

Columbia Precinct Stage 2 Planning Proposal 11-17 Columbia Lane, Homebush



Visual Impact Assessment

Prepared for Columbia Lane Development Pty Ltd (JQZ)

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March 2017

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this report

Richard Lamb and Associates have been appointed by Columbia Lane Development Pty Ltd (JQZ) in respect of a Planning Proposal for Stage 2 of the Columbia Precinct Project located at 11-17 Columbia Lane, Homebush. RLA have been engaged to prepare a visual assessment with particular attention to the likely visual effects of the proposal in relation to the surrounding visual context and catchment.

JQZ intends to develop land for residential development as approved under the Part 3A Concept Plan Stages 1 and 2. The Planning Proposal will seek an increase to height and FSR controls which apply to the site under the *Strathfield Local Environmental Plan 2012*. We note further that the council have requested that a Visual Impact Assessment be prepared as supporting documentation for this Planning Proposal.

RLA has extensive experience in scenic resource management and heritage conservation over the last 20 years. The company specialises in landscape assessment, landscape heritage conservation, visual impacts and strategic planning for visual protection and conservation of cultural environments. The primary author of this report, Dr Lamb, has 30 years' experience in teaching, research and professional practice in landscape planning and heritage conservation and has published in local and international journals on perception, aesthetic assessment and landscape management.

Our findings have been based on a field assessment undertaken in 2015, 2016 and in March, 2017 and on architectural information including plans, elevations, 3-dimensional views and isometric views prepared by Mosca Pserras Architects (MPA) and block model montages prepared by Architectus in March 2017.

1.2 Background Planning Context

- A broad summary of the existing planning context in relation to this Planning Proposal is provided below based on information prepared and supplied to us by Urbis Pty Ltd as part of the 11-17 Columbia Lane, Homebush Planning Proposal Document, in March 2017.
- The subject site is located within the Parramatta Road Corridor and is within walking distance to a range of public transport options, employment hubs, and community facilities. The locality can be described as an area undergoing transition from industrial, infrastructure, commercial and low-density residential land uses to an area supporting higher density mixed-use development with a focus on delivering new housing and day to day support services to meet resident's needs.
- The subject site forms part of the 'Columbia Precinct' which is the subject of a Concept Plan Approval (MP10_0143) issued in May 2013, for a mixed use development comprising six buildings ranging in height from 4 to 21 storeys.
- Columbia Lane Developments received approval for the construction of a mixed-use development located in the north of the site (6-18 Parramatta Road, Homebush), identified as 'Stage 1A' of the Concept Plan Approval. The development did not rely on the Concept Plan Approval but rather an alternate proposal was developed in consultation with Council.

- The proposed development has progressed throughout 2016 to its current form represented in the “Planning Proposal”. This proposal reflects controls included in the adopted Parramatta Road Urban Transformation Strategy.
- This planning proposal seeks amendments to the Strathfield Local Environmental Plan to rezone the site B4 Mixed Use, permit buildings up to 80m, and permit an FSR of 5:1.

1.3 Documents consulted

We have perused the following documents in the preparation of this report:

- Architectural information provided by Mosca Pserras Architects (MPA) March 2017
- Block Model Photomontages prepared by Architectus March 2017
- 11-17 Columbia Lane, Homebush Planning Proposal March 2017 prepared by Urbis.
- Historical information in relation to the site including but not limited to;

Joint Regional Planning Panel (Sydney East) Assessment Report DA 2014/066 October 2014 in relation to 6-18 Parramatta Road.

Part 3A Approval documents available on line at the NSW Department of Planning website

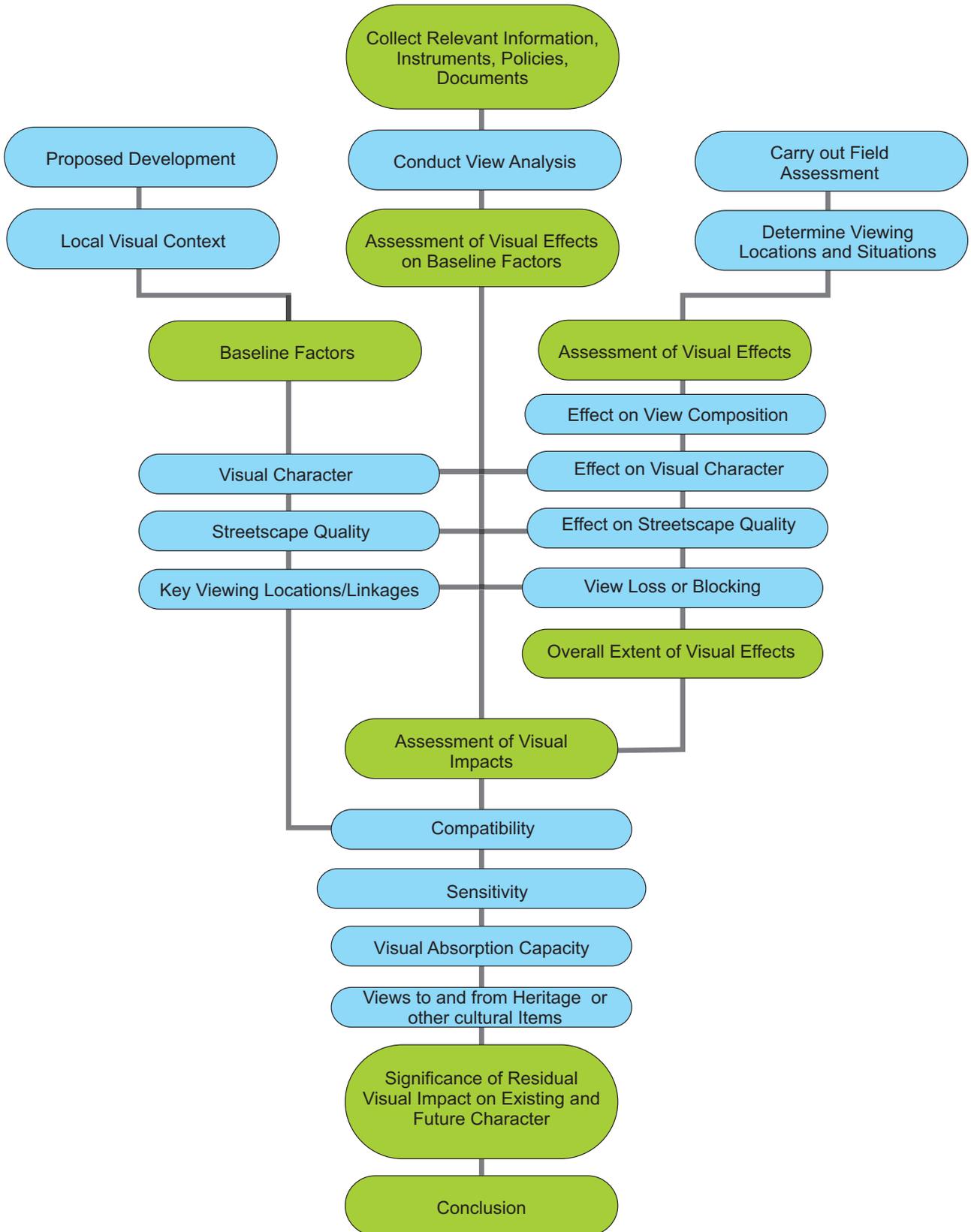
http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=4195

