GMU
Urban Design & Architecture

Urban Design Assessment

Amended additional commentary for

Planning Proposal for Hornsby RSL Club sites at:

1A & 3-7 William Street & 2 Ashley Lane (Hornsby RSL Club & Community Car Park),
4 High Street (Hornsby RSL Club), and
7-19 Ashley Street & 2-4 Webb Avenue, Hornsby

Date: 20 December 2016

GMU Ref: 16156

Issue	Date	Status	Prepared by
A	09/11/2016	Final	Karla Castellanos
B	21/11/2016	Revised Final	Karla Castellanos
C	20/12/2016	Revised Final	Karla Castellanos

Contents

Introduction

GM Urban Design & Architecture (GMU) has been appointed by Hornsby Shire Council to undertake a SEPP 65 assessment and urban design review for the amended Planning Proposal Application for the Hornsby RSL redevelopment located at 1A & 3-7 William Street and 2 Ashley Lane (Hornsby RSL Club & Community Car Park), 4 High Street (Hornsby RSL Club), 7-19 Ashley Street & 2-4 Webb Avenue, Hornsby (the subject site).

GMU undertook an initial review of the application in August 2016. The purpose of this report is to provide additional assessment on the proposed development against the previous advice provided by GMU for the subject site. When reviewing the Planning Proposal application, GMU has referred to the following relevant planning policies or design guidelines:

- Hornsby LEP 2013
- Hornsby DCP 2013, particularly the West Side Precinct
- Exhibited Hornsby DCP Draft Housekeeping Amendments with Additional Changes
- SEPP65 and the Apartment Design Guide (ADG)
- SEPP2004 Housing for Seniors or People with a Disability

The proposal contains three development sites as shown in Figure 1. Accordingly, this report has been structured into three sections. Each section discusses issues related to each development site.

Figure 1 – Development sites included in the subject Planning Proposal (courtesy of Altis Architecture)

1. Site 1 - Community Car Park Redevelopment

Detailed commentary for Site 1 development is as follows:

Built form

Side setbacks

The proposal has increased the setback to the common boundaries with No.11 William Street which improves the outcome, but the setback distance to the common boundary with 141-151 Pacific Highway is inadequate and does not comply with ADG's separation requirements. The separation, which has been labelled as 12m on the floor plans in this location, is actually 9m only. The minimum separation distance required is 12m.

Floorplate sizes

It is noted that the gross floor area (GFA) of Levels 7-13 exceeds the maximum residential floorplate size of 700m^2 as required by Clause 4.5.4 (d) of the Draft HDCP 2013. The current floorplate of Levels 7-13 each has a GFA of approximately 750m^2; they should be further reduced to comply with the DCP control. The oversized floorplates contribute to the inappropriate bulk of the proposal and would increase shadow impacts on adjacent properties.

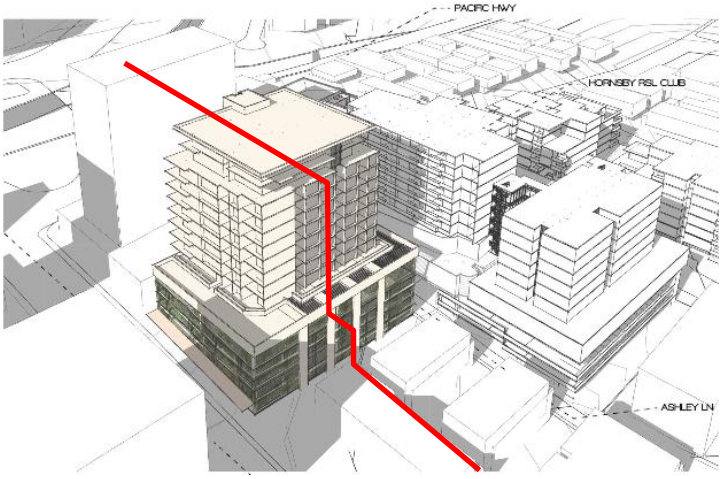
Street wall

The proposal does not comply with the DCP to create a consistent street wall height as per the West Side Precinct – Key Principles Diagram (Figure 4.5g).The proposal claims that the existing car park structure needs to be retained to be financially viable for the project, resulting in an inconsistent character with the DCP's desired future street wall height.

