ITEM-3	LOCAL PLANNING PANEL – PLANNING PROPOSAL AND DRAFT DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PLAN – 7-15 COLUMBIA WAY, NORWEST (3/2022/PLP)
THEME:	SHAPING GROWTH
MEETING DATE:	18 August 2022
	LOCAL PLANNING PANEL
GROUP:	SHIRE STRATEGY, TRANSFORMATION AND SOLUTIONS
AUTHOR:	SENIOR TOWN PLANNER GIDEON TAM
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	MANAGER – FORWARD PLANNING NICHOLAS CARLTON

PURPOSE

This report presents the planning proposal for land 7-15 Columbia Way, Norwest to the Local Planning Panel for advice, in accordance with Section 2.19 Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. The planning proposal applicable to land at 7-15 Columbia Way, Norwest (Lot 2015 DP 857690 and Lot 200 DP 877496) demonstrates adequate strategic and site-specific merit to warrant progression to Gateway Determination, on the basis that:
 - a) The proposal is consistent with the strategic planning framework as it seeks to facilitate commercial uplift in the vicinity of the Norwest Metro Station, contributing to identified job targets and reinforcing the role of the commercial core of Norwest as a specialised commercial office precinct.
 - b) The proposal demonstrates an appropriate balance between realising the additional commercial uplift envisaged by the strategic planning framework and enabling an appropriate built form outcome at this location within the business park, at the interface with lower-density residential areas; and
 - c) The proposed development concept demonstrates an appropriate urban design outcome that responds to surrounding development, maintains visual amenity and the privacy of adjoining low-density residential properties, includes generous public open space, a highly accessible and permeable ground plane and soft landscaping, contributing to the urban tree canopy and landscaped character of Norwest Business Park.

- 2. Notwithstanding the above, the following matters should be resolved, before the proposal is suitable for submission for Gateway Determination:
 - a) The site-specific Development Control Plan submitted by the Proponent be further amended to include additional provisions that would secure the key urban design, landscaping and public domain outcomes proposed within the Proponent's supporting material; and
 - b) Further negotiations should be undertaken with the Proponent with respect to the proposed Voluntary Planning Agreement, to ensure that future development is subject to a fair and reasonable contribution towards local infrastructure within the Norwest Precinct. Specifically, it is considered that while recognition of the land dedication for Columbia Way (upgrade) and Columbia Court (extension) can be retained as items within the VPA, no public benefit or monetary value should be attributed to this obligation given the yield entitlement (GFA) of this land will be transferrable on the site. The monetary value attributed to this land by the Proponent within the Letter of Offer should instead be provided in the form of other public benefits, such as additional monetary contributions.

Proponent	Sutherland & Associates
Owner	GTL Properties Pty Ltd
Planning Consultant	Sutherland & Associates
Urban Design Consultant	Turner Studio
Transport Consultant	Stantec
Landscape Consultant	Arcadia
Surveyor Consultant	Chadwick Cheng
Site Area	30,320m ²
List of Relevant Strategic Planning Documents	Greater Sydney Region Plan
r laining Doodnonto	Central City District Plan
	Section 9.1 Ministerial Directions
	The Hills Local Strategic Planning Statement
	The Hills Development Control Plan
Political Donation	None Disclosed



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary and assessment of the planning proposal applicable to land at 7-15 Columbia Way, Norwest for consideration by the Local Planning Panel. The proposal, as submitted by the Proponent, seeks to increase the floor space ratio and maximum building height applicable to the site to facilitate commercial development comprising 71,516m² of gross floor area within five buildings ranging in height of 5 to 15 storeys.

Following consideration and assessment of the planning proposal it is considered that the proposal demonstrates adequate strategic and site-specific merit to warrant progression to Gateway Determination. The proposal generally aligns with the relevant strategic planning framework and will facilitate a commercial-only outcome within the Norwest Strategic Centre, contributing to identified job targets, while responding appropriately to site-specific constraints such as local amenity and character.