1.4 Proposal

The Planning Proposal prepared in March 2017 (the planning proposal) includes two residential towers, podium, road extension and public open space located in the south-western part of a larger precinct known as the Columbia Precinct at 220 Parramatta Road, Homebush. The south-western part of the site is referred to as 11-17 Columbia Lane and is known as Stage 2 (the subject site). The subject site is divided into two parts separated by Nipper Street (formerly George Street extension). All built form is proposed for the western part of the site including a nine-storey podium which supports a 24-storey northern residential tower and a 26-storey southern residential tower form. The podium shape responds to the alignment of Nipper Street to the east and north that separates the Stage 1A buildings from those proposed in Stage 2. The podium shape could broadly be described as a reverse ‘C’ shape where the long back of the ‘C’ is adjacent to the west side of Nipper Street. The ‘C’ shape has a narrow projection of built form to the south from the top of the ‘C’. Areas inside the “C” shaped podium and either side of the south projection are characterised by ground level open space which extends to the western boundary of the site. The two tower forms are spatially well separated with the northern tower being located at the top of the ‘C’ and on part of the south extension and the southern tower located in the south-west corner of the subject site at the bottom of the ‘C’. Pedestrian access to Homebush Station, Homebush local shops, and the Bakehouse Quarter will be augmented by a pedestrian bridge over Parramatta Road.

1.5 Visual impact assessment methodology

RLA adopted a methodology specifically designed for assessment of large scale urban projects. A flow chart below is a graphic representation of the parameters of the assessment and the logic and sequence of analysis and assessment tasks undertaken. This assessment includes a review of the current visual environment of the site focussing on the south western part of the Columbia Precinct site, subject to this application.



Richard Lamb and Associates Development Assessment Method Flow Chart

2.0 Visual Character and Visual Resources Analysis

2.1 Visual character of the site

The Columbia Precinct is located on the southern side of Parramatta Road close to the northern and western rail lines, Station Street, George Street, the M4 Western Motorway and the Concord Interchange of West Connex that is currently under construction.

The subject site relative to Parramatta Road is located south and to the rear of Stage 1A built forms, some of which have been completed and others which are almost complete. The subject site has an irregular shape and fills the south west corner of the precinct that has a total area of 6568m² the majority of which (4,466.8m²) will include built forms with the remaining space being reserved for public open space and roadway. Powells Creek is characterised by formed concrete walls and bottom and runs in a north-south alignment adjacent to the western boundary and part of the southern boundary of the site as it flows to the north and continues beyond Parramatta Road. The subject site falls slightly to the west to meet Powells Creek, but is otherwise relatively flat and has been cleared of the industrial style buildings and carparks that previously characterised the site.

An electricity substation and State Rail buildings are located adjacent to the Creek to the south and south-southwest and around to the east. Kennards Self Storage is located north east of the site adjacent to the eastern boundary of the Columbia Precinct. Low vegetation lines the south-west corner of the site.

Access to the subject site is via Nipper Street and Gramophone Lane both accessed from Parramatta Road and we note that the Lane also provides access to the State Rail land and the substation to the south. Nipper Street returns and runs east-west on the subject site so that it separates Stages 1 and 2. The roads and the creek land are not under the Applicants' ownership.

From locations to the north, northeast and northwest including Parramatta Road which are predominantly low-lying and approximately level with the subject site, Stage 1A development will create dominant components in views and will potentially block views to the interior of the subject site. Development in Stage 1A includes podium and tower forms on both sides of Nipper Street that are similar in height and scale ie. podiums of nine residential storeys in height which support low towers of five residential storeys. Notwithstanding the low tower forms are set back from Parramatta Road, collectively the podium and towers create screening effects in views to the south to the subject site. Nipper Street provides the only visual access and a near-axial view into and beyond the site from the north.

2.2 Visual character of surrounding context and streetscapes

The immediate context of the subject site is that of railway land/infrastructure buildings, electricity substation, sections of two major railway lines and Homebush Railway Station. It is also located in the context of industrial, commercial, mixed-use and residential developments on Parramatta Road, commercial and retail developments in the Bakehouse Quarter to the north, tall mixed-use and residential apartment buildings on Station Street and the Strathfield Triangle and M4 Western Motorway. The West Connex Concord Road Interchange is located adjacent to the M4 motorway north-east of the Columbia Precinct. Powells Creek adjoins the western site boundary and continues on the northern side of Parramatta Road.

The subject site and its immediate context, including the adjacent part of Parramatta Road is located lower, relative to the adjacent section of M4 Motorway.

The street wall height of developments on Parramatta Road in the vicinity of the site is variable. Older developments to the east are typically two to four residential storeys in height, but with some mixed buildings of up to ten storeys with zero setbacks and approved developments under construction to the west also reach this height. Typically, the upper levels of development along Parramatta Road are generally set back, either above a street wall height of two to four storeys or at the upper level of taller residential or mixed-use buildings. No. 52-58 Parramatta Road has two commercial levels and five residential levels above it.

The existing Bakehouse Quarter development located on George Street is a good example of a mixed retail and commercial development with a high level of pedestrian activity and permeability, lower street wall heights, engaging streetscapes and narrow cross streets flanked by developments. It retains many of the underlying structures of the original buildings. The function of George Street however as a through link is problematic to the shared character of the public domain. George Street is a main road between North Strathfield and Homebush.

The construction and near completion of Stage 1A built form and other development located at the corner of Powell Street and Parramatta Road have significantly changed the immediate visual context of this part of Parramatta Road. This will increase the visual absorption capacity of the setting for taller built form on the subject site and provide a transition in height, bulk and scale from the mixed range of residential, industrial and mixed- uses to the north and south west of the site.

Residential development exists on Station Street adjacent to the subject site where there are five apartment buildings on land zoned Residential 2(b). These buildings are up to twelve storeys high and include apartments that appear to have various orientations, including some that are towards the subject site. Part of the land on the eastern side of Station Street and closer to Parramatta Road is zoned Mixed Use, similarly to the subject site.