If the car park has to be retained as it is, it is important that the proposal investigates façade treatment options to create the visual transition from 2 storeys to 5 storeys in order to maintain the desired streetscape relationship.

Building height

The applicant has provided a 3D view as per the request in GMU's previous commentary. The 3D view clearly shows that the proposal presents a rather abrupt relationship with the 4-storey development to the west and also presents an oversized bulk in context with the surrounding built form.



Source of image: Altis Architecture

Building depth

The building depths of the proposed tower range from 20m to 29m, measured from glass line to glass line. The building depths significantly exceed the maximum dimension of 18m recommended by the ADG.

The applicant claims that the apartments are able to maintain the maximum 8m depth from glazing to the edge of open plan living/kitchen areas. However, the excessive building depths will contribute to the bulky appearance and increase the shadow impacts of the proposal.

Siting the development

Public domain interface

In the previous commentary, GMU emphasised that, as a minimum, the car park structure should be sleeved by commercial or residential uses along the William Street frontage as well as the laneway to the east. While the proposal has extended the active edges along William Street, the William Street and eastern laneway frontages are still not able to provide the expected level of activation. There are opportunities to maximise street activation with retail uses at the north eastern and south eastern corners of the site.

It is GMU's opinion that the proposal should mitigate the impact of the Sydney Water Pump Station on the public domain of William Street and the laneway as a 'value-add' of the project in order to justify the proposed uplift on the site.

It is recommended that the applicant provides perspective views from the street level to demonstrate the quality and potential future character of the frontage along William Street and the eastern laneway. The current scheme does not demonstrate a convincing outcome.

The façade treatment of the car park structure is paramount to the quality of the public domain and the outcome of the redevelopment and therefore should be carefully considered at the early stage of the project. The practicality of such extensive use of 'green wall' treatment on the façades of the existing car park structure is questionable. Especially on the south facing façades where direct sunlight is not available, green walls might not be a suitable solution for all aspects. Failing green walls would only lead to a poor visual quality for the development and escalate the maintenance costs in the long term.

GMU recommends to investigate other design treatments in combination with green walls such as artistically design panels to achieve a good balance. A single kind of treatments might lead to a monotonous outcome.

Vehicle access

It is preferred that the vehicle access from William Street is removed or relocated to the laneway along the eastern boundary. The applicant claims that the William Street access has to be retained due to the narrow width of the road reserve and traffic rates. GMU recommends Council's traffic engineering officers to review and assess this issue.

Designing the building

Natural ventilation

Based on the typical floor plan for the residential levels, there are only 4 apartments (50.0%) per floor that are dual aspect (corner) apartments which can achieve cross-ventilation. The other 4 apartments on the typical floors are single aspect apartments. Therefore, the proposal is unlikely to meet the ADG's requirement to ensure that a minimum of 60% apartments are cross-ventilated.

Common circulation and spaces

The residential tower has 9 apartments per floor up to Level 13. This exacerbates the bulky appearance of the proposal and exceeds the maximum number (8) of apartments off a single circulation core per floor recommended by the ADG. The ADG may accept greater number of apartment per floor in certain circumstance, but not in this case when the proposal presents such an inappropriate bulk and contains a large number of non-compliances.

Solar access

Apartments 601 and 1101 are labelled on the drawings showing that they are able to receive direct daylight. However, in reality the daylight to these apartments would be obstructed by the lift core.

According to the shadow diagrams and the typical floor plans, Apartments 602, 601, 1102, 1101, 1401 and 1501 are not able to receive any direct sunlight between 9 am and 3 pm at mid-winter. This means that in the entire development 18 out of 81 apartments (or 22.2%) would not receive any direct sunlight between 9 am and 3 pm at mid-winter. This exceeds the maximum of 15% allowed in the ADG.