While the proposal generally demonstrates adequate strategic and site specific merit, there remains a need to resolve associated matters within the draft site-specific Development Control Plan and draft Voluntary Planning Agreement, before the application is ultimately suitable to progress further. Specifically, it is recommended that:

- a) The site-specific Development Control Plan submitted by the Proponent be further amended to include additional provisions that would secure the key urban design, landscaping and public domain outcomes proposed within the Proponent's supporting material; and
- b) Further negotiations should be undertaken with the Proponent with respect to the proposed Voluntary Planning Agreement, to ensure that future development is subject to a fair and reasonable contribution towards local infrastructure within the Norwest Precinct. Specifically, it is considered that while recognition of the land dedication for Columbia Way (upgrade) and Columbia Court (extension) can be retained as items within the VPA, no public benefit or monetary value should be attributed to this obligation given the yield entitlement (GFA) will be transferrable on the site. The monetary value attributed to this land by the Proponent within the Letter of Offer should instead be provided in the form of other public benefits, such as additional monetary contributions.

Pending the resolution of these above issues, it is considered that the planning proposal, draft Development Control Plan and draft infrastructure mechanism (Voluntary Planning Agreement) represent a logical and appropriate framework for facilitating high quality development of the site in the future which aligns with the strategic vision for the land and is supported by fair and reasonable contributions towards future local infrastructure.

1. THE SITE

The site is known as 7-15 Columbia Way, Norwest, and is located within the Norwest Strategic Centre. The site is zoned B7 Business Park under The Hills Local Environmental Plan 2019 and is approximately 830 metres walking distance from Norwest Station.

The site is a large single landholding with a total area of 3.3 hectares (33,320m²) and currently contains two warehouses and associated office premises, with an existing combined gross floor area (GFA) of approximately 13,201m². Under the existing planning controls, the site would be capable of achieving a total GFA of approximately 30,320m² (a floor space ratio of 1:1). Accordingly, there is an additional 17,119m² of unrealised development capacity on the site under the existing controls however the viability of redeveloping the site to achieve this incremental uplift is uncertain.

The site has a fall of approximately 13 metres from a ground level of RL 99 metres in the northeast corner to a ground level of RL 86 metres in the southwest corner.

Access to the site is via Columbia Way along the southern boundary (which is currently a private road). Spurway Drive runs along the rear (northern) boundary, however there is no current access from this frontage. The site adjoins Council's vehicle depot to the east and commercial buildings to the south, which range from 2 to 5 storeys in height. To the site's north is Castle Hill Country Club and a low-rise seniors housing development, both of which are zoned RE2 Private Recreation. 7 Maitland Place, directly adjoining the site's western boundary, is subject to a recent development approval for a 6 to 8 storey commercial building.

Under Schedule 5 of The Hills Local Environmental Plan 2019, Spurway Drive is listed as an item of local heritage significance (Item 25). Its heritage significance relates to the avenue of mature eucalyptus trees along the road that provide evidence of European settlement and the use of this land since the early 19th century.

THE HILLS SHIRE



Figure 1
Aerial view of subject site (outlined in red) and surrounding locality

2. DESCRIPTION OF PLANNING PROPOSAL

The planning proposal seeks to enable commercial development uplift on the site, comprising five commercial buildings, ranging from 5 to 15 storeys with a total GFA of 71,516m² (approximately 2,383 total jobs). The development concept submitted in support of the application includes commercial office space, with complementary uses such as food and drink premises, a health club, a 45 to 65-place childcare facility and 2,043 basement car parking spaces. The proposal does *not* seek to permit any residential outcomes on the site.

The application material indicates that building footprints would occupy no more than 30% of the site area, with substantial areas at the ground plane reserved for landscaping (including deep soil zones and tree canopy), publicly accessible open space/plaza area and through site links. The Proponent has also submitted indicative plans for a new road link along the site's eastern boundary that would connect Spurway Drive with Columbia Court. The proposal also includes a 10 metre strip of land along the southern frontage for the future road widening and dedication of Columbia Way.