Homebush Station is located southwest of the subject site, near the southern terminus of Station Street. Existing views of part of subject site and potentially to the two proposed towers from the Station platforms and overbridges across industrial land are available. The remainder of the subject site is screened from views by tall buildings on Station Street and vegetation located along the southern boundary of the site.

Strathfield Triangle, to the south east of the site, is currently a higher density residential development area and is generally bounded by Leicester Avenue to the east, the northern rail line to the west and south and Parramatta Road to the north. There are residential apartment buildings in the Triangle of up to ten storeys in height and more proposed.

The wider visual context south-east of the site includes the Strathfield Square development near the corner of Albert Street and Raw Square where apartment buildings are up to sixteen storeys high.

While the visual context of the subject site falls under two LGAs (Canada Bay Council and Strathfield Council), the emerging character appears to be evidently that of medium to high density mixed use development with internalised high quality public domain open spaces and active street fronts. Many approved developments of this kind are visible along the Parramatta Road corridor east and west of the site eg. 27 Parramatta Road.

In this visual context the proposal is compatible with the emerging desired future character of the visual context.

2.3 Visual resources of the site and its context

We summarise the key visual resources of the subject site as follows;

- The overall existing scenic quality of the visual context of the subject site is considered to be low. This is due to the presence of railway land, State Rail buildings, rail lines, an electricity substation and easement and the nature of Powells Creek to adjacent to the west.
- A higher rating of scenic quality is transforming part of the setting as completed parts of Stage 1A take shape.
- The presence of residential context adjacent west and south to the site gives a slight up-weight to the overall low scenic quality.
- The dominance of the environment by low scenic quality and by utilitarian buildings and infrastructure is however transitional, as evidenced by the approval and construction of Stage 1A and other developments under construction along Parramatta Road. Built form, public domain and overall scenic quality can be anticipated to increase in views from the existing environment to the north.
- The presence of services, other mixed-use development, infrastructure eg. railway stations, the M4 and West Connex infrastructure provides an opportunity for a mixed use development of high architectural standards, of the nature proposed.
- The presence of the Creek provides an opportunity for provision of open space/landscaped area adjacent to it which could be connected to the proposed public park on the northern side of Parramatta Road.
- The Bakehouse Quarter located north of the site across Parramatta Road has become established providing further opportunities for a high level of interaction including pedestrian linkages (both internal and external) between the two precincts overall including Stage 2 works.
- Development on the subject site will not be highly visible from Parramatta Road due to the blocking effects of Stage 1A built form.
- The treatment of the western edges of the subject site is more critical being adjacent to existing residential development and because views to it are available from Parramatta Road via the open space of Powells Creek. We note that the spatial separation of the two tower forms and the western and inclusion of a central communal open space, provides opportunities for visual and physical permeability and links through the site.
- There is scope on the subject site for a development of the nature proposed subject to appropriate treatment of the various interfaces with the adjacent land uses, setbacks, appropriate podium heights (street wall heights), spatially separated tower forms and pedestrian linkages.
- Gramophone Lane, Railway Lane and the Nipper Street provide views into and out of the subject site, which should be enhanced.



Map 1 View Locations

2.4 The proposal and its response to visual resources

The proposal is for a mixed use development comprising residential, commercial, retail and community uses and basement car parking.

Nipper Street including the triangular public open space proposed to its east, will provide visual and physical access to the subject site and permeability into the Columbia Precinct and to Stage 2 specifically. The triangular shaped open space will contribute positively to the proposed development by creating the potential for through site views which are potentially available from the northern parts of the George Street extension near Parramatta Road.

Built components of the proposal that are confined to the western side of Nipper Street also include two areas of communal open space, the western of which adjoins Powells Creek.

As shown in the approved MP 10_0143 Concept Site Plan and in concept drawings for Stage 2, the western margins of the site including Powells Creek are proposed to be developed into a public open space that will link visually to a public space along the western side of Powells Creek which links to an additional space north of Parramatta Road that is proposed to be developed as a public park.

The proposed tower elements are separated by a wide setback above the podium, and from the western site boundary, from the public open space proposed adjacent to Nipper Street and in relation to the communal spaces that are included in Stage 2. This results in satisfactory residential amenity and quality street activation and pedestrian permeability.

Vehicular entrance to the subject site will be through Gramophone Lane for traffic travelling west on Parramatta Road and through Nipper Street for traffic travelling both east and west on Parramatta Road and south from George Street. Car parking is predominantly in the basement below the towers and podium.

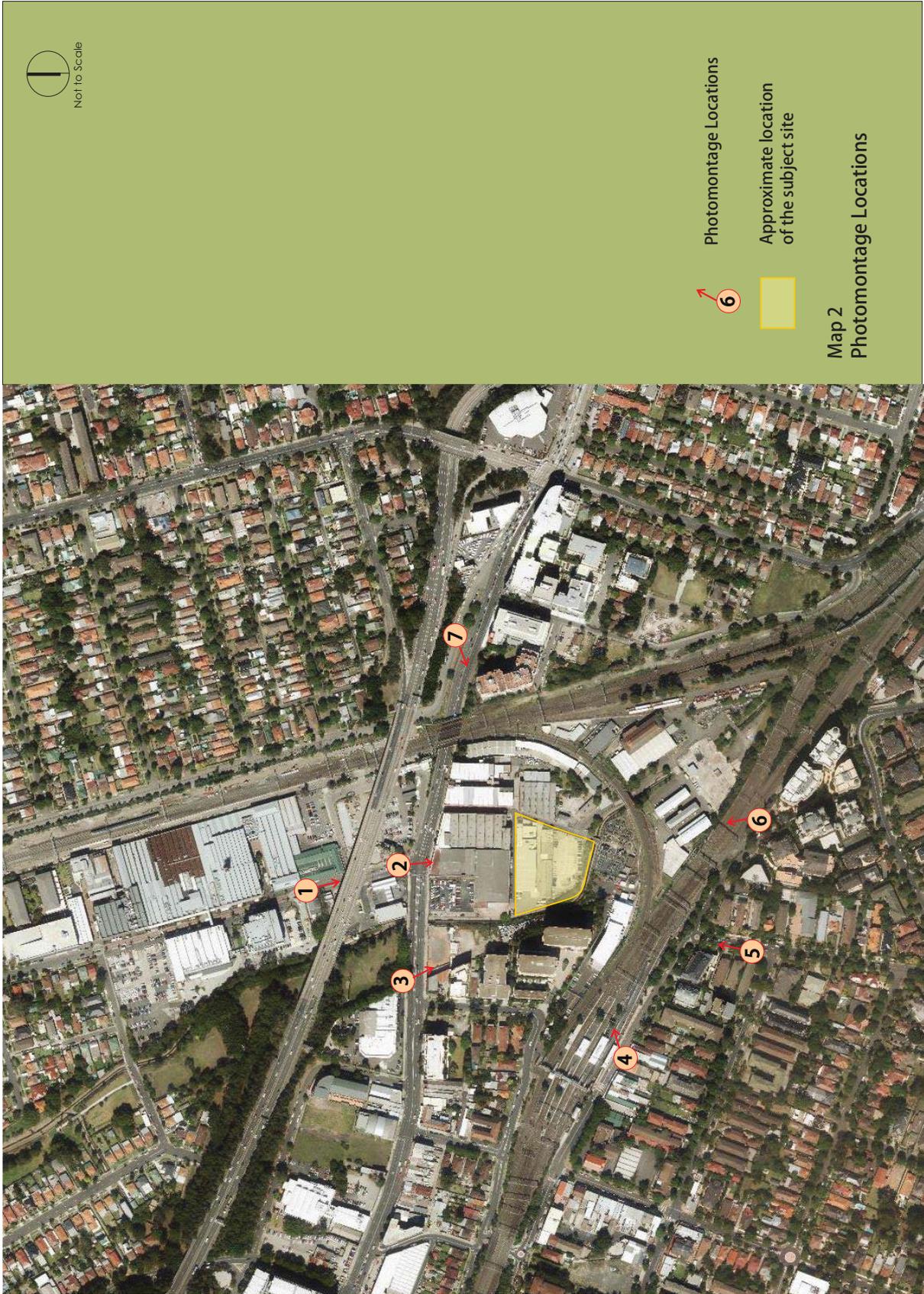
In our opinion the bulk, scale and spatial arrangement of the Stage 2 development responds appropriately to the interfaces with adjacent land uses, with regard to setbacks, podium heights, tower forms and pedestrian linkages.