It is noted that the north arrows throughout the drawing package are inaccurate.

2. Site 2 – RSL Club Redevelopment

Detailed commentary for Site 2 development is as follows:

Built form

Street setback

The following issue from GMU's previous commentary has not been addressed. It is important that the proposal provides a sensitive character transition from business to residential uses within the site, which is the intention of the DCP setback control as stated in GMU's previous commentary. Matching the existing zero setback of the RSL Club is not considered to be a sensitive approach.

> *"The proposed 0m carpark setback to Ashley Street does not comply with the DCP's requirement to provide a minimum 3m street setback (Figure 4.5n). This setback is important as it will provide the character transition to the existing residential development further to the west."*

Side setbacks

The proposal has increased the side setback distance to the adjoining properties at No. 14-18 Ashley Street from the car park's ground level. However, it is GMU's opinion that the side setback zone should be provided with mature tree planting to screen the carpark structure as the car park has a direct interface with the habitable rooms of No.14-18 Ashley Street. The proposal uses the entire setback zone for vehicle circulation which is an unacceptable outcome and would significantly compromise the amenity of the neighbouring properties.

Building length

The building length of the residential tower is still considered excessive, particularly with the lift core of the hotel/serviced apartment building attached to the western side, further contributing to the perception of length. The two buildings will be seen as one continuous mass and present as a 'wall' of development. A minimum of 12m separation should be provided from non-habitable rooms to the hotel, or a minimum of 18m separation should be provided from habitable rooms to the hotel.

On the drawings, the separation distance is labelled as 12m between the hotel/serviced apartment building and the residential tower. However, the separation is in fact 8m only. The applicant has not provided accurate information

Siting the development

Public domain interface

The proposal retains the primary club entry via Ashley Lane and retains the undercroft drop-off area as the arrival point which is not a good outcome. It is GMU's opinion that the lobbies of the club and hotel should each have an identifiable street address on Ashely Street.

The residential lobby should also have an identifiable street address and this can be provided near the corner of Ashley Lane and the eastern laneway of Site 1 so that its visibility is maximised. This would separate the residential entry from the club and hotel entries to maintain the privacy of the future residents.

The current lobby location is completely internalised and over 10m deep from the Ashley Lane boundary. It is also very convoluted for the future residents to access to the residential lobby. Access to lobbies should be as direct and visible as possible.

The proposal currently has a 65m-long and continuous inactive edge along Ashely Street which is a very poor outcome. It is recommended that the Ashley Street be activated with club and hotel lobbies or other active uses to reduce the length and break up the continuity of the inactive edge.

The applicant claims that the entry to the loading dock cannot be relocated to Ashley Lane in a practical way because only the current access location can accommodate the range of vehicles which need to access the docks. GMU recommends Council's traffic engineering officers to review and assess this issue. Should the vehicle entry to the loading dock is retained on Ashely Street, its dimensions must be minimised to reduce the impacts on the public domain.

Solar access

Apartment 206 is labelled on the drawings showing that they are able to receive direct daylight. However, in reality the daylight to the apartment would be obstructed by the lift core.

According to the shadow diagrams and the typical floor plans, Apartments 206 and 207 are not able receive any direct sunlight between 9 am and 3 pm at mid-winter. This means that, in the entire development, 16 out of 64 apartments (25%) would not receive any direct sunlight between 9 am and 3 pm during mid-winter. This exceeds the maximum of 15% allowed in this ADG.

3. Site 3 – Seniors Housing Development

Detailed commentary for Site 3 development is as follows:

Built form

Street Setback

The proposed setback of 4m to Ashley Street is inadequate considering that the prevailing setback distances along Ashley Street to the west range from 7 to 8m. The proposed residential development should not refer to the RSL Club building (which is a commercial premises) for setback requirements.