To enable the proposed development outcome, the planning proposal seeks to amend The Hills LEP 2019 as follows:

- Increase the maximum Floor Space Ratio from 1:1 to 2.36:1; and
- Increase the Height of Building from RL 116 to RL 155.85 (approximately 15 storeys).

The planning proposal seeks to rely on the current land use permissibility and zone objectives of the existing B7 Business Park zone which applies to the land and does not seek to amend

the land use zoning, minimum lot size or introduce any additional permitted uses on the site. Indicative development concepts submitted by the Proponent are provided in Figures 2, 3 and 4 below.



Figure 3 Proposed north/front elevation (view from Columbia Way)

THE HILLS SHIRE



Proposed south/rear elevation (view from Spurway Drive)

The table below provides a comparison between the current planning controls, outcomes envisaged under the Government and Council Corridor Strategies and the outcomes sought through the planning proposal.

	LEP 2019 (Current Controls)	NWRL Corridor Strategy	The Hills Corridor Strategy	Original Proposal (September 2021)	Current Proposal (July 2022)
Zone	B7 Business Park	No cl		change	
Max. Height	RL 116 (7 storeys)	6-8 storeys ¹	4-8 storeys ¹	RL 155.85 (5-15 storeys)	RL 155.85 (5-15 storeys)
FSR	Max. 1:1	2:1 – 4:1	Min. 1.5:1 ²	Max. 2.5:1	Max. 2.36:1
Min. Lot Size	8,000sqm	N/A		No ch	ange
Jobs ³	30,320sqm (1,010 jobs)	Up to 121,280sqm (Up to 4,042 jobs)	45,480sqm (1,516 jobs)	75,800sqm (2,526 jobs)	71,516sqm (2,383 jobs)
Car Parking	1,212 spaces ⁴	N/A		2,166 spaces⁵	2,043 spaces⁵

Table 1

Comparison of Existing and Proposed Standards under LEP 2019 and the Strategic Planning Framework

Notes to Table 1:

¹ The NWRL and Hills Corridor Strategies do not include anticipated heights for the subject site. The abovementioned heights are indicative based on anticipated character and FSR.

² The Hills Corridor Strategy expresses commercial floor space densities as **minimum** targets, subject to detailed precinct planning and site-specific considerations, rather than maximum limits.

³ Employment ratio based on a rate of 1 job per 30m².

⁴ Car parking provision based on a rate of 1 space per 25m².

⁵ Car parking provision based on a rate of 1 space per 35m² as requested by the Proponent.

3. STRATEGIC MERIT CONSIDERATIONS

a) Greater Sydney Region Plan and Central City District Plan

Objective 14 of the Greater Sydney Region Plan and Planning Priority C9 of the Central City District Plan seek to integrate land use planning with transport and infrastructure corridors to facilitate a 30-minute city where houses, jobs, goods and services are co-located and supported by public infrastructure. The planning proposal is consistent with this objective as it seeks to facilitate additional commercial floor space and increased commercial employment opportunities within the Norwest Strategic Centre. Located at the periphery of the Centre, the site is 830m walking distance from Norwest Metro Station and is in close proximity to bus stops, supporting the realisation of a 30-minute city.

Objective 22 of the Region Plan and Planning Priority C10 of the District Plan seek to attract investment and business activity in strategic centres. The proposal is consistent with this objective as it would facilitate 71,516m² of additional commercial floor space, providing approximately 2,383 jobs (1,943 additional jobs than what is currently provided on the site) which will contribute towards the 49,000 total job target identified for Norwest in the District Plan.

The retention and growth of existing and new commercial office precincts is essential to grow jobs and in turn, Sydney's global competitiveness. Increased development opportunities on the site will assist Norwest to realise its potential as one of nine specialised commercial office precincts within Greater Sydney, through the proposed commercial land use and increased commercial capacity sought under the planning proposal. The site is located within the Commercial Core are of Norwest Strategic Centre and the commercial-only outcome is entirely consistent with the land use outcomes anticipated for this area.