2.5 Response of the proposal to the identified visual resources

The tallest built form within the Columbia Precinct is massed in the south-west corner of the site. The tallest tower form on the subject site is located close to the south boundary, which leaves wide central areas of the site on both sides of Nipper Street to be utilised as open space. This distribution of built form is appropriate and responsive to the visual opportunities and constraints of the subject site, the Columbia precinct and the surrounding visual context.

The tower forms in the west and south of the subject site will have restricted visual exposure to the public domain. Their visual exposure to a small number of residential buildings at substantial distances is not considered to be a significant constraint.

The proposed recreation space, west of the canal, is an appropriate treatment of the western edge and the western part of the subject site given its interface with the residential context on Station Street and to other planned open spaces in the public domain.



Map 2 Photomontage Locations

The overall heights proposed are not dissimilar to recently constructed apartment buildings and mixed use buildings within the visual context of the site.

The general setbacks and pedestrian areas proposed are appropriate. The open spaces within the development will provide potential pedestrian links with Stage 1A works and to internal roadways. These add merit to the proposal and assist in providing a high level of permeability in to the subject site. The existing and proposed streets will provide views into the site from the public domain.

3.0 Visual Effects Analysis

3.1 Visual exposure of the site and the proposal

As part of the field assessment, the visual exposure of the site and the proposal was documented by visiting a number of viewing locations and making observations. For this assessment RLA visited 17 locations within the immediate and wider visual context of the site. RLA undertook fieldwork in March 2017 to assess the potential public domain visual catchment, the visual effects and potential impacts of the proposed development within its immediate and wider visual context.

The visual exposure from the private domain was determined by making observations from the streets. In general, the public domain visual catchment of the proposal is small.

Appendix A contains photographic plates representing the visual exposure and the viewing locations assessed are shown on Map 1.

This existing visual exposure of the Columbia Precinct including Stage 1A and Stage 2B subject site is likely to further decrease in the context of the construction of Stage 1A. Other developments to the north of the site including the existing Bakehouse Quarter and to the west along Parramatta Road contribute to an evolving potential visual catchment.

The wider visual catchment of the subject site is mainly confined to the east, southeast, and south with the exception of some limited visibility from the northeast, from elevated parts of the M4 Motorway and south west in the vicinity of Homebush Station. It includes the developments located on The Crescent and Homebush Road, including predominantly two-storey retail developments with residential on top, some 1960s residential apartment buildings interspersed with some tall residential apartment buildings of about twelve storeys at the terminus of The Crescent and in the vicinity of Beresford Road.

Completed Stage 1A buildings that front Parramatta Road will screen views to the subject site from closer viewing locations to the north, north-northeast and north-northwest. The upper parts of the both towers and the western side of the podium will be visible in some views from north, north-west and north-east. In our opinion, views to the subject site will be constrained from these directions and from Parramatta Road as a result of the alignment of road corridors and the height of existing Stage 1A built form in the foreground of views. A greater proportion of the podium and towers will be visible from the south and south-east, however in these views there is wide separation between viewers and the site, as a result of the railway land in the foregrounds of views.

Views from residential areas south-west, south and south-east of the site are blocked to varying degrees by intervening residential development located along the eastern side of Station Street and by intervening street trees which are prevalent in streets in the vicinity of photomontage view locations 4, 5 and 6 as shown on Map 2. We observed further that this area is characterised by tightly spaced long rectangular shaped 3 and 4 storey residential flat buildings. These are generally arranged in a north south alignment with views orientated to the west and east rather than toward the subject site.

Views from the south-east from parts of the Crescent are available however these are from approximately 200m away and the proposal will be visible in the context of railway lines, railway related electrical lines and stanchions, tall electricity poles and parts of Homebush Railway station.

3.1.1 Visual exposure to Roads

The tallest parts of the towers and partial views of parts of the podium may be available from surrounding roads, including a restricted part of Parramatta Road, the adjacent elevated part of the M4 Motorway, the southern end of George Street, from some locations in Station Street, Homebush Road and The Crescent. Where possible, representative views from such locations have been analysed and photomontages indicating potential effects on views have been prepared for views from seven representative locations.

The mid and upper parts of both tower forms will be visible from Homebush Railway Station (Viewing Location 11 on Map 1 and Location 11 in Appendix A) and potentially from other locations in this vicinity. Parts of the proposal will be visible to train commuters from a short section of the two rail lines and possibly from the Arnotts Bridge on the northern rail line. However the view angle from trains is low and the taller parts of the proposal would not be likely to be visible.

A narrow part of the subject site including the eastern part of the proposed development would be visible from the south end of George Street and from Nippers Lane. The proposal may also be seen from moving viewing locations from the elevated section of the M4 Motorway, where the tops of the tower forms would be visible in various contexts and potentially from the West Connex Concord Interchange at Concord Road that is a local high point. It is unlikely in this case that the full extent of development will be perceived from the north in any individual view, given that the development of Stage 1A will provide significant view screening effects.

There will not be any significant visibility of the proposal from Leicester Avenue, Concord Road north of the West Connex Concord Interchange or other residential streets in North Strathfield. There will not be any significant visibility from Beresford Road, Homebush Road, Albert Street, Raw Square or other streets in Strathfield.