Building separation

The following issue from GMU's previous commentary has not been addressed:

> *"A residential flat building over 4 storeys with habitable rooms/balconies facing the adjoining properties to the west should provide a 9m side setback to the common boundary as per the ADG. Levels 4, 5 and 6 of the proposal should also have an additional setback of 3m from the common boundary."*

The applicant claims that the reduced separation distance will not lead to privacy impacts; however, the proposal did not consider its increased shadow impact onto the neighbouring private open space. The reduced separation distance also causes a rather abrupt relationship between the proposed 7-storey building and the adjacent single-storey dwelling house.

To achieve an ADG-compliant building separation, a total of 9m separation (i.e. the minimum of 6m plus additional 3m for zonal transition) is required from the proposed built form to the common boundary for building up to 4 storeys, or 12m is required if the building has 5 to 8 storeys.

Building height & secondary setback

GMU understands that Council is agreeable to an uplift for the site if the proposal is for the purpose of senior housing up to 5 storeys. Having considered the future development scale to the north of the site, it is GMU's opinion that a streetwall up to 4 storeys would be appropraite along Ashley Street; the streetwall along Webb Avenue should be no more than 3 storeys, so that it is able to maintain a sensitive scale to the 2-storey dwellings to the south; the transition of street wall height from 4 to 3 storeys should be provided from the north to south along Forbes Street.

The upper levels above the street wall should be sufficiently setback to reduce their perceivable bulk from the street. GMU recommneds that:

- a minimum of 3m secodary setback should be provided to Ashely Street and Forbes Street.
- a minimum of 6m secodary setback should be provided to Webb Avenue.

GMU has attached sketches to illustrate the above recommendations at the end of this report.

Siting the development

Public domain interface

The proposal attempts to address the blank wall façade on the street level with landscaping. This approach, however, still provides no activation to the public domain interface. Using landscape treatment alone to mask the issues does not help activate the street edges and is considered to be a lesser outcome.

In GMU's previous commentary, it was recommended that the public domain interface should be activated by private front gardens with direct street access to each ground floor apartment. The gardens (or protrusion of basement car park) can be raised by up to 1m above the ground level if required to overcome the topographical constraints.

The following issue from GMU's previous commentary has not been addressed.

> *"The proposal cuts into the northern portion of the site and sinks the development by more than one storey (approximately 4m) lower than the existing ground level, in order to achieve level access and parking while lacking sensitive response to the sloping nature of the site's topography. As the units at the site's edges are sunken, they would have a poor outlook and also visual privacy impacts from the public footpath. A better design solution is to set the datum level with ground floor units and adjust basement parking and site access accordingly."*

The applicant's claim to use landscape treatment to maintain privacy is a highly compromised solution and does not promote a good design outcome. Such an approach is not supported.

The following issue from GMU's previous commentary has not been addressed:

> *"The drop-off area and dual vehicle entry ramps on Ashley Street would occupy about 40% of the street frontage, resulting in a poor public domain interface. The approach prioritises vehicles rather than pedestrians to create a poor arrival experience."*

GMU is not convinced that the 'shared environment' approach by the applicant is an appropriate solution to the issue. Shared zones are usually design at a compact and intimate scale to promote priority for pedestrians. The proposed drop-off area is nearly 28m wide with two 4m-wide vehicular entry points. This is not considered to have a human-scale and would cause significant impacts onto the public domain.

The following issue from GMU's previous commentary has not been addressed:

> *"The cutting of the site and sinking of the development lead to the inability to provide direct street access into ground floor apartments, exacerbating the poorly treated public domain interface."*

It is an important principle that the public domain interface is activated by residential entries, private open spaces and habitable rooms. The trench along the boundaries physically disconnects the street-level apartments from the public domain. The sinking of the apartments creates more than just privacy and access issues but a poor public domain interface and lesser amenity from the subterranean units.

