

## Response to:

### **'Independent Assessment of Commercial Building Concept for the City of Parramatta' for St John's at Parramatta**

August 2019

We have been requested to provide a short response, in relation to heritage issues that may arise from the 'Independent Assessment of Commercial Building Concept for the City of Parramatta' (CPC) by JPW dated July 2019 for St John's at Parramatta. We appreciate that the response is to test specific issues and is consequently necessarily limited in how it has considered options and outcomes.

The Council brief for the review posed the following specific questions:

*"Is it possible to provide a viable commercial tower with a viable floorplate and meet the needs of the Church whilst retaining (and undertaking a sensitively handled re-adaptation of) the Hall in a form that does not undermine its Heritage Significance, and activates the proposed new square."*

*If the answer to this question is yes, a reference design that demonstrates how this can be achieved will be required.*

*If the answer to this question is no, and the hall needs to be removed, a report detailing the issues that limit the opportunity to achieve the Church's desired outcomes will be required. A supporting reference design that demonstrates a scheme which removes the Hall will be required in this instance.*

The review sets out three options:

- 1 Retain the hall and develop a smaller than optimum new tower floor plate
- 2 Retain the hall and cantilever over the building at higher levels
- 3 Remove the hall and develop a viable commercial floor plate.

The report concludes that Option 1 is not viable as it does not achieve the commercial outcomes that CPC seeks. We agree with that assessment.

The report then concludes that options 2 and 3 achieve the required commercial viability sought and are both acceptable approaches to future development. The clear difference is that Option 2 retains the hall and Option 3 does not.

The review makes a range of observations about the church hall building including:

*The legibility and integrity of the original Parish Hall has been diminished by various built elements that have been added over the past century in response to changing needs. ....*

*It is possible that a retained Parish Hall can positively meet the needs of the church and activate a new public space in conjunction with the North Tower podium as noted in Strategy 1 & Strategy 2. A successful outcome for this approach represents a significant architectural and urban design challenge.*

The review clearly sees that the option of retention of the hall presents challenges to the site that are difficult and that the buildings' significance has been diminished over time.

There are three fundamental issues that need to be considered in looking at the options and the outcomes that affect the approach that may be undertaken. It is noted that the Planning Proposal left the question of the hall being retained or removed open to a design process but that the removal option was preferred as it provided potentially greater benefits to the city.

### **Issue 1 - Setting of the hall**

Options 1 and 2 set the new tower form slightly back from the north side of the hall.

We would suggest that the relationship of hall to tower is critical if the hall were to be retained. The 3-D modelling in the review (options 1 and 2) shows a very abrupt and quite brutal relationship of new to old. Option 1 is not supported by the peer review, option 2, as suggested below, is not appropriate in regards to the proposed overhang. Irrespective of this, the relationship of hall to the tower form does not achieve a desirable or acceptable urban outcome for the city.

### **Issue 2 - Cantilevering over the hall**

The Abrahams review was categorical that a built form overhanging the hall was not an acceptable outcome. This was both accepted as a correct analysis and supported strongly in the heritage assessment that we provided.

Rarely, if ever, has a cantilevered tower over a diminutive heritage item (or any building) been successful as an urban design outcome and as a heritage outcome. This approach should in our assessment be rejected as poor heritage and urban design practice.

The visual impact alone reduces the hall to an obvious site impediment that could not be designed around. Parramatta City deserves a better outcome than this.

### **Issue 3 - Adaptation of the hall**

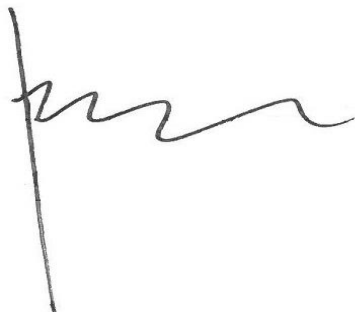
The review recommends in Option 2 removing the various accretions to the hall and opening it up to activate the building as it fronts the square to the south. This would be achieved by extending window openings to doors and re-purposing the building. This is possible but is a significant adaptation where the building would no longer be a church hall. The heritage outcome would be the retention of fabric and part of the form and the north wall would presumably connect to new development. The building would no longer be a church hall as that use would be in the new building. It may be a foyer/lobby or an interstitial space, it may retain a 'front' door but would be accessed through a series of openings facing south and north. This may be a reasonable outcome but the level of intervention and change must remove a key part of the local significance that the fabric has.

## **Conclusion**

The review concludes that two of the three options are possible to achieve a good overall outcome. On the basis of the assumption in option 2 that a cantilevered form is required to achieve a viable development outcome and the very problematic concept of cantilevering over an existing building (heritage or non-heritage listed), we would strongly suggest that Option 2 is not viable or desirable.

Accordingly, Option 3 is the only remaining viable option.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Davies', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Paul Davies**