3.1.2 Reserves and recreation areas

Parts of the proposal will be visible from Powells Creek Reserve to the west of the stormwater canal on the northern side of Parramatta Road and from an area immediately southwest of the subject site.

3.1.3 Residences, industrial and commercial areas

Parts of the proposal will be visible from the rail buildings and the electricity substation, adjacent to the subject site.

Potential views to the upper parts of the tower forms exist from commercial development on Parramatta Road in the vicinity of Knight and Powell Streets, and from the residential buildings located on the eastern side of Station Street. Limited potential visibility may exist from development along George Street in the Bakehouse Quarter.

The upper parts of the tower forms may be visible from isolated locations along the Crescent between its eastern terminus and the roundabout west of Rochester Street. It will be visible from some developments on the northern side of Loftus Crescent. It will also be visible from some residences on Queen Street.

The upper-most parts of the tower forms may be visible from residences in the Strathfield Triangle on Parramatta Road, Cooper Street, Chapman Street, Clarence Street and Hills Road. Parts of the towers may also be visible from taller buildings in Homebush (on Beresford Road) and Strathfield (on Raw Square and Albert Street) adjacent to the two railway lines.

The visual amenity of the subject site as seen from these residences will be improved compared to the existing visual environment.

3.1.4 Photomontages

Architectus have prepared block model montages based on perspective renders prepared by the project architects, Mosca Pserras Architects. The photomontages show the proposal as seen from seven representative viewing locations. RLA selected the viewing locations based on the findings in our field assessment and these are shown on Map 2 in this report. The viewing locations were selected to represent the kind of views available from the whole visual catchment and the range of locations from which they are available. The representative viewing locations are the following:

- Looking south from the southern-most roundabout on George Street.
- The north-east footpath at the intersection of Parramatta Road and George Street.
- The north side of Parramatta Road adjacent to Powells Creek Reserve park and approximately opposite No 38 Parramatta Road.
- Looking north-east from in front of No 16, The Crescent.
- Looking north along Homebush Road from approximately 25m north of its intersection with Burlington Road.
- Looking north from the cul-de-sac end of The Crescent.
- Looking south west from Queen Street, below the embankment of the M4 Sydney Street off ramp.

The photomontages were with created with our supervision and advice. A 3-dimensional computer model of the development was created by MPA from the architectural plans for the proposal. The model became the base layer later to be inserted into the photographs, using the Adobe Photoshop program.

The photographs were taken as single images by Dr Lamb with a Canon EOS 5D Mark III DSLR camera using a fixed focal length lens of 35mm, which is conventional for outdoor urban photography. The locations and lens height of the camera were surveyed by Land Partners, surveyors, who provided the coordinates of the camera locations to Architectus, to ensure the accuracy of the photomontages and conformity with the requirements of the Land and Environment Court of NSW practice note for preparation of photomontages.

RLA provided the photographs to Architectus and an aerial image in Google Earth on which the geotagged images were located by place holders. The 3D camera was matched to the focal length of the image in each case and the location of the place holder and the ground level plus camera height was determined. The 3D camera was then rotated to match known surveyed buildings as well as possible, to ensure that the computer model of the building envelopes was correctly located relative to the camera locations.

Completed Stage 1A buildings and those nearing completion are visible in the photographs alongside the lighter shaded building shapes used to represent the proposed building forms of the proposed Stage 2 works.

The photomontages represent the visual exposure of the proposed building envelopes and siting with regard to the topography and the surrounding built and natural character to a level of accuracy that is as high as is possible in the circumstances.

The present application is only for the concept, massing and overall building footprints of the buildings and therefore the detailing of the individual buildings is not part of the present application. The individual buildings will be contemporary in style and detailing, providing visual interest, articulation and modulation of the facades and will not be dissimilar in character to those completed in Stage 1.

These potential contemporary forms and their high architectural standards will be compatible with both the existing residential and the emerging and desired future character of the locality.

3.1.5 Assessment of Views as shown in Photomontages

Photomontage 1 from George Street roundabout

This is a view south towards the northern and eastern elevations of the proposed towers and podium. A narrow vertical sliver of the podium and the northern tower and the upper two floors of the southern tower is visible above completed Stage 1A buildings. Views to the majority of the proposed development are screened by Stage 1A development and by the infrastructure of the elevated section of the M4 motorway. The proposal is massed and distributed so that its bulk and scale in our opinion is appropriate and acceptable within the emerging visual context.

Photomontage 2 from the northern end of George Street

This is a view south-east along Nipper Street to the north and eastern elevations of the podium and both towers. The majority of the podium and northern tower are screened from view by Stage 1A buildings in the foreground. The existing through-site view to the south that includes a distant horizon characterised by urban development will be replaced by built form of varying height and scale. Collectively the forms will create a short section of new horizon in the composition of the view. In our opinion the proposal is a secondary background element appropriate within this emerging visual context and does not block any scenic or significant views.

Photomontage 3 from Parramatta Road north west of the site

This photomontage shows a view to the south-east along the western site boundary. Completed Stage 1A buildings screen views to the majority of the proposed development with the exception of the northern tower form. This form screens all views of the podium and southern tower except for a narrow vertical sliver of the north-western elevation of the southern tower.

The northern tower creates a new form in the mid-ground composition of the view and alters a small part of the existing horizon. The tower form is isolated in space by a wide separation between it and Stage 1A buildings and by Powells Creek along the western site boundary. The physical and spatial separation around the tower is filled with sky, which helps to minimise the bulk and scale of the proposal in this view. In addition, landscape treatment proposed for the western boundary of the site

will contribute to the foreground in this view and over time will help to soften the visual effects of the new urban forms. Notwithstanding the establishment and growth of the proposed landscape treatment, in our opinion the scale of the new built forms is appropriate within the emerging visual context of the overall precinct and wider area.

Photomontage 4 from No 17 The Crescent

This view is to the north-east from south of Homebush Station toward the west elevation of the north tower and west and north elevations of the south tower. Stage 1A development cannot be seen in this view so that the two proposed towers appear as new forms within an established visual context. The west elevation of the north tower is a form not dissimilar in bulk to adjacent residential development visible in this view. It is separated from the slimmer vertical southern tower form by open space that is filled with sky. The physical and spatial separation between the towers helps to minimise their bulk and scale so that they do not dominate the composition of the view. Neither form blocks any scenic or significant views to the north from this vicinity. In our opinion the scale and bulk of the proposal is appropriate within the emerging visual context of the overall precinct and wider area.

Photomontage 5 from Homebush Road

This is a north-east view to the south and west elevations of both towers from the residential area south of the site. Isolated, small sections of the podium and the majority of the southern elevation of the south tower are visible behind foreground street tree vegetation.

