

CONSIDERATION AND RESPONSE TO STRATEGIC URBAN DESIGN REVIEW

Following lodgement of the Planning Proposal for the Victoria Road Precinct in August 2015, Marrickville Council engaged Roderick Simpson to undertake a review of the proposal and provide strategic urban design advice to Council.

In October 2015 Roderick Simpson presented his advice to Council in a report titled 'Victoria Road Planning Proposal – Strategic Urban Design Review.' As noted in Section 1 of this report the advice is intended to cover a wide range of aspects, in particular:

- a) The scale and overall heights (in the immediate and broader landscape setting) of predominantly residential development proposed for the southern part of the precinct;
- b) The street wall proposed along Victoria Road;
- c) The layout and arrangement of buildings relative to open space, paths, landscape and existing and proposed street networks; and
- d) Any other general strategic urban design advice.

In March 2016 Gateway Approval was issued for the Planning Proposal by the Department of Planning and Environment. The Gateway Determination was granted subject to a number of conditions. Condition 1(c)(iv) requires consideration to be given to the design advice provided in the Independent Urban Design Study, prepared by Roderick Simpson.

This document has been prepared in response to the Gateway Determination. It considers and responds to the matters raised in the Strategic Urban Design Review prepared by Roderick Simpson.

1.0 VISION

The Strategic Urban Design Review supports the redevelopment and regeneration of the Victoria Road Precinct. It states that *'the key objective should be to create a precinct that can intensify and develop over time and that encourages and allows diversity.'*

The Strategic Urban Design Review however suggests an alternative approach for the Victoria Road Precinct than that set out in the Planning Proposal. Whilst this is the case it is noted that the Planning Proposal will result in an outcome that in many ways responds to the key elements of the vision put forward by the Urban Design Review, specifically it will:

- Facilitate a more intensive and diverse range of business uses that take advantage of the precincts proximity to the city and inner west;
- Support a shift to higher order and more intense activities;
- Result in the creation of new street, laneways and pathways that will deliver a finer grain street network;
- Support the retention of a number of 'character' buildings that have been assessed as having potential heritage value and which are considered to contribute to the interesting and diverse character of the area;
- Will support the provision of key worker housing and will help with improving housing affordability in the local area.
- Deliver new development that have will be designed to higher sustainability standards than those that presently occupy the precinct.
- Result in significant improvements to the quality of streetscapes, public domain and open space within the precinct.

2.0 URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

As per the proposed Vision for the precinct, whilst the planning proposal will deliver an urban design outcome that is slightly different to that proposed in the Strategic Urban Design Review, it will still respond to and support many of the key recommended principles.

2.1 Street grid and character

The Strategic Urban Design Review states that ‘there should be a variety of street conditions related to their role and function and desired character, not simply the volume and type of traffic. Improving the permeability and pedestrian and cycle connections to the north west and south east right through to Sydenham station should be considered as part of the planning.’

In response to this the Draft DCP has been prepared to include provisions that will facilitate the creation of a varying street hierarchy, shared spaces and pathways. These spaces will have a different feel and character that will be designed by the built form that adjoins, the width of the road, landscaping and the design of the public domain. Overall it will result in a rich and vibrant tapestry of streets that support a range of functions and experiences for residents and visitors of the precinct.

It is noted that the Strategic Urban Design Review concludes:

‘The proposal for additional streets and lanes that connect to the surrounding network should be strongly supported and commended.’

2.2 Subdivision Pattern

The Strategic Urban Design Review states that *‘the retention of the small lots and narrower frontages should be preserved.’* Whilst this is the case the report also acknowledges that *‘Site amalgamations and boundary adjustments will be necessary to facilitate the renewal and intensification, but the ‘legacy’ subdivision should be finer grain than exists as befits the new activities.’*

The proposal will allow for a mix of small and large lots to be developed within the precinct. Sites will be amalgamated where necessary to deliver high quality urban renewal that will contribute to revitalising the precinct. Key examples of this include the Timber Yards site and land around Wicks Park, particularly to the north.

Finer grain development will be encouraged in areas such as Rich Street, Chapel Street and Faversham Street, where land has historically been characterised by smaller lots and a finer urban grain.

The fine grain built form will also be able to be achieved through effective building designs that articulate and vary their appearance through façade designs and treatments. Together these measures are expected to deliver an urban form that is mixed in character, and which in some areas will carry through the subdivision pattern and urban grain that has traditionally characterised the precinct.