Objective 2 of the Region Plan and Planning Priority C1 of the District Plan seek to ensure that infrastructure provision aligns with forecast growth. The planning proposal is seeking to progress in advance of precinct planning and detailed infrastructure analysis that would determine the infrastructure upgrades required to support the growth forecast for Norwest under the District Plan.

In the absence of a completed precinct plan and infrastructure analysis for the Norwest Strategic Centre at this time, which would determine the local infrastructure required to support anticipated development within the precinct, the proposal is supported by a letter of offer to enter into a VPA comprising of capital works, land dedication and monetary contributions, amounting to 2.8% of the estimated cost of development. The VPA would be in lieu of the payment of 7.12 developer contributions and seeks to address the additional infrastructure demand created by the proposed uplift and the cumulative growth of the broader precinct more generally. While the value of the contribution (as put forward by the Proponent) is comparable to other non-residential VPAs and Council contributions rates, it is considered that dedicated land should not be assigned a contribution value where a future developer is able transfer the achievable GFA from the land to elsewhere throughout the site, as the need for compensation for lost development potential as a result of this land being used for a public purpose is negated. This is further discussed in Section 3e) of this Report.

b) Section 9.1 Ministerial Directions

Direction 1.16 North West Rail Link Corridor Strategy

This Direction aims to promote transit-oriented development and manage growth around the eight new stations of the North West Rail Link (now known as Sydney Metro Northwest). It

requires that proposals for development within the corridor be consistent with the State Corridor Strategy and precinct Structure Plans. The planning proposal is consistent with this Direction as it will contribute to the identified employment targets for Norwest Station Precinct and it proposes a height, density and character outcome consistent with the State Corridor Strategy, as further discussed Section 3c) of this Report.

Direction 2.3 Heritage Conservation

This Direction seeks to conserve items, areas, objectives and places of environmental heritage significance and indigenous heritage significance. It requires planning proposals to include provisions that facilitate the conservation of environmental heritage. The provisions proposed within the subject planning proposal will facilitate a built form and design which are unlikely to create an adverse impact on the heritage significance of The Avenue of Trees. The proposed development outcome is consistent with the intended character of Norwest and anticipated built form along Spurway Drive. Accordingly, the planning proposal is consistent with this Direction.

Direction 4.1 Flooding

This Direction seeks to ensure that development of flood prone land is consistent with the NSW Government's Flood Prone Land Policy and the principles of the Floodplain Development Manual 2005. It also seeks to ensure provisions of an LEP applying to flood prone land are commensurate with flood behaviour and consider potential flood impacts both on and off the subject land. The Proponent's Flood Study concludes that the development of the subject site is expected to be feasible and generally in accordance with the requirements of Direction. It is however recommended that further consideration should be given to facilitating building design that appropriately responds to flood evacuation. This is further discussed in 4c) of this Report.

• Direction 5.1 Integrating Land Use and Transport

This Direction intends to ensure that future development encourages the use of sustainable integrated transportation options. The planning proposal is consistent with this Direction as it seeks to improve access to jobs and reduce car dependence by co-locating higher density commercial employment opportunities in walking distance to public transport services.

Direction 7.1 Business and Industrial Zones

This Direction aims to encourage employment growth in suitable locations, protect employment land and support the viability of identified centres. The planning proposal is consistent with this Direction as it seeks to encourage employment growth in a strategic business centre in close proximity to Norwest Metro Station, which would support the economic viability of the Norwest Business Park into the future.

c) North West Rail Link Corridor Strategy

The North West Rail Link Corridor Strategy identifies the area generally between Spurway Drive and Brookhollow Avenue, including the subject site, as a "Business Park" (see Figure 5). It is envisaged that this area would accommodate commercial offices that are carefully designed to integrate into the character of the area. It is also anticipated that this area would be of a lower density and scale to the Commercial Core (dark blue in Figure 5), given the more peripheral location on the outer walkable catchment of the Metro Station.