The tower forms are close together in this view, modulated by a difference in height. Together they stand as one new visual element and create a small part of a new horizon in this view. However, the form is isolated and surrounded by open space and sky. In our opinion its form and scale and visual separation from other tall forms within the visual context, prevent the proposed development from dominating the existing and emerging visual context in this view.

Photomontage 6 from the east end of The Crescent

This is a view to the north-west and to the southern and eastern elevations of the southern tower. Views to most of the Stage 1A buildings will be blocked by the development of Stage 2 built form. The proposal is clearly visible from south of the railway and contributes a prominent new built form to the composition of the view. From this location, the southern tower stands as an isolated form spatially separated from Stage 1A development. In our opinion the bulk and scale of the tower form is appropriate within this existing and emerging visual context.

Photomontage 7 from the south side of Queen Street, north of the Parramatta Road

This is a view to the west that includes the eastern elevations of Stage 1 and Stage 2 forms. Buildings completed in Stage 1A screen the majority of views to the proposed development including the podium and all of the southern tower. The eastern elevation of the northern lower tower is visible above Stage 1A and appears as a continuation of new built form in this stage. Its form adds to the progression of height and scale already approved and emerging within the Columbia Precinct and in our opinion does not dominate the composition of the view. In our opinion the bulk and scale of the tower form is appropriate within this existing and emerging visual context and does not block any scenic or significant views to the north-west from this vicinity.

3.4 Potential change in intrinsic character of the site

Change in the intrinsic character of the site is a description of the extent and nature of visual changes when considered in relation to the site's present character before the intended development is constructed.

A change to the visual character of a site or the immediate surroundings can be positive, neutral or negative and does not directly lead to visual impacts. The more important question to be investigated is the contribution of the proposal to the visual, sensory experience of the surroundings, the desired future character and with the underlying zone objectives and permissibility. This has been considered at Sections 4.2 and 4.3 of the Report, respectively.

In our opinion the proposal will have a moderate effect on the existing character of the site on the six-point evaluation scale described below in relation to sensitivity. The character of the site will change from an industrial character with many non-functional and old buildings to a high quality mixed use and residential apartment development with a high quantum and quality of the public domain, with increased accessibility to pedestrian permeability, legibility and security. The change and improvement in character as described will not be dissimilar to the character of the northern part of the Columbia Precinct that has been constructed. The existing environment has no accessible public domain, no visual presence to the adjacent environment and no physical or visual permeability. The effect of the proposal will be a positive one in regard to amenity. The proposal includes visually linked internal open spaces which interact visually and physically with existing and proposed new external open spaces.

3.4 Potential change in intrinsic character of the surroundings

Change in the intrinsic character of the surroundings is a description of the extent and nature of visual effects when considered in relation to the surroundings of the site which would be caused by construction of the intended development.

The existing, emerging and desired future character of the locality is that of high quality mixed use and residential apartment development. In our opinion, the character change of the subject site will positively respond to the surrounding context, including Stage 1A and will be a significant improvement over the existing situation.

We consider the proposal will have a moderate effect on the visual character of its surrounding context. The effect is also considered to be a positive one. It will provide a familiar character of high compatibility with the existing context. It also responds positively to the underlying geometry of the site and produces a habitable, permeable and accessible public domain and will produce an interesting and attractive outcome.

3.5 Specific Visual effects

3.5.1 Visual privacy

There will be no visual privacy impacts of the development on residences outside the Columbia Precinct. Visual privacy between neighbours within the proposal as well as with adjacent existing, approved and proposed residential development will be maintained by commitments to appropriate setbacks, building separations, building orientations, locations of doors, windows and balconies, and landscaping. The tower forms are adequately separated from each other and from the externally located residential

development, for example along Station Street. Further commentary in relation to visual privacy will be provided by Urbis and measures to ensure maintenance of such can be incorporated at the fine grain design stage in the future.

3.5.2 Interruption of views and view loss effects

It is considered that overall the high density mixed use developments on Parramatta Road, in Homebush and Strathfield are not designed or constructed to offer long-term scenic views. This is because the scenic views even if they are presently available to any apartments are highly distant and are over and across lands that are zoned, and have the potential, for similar developments. Based on the objectives and controls within the Strathfield LEP 2012 (SLEP) and the Strathfield Parramatta Road Corridor DCP 2005 (the DCP) in our opinion the proposal is consistent with desired future character of the locality. In this context, some effect on the sight lines from existing apartments is inevitable, however we consider that it is not significant or unreasonable.

Some residences on the upper levels of the apartment buildings in Station Street may have views to the east across the subject site towards Canada Bay, parts of the Parramatta River and district views, including some possible views towards the city and parts of the city skyline to the east. Our assessment of views from the potential visual catchment looking back toward the subject site, in which none of the adjacent tallest buildings are visible, indicates that there is unlikely to be significant exposure of adjacent apartments to existing scenic views.

Views from the south-west across the subject site to the north and east include the new built form with Stage 1A of the Columbia Precinct and will become further affected by any future development in the vicinity ie. other approved development along Parramatta Road or potential additions to the Bakehouse Quarter.

The primary orientations of the closest residential tower buildings on Station Street are east-west with some apartments orientated towards the site. Where affected, and given the separation distances between buildings which ensure that significant areas and widths of view corridors will not be affected, the potential view loss effect is likely to be low to moderate at the worst, on a six point scale ranging from negligible to high. The proposed development on the subject site has the potential to affect these views, however, we do not consider this to be a significant issue, considering the potential zoning of the subject site, its development potential and the desired future character for the locality and the wider Parramatta Road corridor. That is to say, there may be some view loss; however this would need to be assessed in greater detail at the individual DA stages.

Overall, it is considered that the proposal will not cause any significant blocking of views of any scenic items from its public and private domain visual catchment.

3.6 Overall visual effects

Based on the analysis presented above on each factor, it is assessed that the overall visual effects of the proposal will be low-moderate on the six point evaluation scale.

4.0 Visual Impacts Assessment

The criteria in Section 3.0 provide assessment of the extent of the visual effects of the proposal when seen from specific viewing places. The extent of the visual effects is the baseline analysis against which to judge the visual impacts.

There is a fundamental difference between analysing visual effects (Section 3.0) and the assessment of visual impacts. Whether or not a visual effect is an impact of potential significance cannot be equated directly to the extent of the visual effect. For example, a high visual effect can be quite acceptable, whereas a small one can be unacceptable. In this regard, the strategic decision to fundamentally change the future character of the precinct which occurred with the Major Project Approval sets a benchmark for change, in which major changes are intended and accepted future visual effects. In that context, many high visual effects of change will not be considered to be significant.