2.3 Car Parking

The Strategic Urban Design Review states that *‘there will need to be an increase in car parking for the increased intensity of activity. The vision is not a large floor-plate office park, there will not be extensive areas of residential and car parking would be more efficiently and cost effectively provided on a street block or sub precinct level, above ground in dedicated structures that may be ‘sleeved’ by active uses at the ground level, and designed to allow adaption to other uses over time.’*

. Whilst it is acknowledged that above ground public car parks may be useful in the future, there are significant complications and challenges with this approach, namely:

- delivering this type of infrastructure requires specific land to be identified and dedicated for a car park, which comes at significant expense and at the expense of a site's development potential;
- above ground car parks are typically unsightly structures that detract from the quality of the urban environment;
- consolidating parking in a single location results in inefficiencies for land uses. Typically, business operators and residents want their car parks to be located within the same site as their place of business or residence. This arrangement would significantly detract from the value and appeal of dwellings and floor space in the precinct.

Given the above, car parking is proposed to be provided on a site by site basis in a manner that is consistent with Council's current practices and requirements.

2.4 Character Buildings

The Strategic Urban Design Review states that there are a "variety of building types and 'quirky buildings' that give the precinct its character are at risk with redevelopment and increased FSR.

There are a wide range of building types in the area reflecting the particular and diverse range of activities that have occurred. These range from anomalous residences, to corrugated iron sheds to derelict ambulance stations. None of these are formally scheduled as 'heritage' in the LEP, but are very important elements that contribute to the character of the area."

In response to this it is noted that a further Heritage Assessment of the precinct has been carried out by Artefact Heritage, which has identified a number of buildings (in addition to existing heritage items) that are considered worthy or potentially worthy of retention. These buildings have subsequently been identified within the Draft DCP, which requires further detailed heritage analysis to be undertaken for any proposals that have the potential to affect these buildings. Through the implementation of the DCP the proposal will appropriately recognise and respond to the precincts character buildings. Furthermore, it will encourage the adaptive reuse of heritage features within the precinct, especially within Faversham Street and Farr Street.

2.5 Open Space

The Strategic Urban Design Review states that 'the location, type and quality of open space is a result of historical happenstance. The accessibility and useability is poor and the amenity of Wicks Park is compromised by traffic on two sides. The renewal of the area provides an opportunity to improve the location and configuration open space and the school grounds.'

Following on from this the Strategic Urban Design Review recommends that the planning proposal should investigate the potential to change the amount or location of public open space, in particular seek to utilise or swap land with the school grounds to create a new park in replacement of Wicks Park.

In response to this it is noted that Wicks Park is considered to be an appropriate location for a park. Its dual street frontages to Victoria Road and Sydenham Road make it highly visible and accessible, and as a result it has the potential to make a significant contribution to the amenity of the area.

Its location provides the opportunity to redevelop land adjoining the park to create a new vibrant and active parkland space that is overlooked by active uses and which is designed as an active and inviting place for the local community.

In addition to enhancing Wicks Park the Planning Proposal will result in the creation of new pocket parks, new shared streets, pedestrian pathways and an enhanced public domain, that together will play a vital role in creating a network of green and open spaces that serve the

community and tie the precinct together. The proposed open space solution is therefore considered to be appropriate in this regard.

2.6 Building Heights and Interface Conditions

The Strategic Urban Design Review recommends that 'The height of buildings need to be considered together with the spatial definition of streets and public spaces.'

It states that the planning proposal shows heights of up to 48 metres and notes that this may be acceptable along Victoria Road, but would be overwhelming if built close to Sydenham Road. With regard to Sydenham Road it recommends that consideration could be given to buildings up to 21, characterised by a four storey street wall with recessed upper levels up to a total height of six storeys.

In response to this it is noted that the tallest built form within the precinct has been positioned centrally within the site, with heights then graduating down to the edges of the precinct to achieve appropriate interfaces with the surrounding area.

Heights along Victoria Road have been designed to be a maximum of 23m of approximately six storeys, while the maximum building height along Sydenham Road has been reduced to 11m, being significantly lower than the 21m suggested in the Strategic Urban Design Review. The Draft DCP will provide a framework of controls that will effectively guide the scale of built form, building setbacks and design. Through the implementation of these controls together with the proposed LEP height limits, it is considered that an appropriate interface can be achieved with the surrounding area.

3.0 COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSAL WITH FOCUS ON SECTIONS 4 AND 5

The following table provides a response to matters raised in Section 6 of the Strategic Urban Design Review.

Comment	Response
Lots on the western side of Farr Street should not be consolidated. The development potential will be just as great if individual blocks are developed as 3 /4storey /live work premises, built boundary to boundary without car parking. Car parking could be provided nearby.	The Planning Proposal does not seek to make any amendments to the current subdivision or amalgamation controls that apply to the precinct.
Leaving aside the issue of whether residential should be permitted, there seems little reason to restrict the frontage along Sydenham Road to 3 storeys. The area on the south side of the road is commercial as far to the west as Frampton Lane. The residential lots to the west of Frampton Lane have a rear land and could be suitable for higher density in the future. Note the R4 development in Garners Road.	The frontage along Sydenham Road has been restricted to 3 storeys for the most part. This amendment has been made in direct response to the Gateway Determination and is considered an appropriate design outcome. Some exceptions are proposed to apply to this, being land on the corner of Sydenham Road and Victoria Road and land at the corner of Faversham Street and Sydenham Road.
The built form on the east side of Farr Street could also be higher (up to 6+2) given the WNW orientation.	Maximum building height along the east side of Farr Street is 20m, which will allow for buildings up to 6 storeys in height. Draft DCP provisions will require upper levels to be setback. Eight storeys was considered excessive along the eastern side of Farr Street and the proposed design solution is considered to facilitate a more appropriate transition in building heights.