The following issue from GMU's previous commentary has not been addressed:

> *"The proposal does not provide any information in relation to deep soil planting. The ADG requires 7% of the site area to be provided as deep soil zone. Considering that the site has a generous area of 5,463m^2, the proposal should endeavour to provide a minimum 15% of the site area as deep soil zone, as recommended by the ADG. The basement parking of the proposal should also provide 7m setback from front and rear boundaries and 6m from side boundaries to allow for deep soil landscaping as per Table 3.5.7(a) of the DCP."*

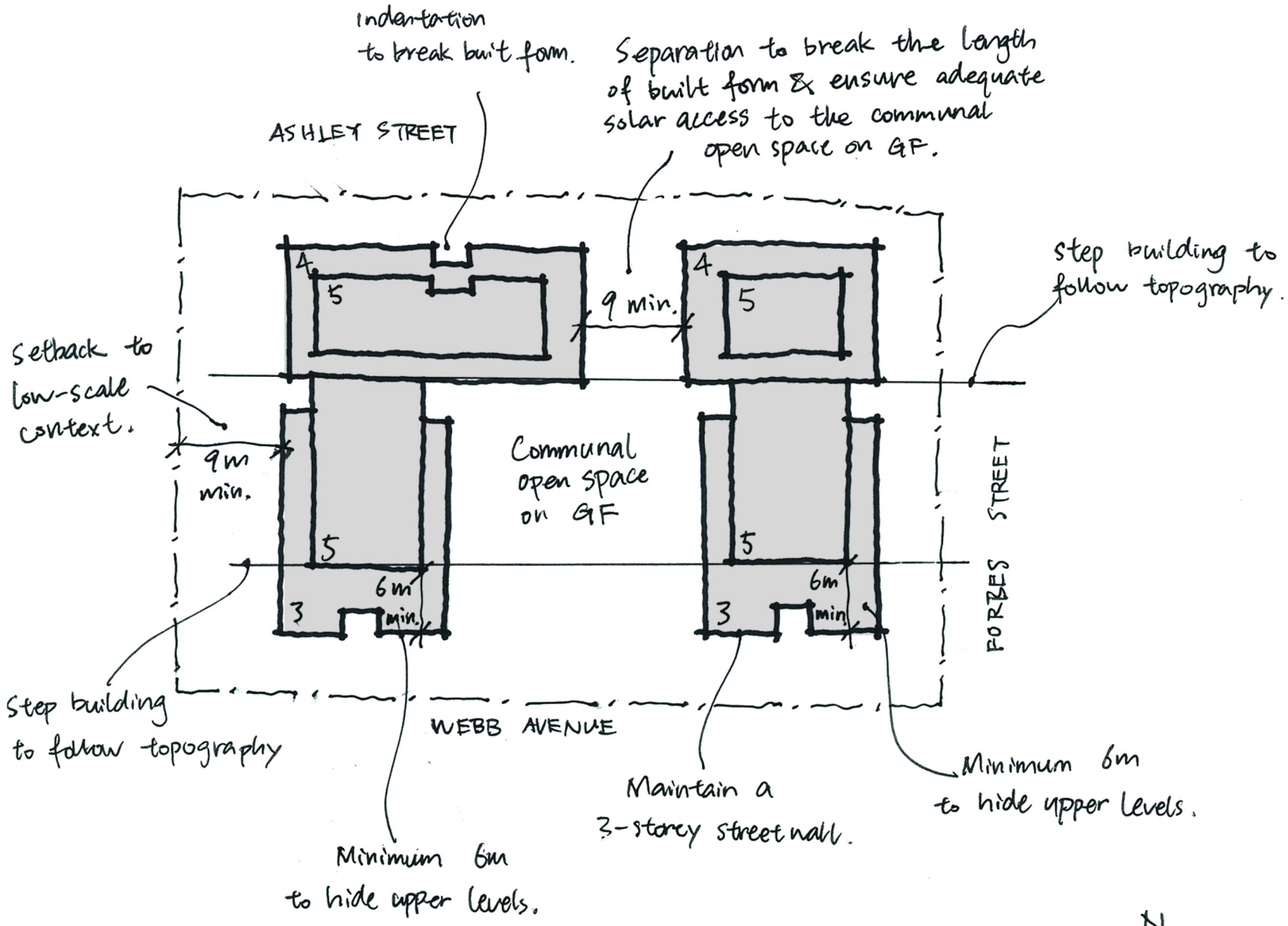
The above comments relate to Section 3E 'Deep Soil Zone' on page 61 of the ADG and Table 3.5.7(a) of the DCP. The revised proposal has not provided any information, such as calculation of the deep soil areas to demonstrate how the above requirements can be met.