In the same way, a small effect may be significant, for example loss of permeability, blocking of views, effects on culturally significant items with visual significance or negative effects on highly sensitive locations or features.

As a result, it is necessary to give an explicit weighting to the assessed levels of visual effects, to arrive at an assessment of the importance (significance) of the impact.

This method therefore does not equate visual effects directly to visual impacts. The approach is to analyse the visual effects as detailed in Section 3.0 above to arrive at an overall level of visual effect of the proposal and then to assess the significance of the level of impact, if any, by giving differential weighting to relevant impact criteria. By this, the relative importance of impacts is distinguished from the size of the effect.

It is considered that three weighting criteria are appropriate to the overall assessment of visual impacts in this project, i.e., Physical absorption capacity, visual compatibility and sensitivity. Each of these addresses the primary question of the acceptability of the visual effects and changes caused by the proposal.

4.1 Physical absorption capacity weighting

Physical Absorption Capacity (PAC) means the extent to which the existing visual environment can reduce or eliminate the perception of the visibility of the proposal.

PAC includes the ability of existing and future elements of the landscape to physically hide, screen or disguise the proposal. It also includes the extent to which the colours, material and finishes of buildings allows them to blend with or reduce contrast with others of the same or closely similar kinds to the extent that they cannot be easily distinguished as new features of the environment. High physical absorption capacity leads to low visual impact.

The subject site has a moderate existing level of physical absorption capacity for development on the site and moderate to high future capacity to absorb the proposal.

Completed buildings within Stage 1A buildings include similar built forms and massing as that proposed. These forms significantly screen the proposed built form in the south-western part of the site when seen from Parramatta Road. In middle distance and distant views only to parts of the upper levels of the buildings in the interior of the site will be visible in views from the north and northeast. Therefore,

only some parts of the proposal will be visible in any individual view from within the visual catchment. In this regard the PAC of the site when considered in the context the Columbia Precinct is high.

The building forms, scale, heights, articulation and modulation are in keeping with the existing and the desired future character of the locality and the Columbia Precinct. The surrounding context provides high physical absorption capacity for the proposal on the subject site. The taller buildings located in the surrounding context of the site, the shape of the site, the alignment of the bounding roads and roads present within the context, all help to increase the physical absorption capacity.

Details, materials and colours and will be subject to fine grain design treatment at the respective DA stages and are not considered in detail in this report. However, these can also increase both absorption capacity and compatibility of the proposal (see below).

The PAC of the site in relation to the proposed development is considered to be moderate to high overall.

4.2 Compatibility weighting

Compatibility is different from change. While change is objective in the sense that what is proposed can be directly compared to what is proposed, the measure of visual compatibility is intended to evaluate the extent to which the change conforms with or acceptably fits into the likely future visual context of the site and its surroundings. Compatibility also means that the development responds appropriately to the desired future character if this has been determined by strategic planning instruments or policies and guidelines. High compatibility means low visual impact. In the context of a Planning Proposal, the existing instruments and policies form a general guide to compatibility, but are not the only yardstick that is appropriate.

4.2.1 Compatibility with the character of the site

Compatibility with the existing character of the site is a measure of how the proposal responds to the natural and built features such as vegetation, topography, scenic features and existing developments within the site as well as its potential impact on the visibility of those features from external viewing locations. It is also an assessment of how the proposal takes into consideration the future retention, management and conservation of existing features. In assessing this, it is also taken into consideration whether the proposal is a permissible use of the site.

The proposal has moderate to high compatibility with the character of the site. It is responsive to the stormwater canal easement with the proposed reserve along its western boundary. It does not require any significant landform alteration in terms of its existing topography. It proposes increased and improved visual and pedestrian linkages to and from the subject site, additional view corridors and significant internal open spaces.

The proposal will result in a positive change to the existing built form character of the site and makes use of the potential of the immediate available infrastructure that surrounds it, without creating significant impacts on the existing residential and commercial environment. While the change to the subject site would be dramatic, the change would be compatible with its potential and existing resources.

4.2.2 Compatibility with the character of the surrounding context

Visual compatibility of the proposal with the surrounding built and natural character is an assessment considered over its total visual catchment and is not confined to the subject site.

From the assessment undertaken, the visual compatibility of the proposal with regard to the existing, emerging and future character of the site is judged to be moderate-high. The reasons for this judgment are:

- The proposal is of a similar character in views from the external domain to the Strathfield Triangle, Raw Square residential development, mixed use development in the Bakehouse Quarter and to apartments located on the eastern side of Station Street. In addition, the proposed Stage 2 works will be similar to and compatible with constructed works within the Columbia Precinct. The residential towers are the only part of the development that have any greater significant visibility to external viewing places.
- The proposal is responsive to the character of the various edges and interfaces of the subject site with its surroundings. It is responsive to the existing and approved development within the Columbia Precinct and to Nipper Street in relation to street wall heights, overall building heights, setbacks and footprints.
- The proposal is responsive to the unique, strategic location of the land in the context of existing infrastructure, the expanding residential high density component in the vicinity and along the Paramatta Road corridor and mixed-use development to the north eg. within the Bakehouse Quarter.
- Appropriate commitments have been embodied in the design so that the proposal will not result in any significant potential visual or related amenity impacts, including visual privacy and that a high level of internal residential amenity and amenity with the neighbours will be maintained.
- The proposal maintains the existing and provides for increased pedestrian linkages and public amenity. In addition, the triangular public park will contribute a central open space and focal point for the immediate environment.
- The proposal has a positive effect on the overall visual character and scenic quality of the locality.

4.3 Sensitivity weighting

Sensitivity relates to the number of viewers who would be likely to see the proposal and their likely expectations for visual quality. It is usually considered that a visual impact on a sensitive location in the public domain is considered more important than one of similar quality on a less sensitive site or seen from a private viewing place.

The visual sensitivity of the subject site for the proposal is assessed to be low on the scale of negligible, low, low-moderate, moderate, moderate-high and high. This is for the following reasons:

- The subject site is located adjacent to infrastructure including two major rail lines. These land uses are considered to be of low visual sensitivity.
- It is located in the vicinity of a major road, the M4 Motorway and the West Connex Concord Road Interchange. The upper parts of the tower or towers as shown in montages 6 and 7 will be visible from moving viewing locations. These are also considered to be of low visual sensitivity.

- The existing context of the subject site is part commercial, industrial, mixed-use and residential. This context is also considered to be of low sensitivity.
- There are no significant scenic or natural features in the vicinity of the subject site with the exception of Powells Creek and Powells Creek Reserve, which could be affected by the proposal. The proposal responds positively to these low-moderate visual quality features by way of proposing open space adjacent to the Creek and an over bridge across Parramatta Road to Powells Creek Reserve.
- The scenic quality of the context of the subject site is rated as low, leading to low expectations of viewers. The viewer sensitivity is considered overall to be low.
- The public domain visual catchment of the proposal is confined.
- The proposal is not visible from any specific scenic routes. The visibility to train commuters on short sections of two rail lines is considered not to increase sensitivity.
- The proposal will be seen in the context of other tall mixed use residential developments such as those located in Strathfield Triangle, Strathfield Square, Beresford Road and Station Streets.