NWRL Corridor Strategy – Norwest Structure Plan (subject site outlined in yellow)

While the Strategy envisages the Commercial Core (darker blue area within Figure 5 above) around the Metro Station to accommodate building heights of around 8-10 storeys, recently approved and endorsed proposals in the commercial core have generally permitted a taller built form ranging between 18-25 storeys, which is more aligned to the outcomes envisaged under The Hills Corridor Strategy (further discussed in Section 3d) below). Consistent with the principles of transit oriented development and locating the highest density and tallest buildings closest to the metro station, the proposed building heights for the subject site, ranging from 5 to 15 storeys, are considered to provide a reasonable transition from the anticipated and approved development on and in closer proximity to the station. The appropriateness of the proposed building heights is discussed further in Section 4(a) of this report.

The Strategy's identified FSR range of 2:1 - 4:1 was broadly stated by the Department as the general FSR range for all commercial development across all precincts along the Metro Corridor. The proposed FSR of 2.36:1 for the subject site is within, and at the lower end of, the 2:1 - 4:1 FSR range identified within the Strategy. When factoring the more detailed site-specific considerations, increased distance from the station and the character areas identified in the Norwest Structure Plan, it is considered appropriate for density on this site to be at the lower end of this specific considerations for this development as they relate to height and density is provided in Section 4 of this Report, which demonstrates that the density and height sought can be accommodated within an appropriate built form on the site.

d) The Hills Corridor Strategy

The Hills Corridor Strategy identifies appropriate densities for development along the Metro Corridor to guide future precinct planning and planning proposals. It uses the principles of transit oriented development to identify the highest densities in the closest proximity to the stations. The Strategy envisages a *minimum* employment FSR of 1.5:1 for the site and emphasises the need to transition heights down across the Precinct, away from the Metro Station in order to reduce the visual impact on surrounding lower and medium density residential areas. An FSR of 1.5:1 was identified as the *minimum* required to achieve strategic

job targets to 2036, as well as being a suitable density that would allow for a built form that achieves an appropriate transition to surrounding lower scale development surrounding the commercial areas within the Business Park.



Hills Corridor Strategy – Norwest Structure Plan (subject site outlined in yellow)

The proposed FSR of 2.36:1 achieves (and marginally exceeds) the minimum target for employment FSR envisaged under The Hills Corridor Strategy for this site. The specific considerations as part of a rezoning proposal allow for detailed consideration of the right density on individual sites. On balance of the relevant considerations, this density of development is considered reasonable given the site's proximity to the Metro station and the fact that the proposed built form outcome demonstrates an appropriate interface with adjoining low-density residential development along Spurway Drive. The ability to achieve a density of this scale on the site within an appropriate built form outcome can be largely attributed to the large site area in single ownership (> 33,000m²), which affords the opportunity to masterplan the site and arrange development more flexibility to achieve variable building heights, adequate building separation, generous setbacks and significant ground plane landscaping.

e) The Hills Local Strategic Planning Statement and Supporting Strategies

The key planning priorities within the Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) that are relevant to this proposal are:

Planning Priority 1 – Plan for sufficient jobs, targeted to suit the skills of the workforce

This priority seeks to maintain an employment ratio of 0.8 jobs per resident worker as the population continues to grow. To do this, the LSPS seeks to protect existing and planned employment land and work with businesses to attract new investment. The planning proposal is consistent with this planning priority as it would increase commercial floor space within the

THE HILLS SHIRE

Norwest Strategic Centre and align the employment offering within the Business Park with the highly skilled professional workforce within The Hills.