The rationale for the built form on Block X is not clear.	Block X is considered to provide an appropriate location for taller built form, given its proximity adjacent to Wicks Park and its central location within the precinct. The proposed density will allow the site to maximise its interface with the park, will provide a built form outcome that activates and frame the open space, and will improve the parks overall appeal and use.
If the objective is to create a mixed use high density corridor along Victoria Road the proposed heights are appropriate. The creation of a rear lane as shown in Figure 12 is essential if Victoria Road is to develop the character of an urban boulevard. Precinct parking rather than site by site parking would serve to activate the streets. Loading, and deliveries would still be on site for bulky goods.	It is considered that an appropriate streetscape environment can be created without the need for a rear laneway behind all of the properties. Parking and servicing within the precinct on a site by site basis will provide an outcome consistent with all other areas within Marrickville.
The renewal of the area presents the opportunity to rearrange the open space including that associated with the school. Wicks Park fronts two busy roads and is bounded by light industrial at present. The 14 storey form shown would overshadow the park in the morning.	Wicks Park is considered to be an appropriate location for a park. Its dual street frontages to Victoria Road and Sydenham Road make it highly visible and accessible, and as a result it has the potential to make a significant contribution to the amenity of the area. The buildings may result in some overshadowing of the park, however the towers will be designed to be slender and controls have been included within the Draft DCP to ensure that the park receives sufficient solar access.
All of the open space could be reconfigured to be more accessible and useable. If there is residential development in the area, preference should be given to a system of interconnected public open spaces rather than private courtyards.	The proposal will result in the creation of new pocket parks, new shared streets, pedestrian pathways and an enhanced public domain, that together will play a vital role in creating a network of green and open spaces that serve the community and tie the precinct together. The proposed open space solution is therefore considered to be appropriate in this regard.
The school site could have securable fenced 'core' with the other playground areas made available to the public as dual use. The current configuration of the school green is not ideal fronting Victoria Road. It may be preferable to have a land swap that consolidates the grounds to the west and south along Farr street, retaining a pocket park where there is the existing grove of mature trees on Victoria Road.	Use of the school site for public open space is not considered to be a desirable outcome. This option was therefore not pursued.
An alternative strategy may be to avoid the creation of any private courtyards or courtyards are that are the exclusive domain of adjoining buildings. A set of interconnected publicly accessible spaces that provide both calmed vehicular access and an attractive, shaded pedestrian places should be the aim. This type of environment is common in Paris, Berlin and Copenhagen, but also in groups of industrial buildings – e.g. precinct 75. Refer to images in Figure 1.	Both public and private open space will be provided to service the needs of the community and the needs of residents within their site. The design will result in a network of pocket parks, shared streets, pedestrian pathways and an enhanced public domain, that together will play a vital role in revitalising the area into a vibrant mixed use precinct.

The key objective should be to create a precinct that can intensify and develop over time and that encourages and allows diversity. If this is the key objective, then it is important to recognise the need for an ongoing 'stewardship' role. This is similar to the role local government plays in relation to shopping centres where there is continual re-investment in the public domain and in the provision of essential infrastructure including car parking.	The proposal will provide a framework to guide and shape the gradual and organic growth of the precinct over the next 15 to 20 years and in this regard will satisfy this objective.
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4.0 SUMMARY

Based on our analysis of the Strategic Urban Design Review the Planning Proposal is considered to facilitate an outcome that in many ways will be consistent with key aspects of the vision and strategy recommended by Roderick Simpson. In particular, it will help grow and diversify employment in the precinct; it will deliver much needed renewal and regeneration; it will increase the permeability of the precinct through creation of new streets and laneways; it will enhance the public domain and result in the creation of new open space; it will deliver housing and improve housing affordability and accessibility in the area; it will provide new opportunities for creative industries; and it will retain and protect the more viable industrial areas within the precinct.

It is acknowledged that there are some points of difference between the Planning Proposal and the Strategic Urban Design Review. These mainly relate to the provision of housing in the precinct (i.e. market vs pure affordable housing), the location of open space, the creation of a rear laneway to service development along Victoria Road, and the lack of any prohibition on lot sizes and amalgamations. All of these are considered to be more minor detailed matters compared to the overarching and objectives for the precinct.

Despite the differences the Planning Proposal will deliver an outcome that will revitalise and transform the precinct into a vibrant mixed use area that better serves the current and future needs of the community, and in this regard is considered to represent an appropriate planning and design response.