4.4 Application of the weighting factors on impact significance

1 Physical absorption capacity

PAC was rated overall as moderate to high, which we consider should result in a down-weight effect on the significance of impacts compared to the level of effects.

2 Compatibility

Compatibility with the site's visual resources and the wider setting was rated as high, leading to a down-weight on the significance of impacts compared to the level of visual effects.

3 Sensitivity

Sensitivity was judged to be low, leading to a down-weight on the significance of impacts compared to the level of visual effect.

4.4.1 Overall visual impacts

The overall level of visual effects was determined to be low-moderate in Section 3.6 above. All three of the weighing factors in Section 4.4 above were considered to be down-weights in determining overall significance of impacts compared to the level of visual effects found in Section 3.6. When the weighting factors (down-weights) are applied to the low-moderate level of visual effects, the overall significance of impacts of the proposal was therefore determined to decrease, from low-moderate to low. There would be substantial visual change to the environment, but no significance visual impacts.

4.5 Address to relevant Planning Instruments

RLA have not addressed other planning merits in this visual assessment. Specialised planning analysis is provided by Urbis in the Planning Proposal.

5.0 Conclusion

Based on the above assessment, we conclude that with regard to the potential visual impacts, the proposal is acceptable and does not result in any significant negative visual effects or impacts on its visual catchment.

The proposal will cause a substantial but positive change to the existing character of the site and the surroundings. We consider such changes to be compatible with the existing and emerging character of the locality and wider visual context, which is undergoing significant transformation to higher density and taller built forms.

The proposal is responsive to the visual opportunities and constraints of the subject site and its surroundings and appropriately responds to the character of adjacent land uses.

The development includes wide setbacks between the tower forms and from existing residential areas and public open spaces. It features appropriate visual and physical linkages to existing or approved mixed-use developments and open spaces. This combination has the potential to create an identifiable, discrete and high quality urban environment.

The proposed reserve west of Powells Creek provides for high quality residential amenity and has the potential to be linked with Powells Creek Reserve on the northern side of Parramatta Road.

The layout of the development is such that individual buildings constructed in Stage 1A will provide substantial screening effects to other buildings in individual views. The tallest built forms will not have substantial visibility from Parramatta Road due to the width and alignment of Nipper Street and the heights and forms of buildings constructed in Stage 1A which screen the majority of views of the interior of the site.

The subject site and the context have high potential for the quantum of built form and a significant physical absorption capacity for the proposal. The proposal is not anticipated to significantly affect views to any important scenic features from within the visual catchment.

The proposal increases the visual and pedestrian permeability into and out of the site by maintaining the existing street and view corridors and proposing new vehicular extensions and pedestrian linkages.

We support the proposal on visual impacts grounds.



Location 1: View south along George Street from its intersection with Allen Street



Location 2: View south along George Street from north of the M4 motorway



Location 3: View south from south of the intersection of George Street and Parramatta Road



Location 4: View south from the south end of George Street



Location 5: View south east from the north side of Parramatta Road west side of the Canal



Location 6: View south east from the north side of Parramatta Road, west of the park



Location 7: View south east from the north side of Parramatta Road, near commercial premises at No 52- 58



Location 8: View east from outside No 1 Station Street



Location 9: view south west from below south side of the M4 motorway



Location 10: view south along Columbia Lane from Parramatta Road



Location 11: View east-north east from the pedestrian over-bridge above platforms 5 & 6 at Homebush Railway Station



Location 12: View north east towards the site from near No 16 The Crescent



Location 13: view north from Homebush Road approximately 20m north of its intersection with Burington Road



Location 14: view north-north-west from outside No 5 The Crescent



Location 15: view north west from the end of The Crescent cul-de-sac



Location 16: view south west from Queen Street just east of the Arnotts Railway bridge



Location 17: view south-west from Queen Street, east of location 16



Photomontage 1 (see Map 2 for location and viewing direction)



Photomontage 2 (see map 2 for location and viewing direction)



Photomontage 3 (see map 2 for location and viewing direction)



Photomontage 4 (see map 2 for location and viewing direction)



Photomontage 5 (see map 2 for location and viewing direction)



Photomontage 6 (see map 2 for location and viewing direction)



Photomontage 7 (see map 2 for location and viewing direction)

Summary Curriculum Vitae: Dr Richard Lamb



Summary

- Professional consultant specialising in visual and heritage impacts assessment and the principal of Richard Lamb and Associates (RLA).
- Senior lecturer in Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Heritage Conservation in the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning at the University of Sydney 1980-2009.
- Director of Master of Heritage Conservation Program, University of Sydney, 1998-2006.
- 30 years' experience in teaching and research in environmental impact, heritage and visual impact assessment.
- Teaching and research expertise in assessment and interpretation of heritage items and places, cultural transformations of environments, conservation methods and practices, visual perception and cognition, landscape studies, aesthetic assessment and landscape assessment.
- Supervision of Master and PhD students postgraduate students in heritage conservation and environment/behaviour studies.
- Richard Lamb provides:
 - professional services, expert advice and landscape and visual assessments
 - Strategic planning studies to protect and enhance scenic quality and landscape heritage values
 - Scenic and aesthetic assessments in all development scenario contexts, from rural to urban
 - Advice and assessment of view loss, view sharing and landscape heritage impacts
 - Expert advice, evidence and testimony to the Land and Environment Court of NSW and Planning and Environment Court of Queensland in various classes of litigation
 - Specialisation in matters of visual impacts, view loss and landscape heritage in projects including:
 - Urban developments, rezoning and planning proposals, urban renewal and urban release areas
 - Project and proposal visualisation and certification of photomontage preparation
 - Extractive industry, infrastructure, signage and maritime developments
 - Development assessment, strategic planning, landscape conservation
 - Appearances in over 250 Land and Environment Court of New South Wales cases, submissions to several Commissions of Inquiry and the principal consultant for over 1000 consultancies.
- Qualifications
 - Bachelor of Science - First Class Honours double major, University of New England
 - Doctor of Philosophy, University of New England in 1975
- International Journals for which publications have been refereed
 - Journal of Architectural & Planning Research
 - Architectural Science Review
 - People and Physical Environment Research
 - Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Person Environment Studies
 - Journal of Environmental Psychology
 - Australasian Journal of Environmental Management
 - Ecological Management & Restoration
 - Urban Design Review International
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