Conclusions and Recommendations

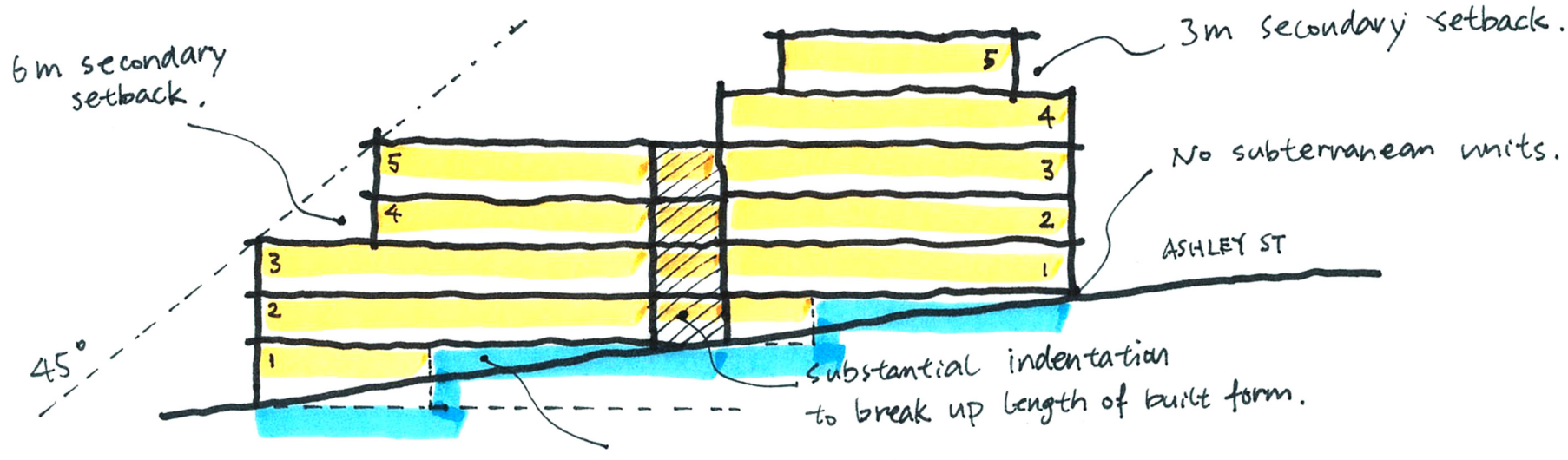
GMU considers that the revised Planning Proposal scheme has not resolved the majority of the issues raised. In general, the proposal's design approach aims to maximise the development yield and has failed to properly address the issues raised, which would lead to over-development at the expense of the quality of the public domain, amenity of neighbouring properties and the quality of the apartment units within the sites.

In addition, the applicant has provided inaccurate information including setback and separation distances, north arrows and solar access to apartments. This leads to a general concern on the overall quality of the documentation.

It is GMU's opinion that the revised proposal still fails to demonstrate how the amended LEP controls would deliver a positive outcome and provide the expected public benefits to the community to justify the proposed level of uplift. The applicant must reconsider the current design approach and follow 'best practice' principles to be able to achieve a satisfactory outcome.



NOT TO SCALE
INDICATIVE HEIGHT DISTRIBUTION
GMU SKETCH
16/12/2016



FORBES STREET ELEVATION

N.T.S.
GMU SKETCH
HORNSBY R L
16/12/2016