Planning Priority 2 – Build strategic centres to realise their potential

This priority supports the job target set by the District Plan of an additional 16,600 to 20,600 jobs by 2036 in the Norwest Strategic Centre. To ensure this target is met, a structure plan (see Figure 7) and phasing strategy outlines how the Strategic Centre is expected to grow and evolve. The subject site is identified for commercial (offices) and is anticipated to provide office and business uses to contribute to this job target. The planning proposal is consistent with this planning priority as it seeks to facilitate a wholly commercial development outcome that would provide 2,383 jobs in the Centre (1,943 additional jobs compared to the current development on the site and 1,373 more jobs than what could be achieved under the current controls).



Figure 7 The Hills Local Strategic Planning Statement – Norwest Structure Plan

Planning Priority 12 – Influence travel behaviour to promote sustainable choices

This priority seeks to influence travel behaviour through careful management of parking demand in the context of higher car ownership demographic in The Hills. Giving effect to this priority, Council's car parking rates for all employment centres are under review. Finalisation of this review is imminent and it is anticipated that the car parking rate in the Shire's strategic centres will need to be reduced in light of the recent opening of Sydney Metro Northwest.

The proposal is generally consistent with this priority as it seeks a reduced car parking rate for the site, from the currently applicable rate of 1 space per $25m^2$ commercial GFA to a reduced rate of 1 space per $35m^2$ commercial GFA. It is noted that Council has supported even greater reductions to parking rates for other sites within the walkable catchment of the metro station (1 space per $60m^2$) and it may be appropriate to consider further reduction of the proposed parking rate on this site, in order to effectively manage the amount of likely traffic generation from the development and continue to influence travel behaviour in accordance with Planning Priority 12.

However, the reduced parking rate sought by the Proponent is considered reasonable for this site as an interim measure, until such time as the outcomes of Council's holistic parking rate

review has been finalised. Should the proposal proceed to Gateway Determination, Transport for NSW will be consulted and will likely comment on the proposed rate of parking provision, as has been the case for many other recent planning proposals in the Metro precincts. Ultimately, it is anticipated that an even lower parking rate than requested by the Proponent may be appropriate for this site, however this will be a matter for further consideration as the proposal progresses (before any finalisation of the proposal) and as Council completes its review of parking rates within strategic centres concurrently.

The supporting Transport Impact Assessment estimates that 43% of trips to and from work on any single day will be made using public transport (bus and metro) with an estimated 5% walking and cycling. Traffic and parking impacts are discussed in further detail in Section 4d) of this Report.

4. SITE SPECIFIC MERIT CONSIDERATIONS

a) Urban Design and Built Form

Height, Bulk and Scale

The proposed FSR of 2.36:1 could typically be achieved through a built form outcome ranging from 8 to 10 storeys in height across the site (not dissimilar to the heights anticipated for this site under Council's corridor strategy). However, the proposal is seeking to instead deliver this moderate density within a more varied built form ranging from 5 to 15 storeys in height. While some buildings proposed would be taller than previously anticipated for this site, the proposed building heights provide opportunity for a greater variation in built form across the site, a more interesting and varied skyline and substantially more space at the ground plane for open space and landscaping within the site. In comparison to a 'blanket' 8-10 storey development, the proposed heights better respond to the identified site constraints including the interface with low density residential development to the north, by enabling density to be shifted away from the sensitive interfaces (an opportunity afforded by the large consolidated development site).

The proposed built form demonstrates an appropriate transition from Norwest Station to the centre's periphery as demonstrated below in the comparison of other planning proposals recently approved or submitted for Gateway Determination:

- 'Commercial Core': building heights ranging between 10 and 25 storeys (including Norwest Station and 34-46 Brookhollow Avenue).
- **'High density residential':** building heights ranging between 7 to 26 storeys (including 40 Solent Circuit (The Greens) and 2-6 Maitland Place).
- **'Business Park':** building heights ranging between 6 to 12 storeys (including 2-4 Burbank Place and 14-16 Brookhollow Avenue).

THE HILLS SHIRE



Figure 8 Comparison of approved and endorsed building heights within Norwest Precinct

As demonstrated above, the proposed built form ranging between 5 to 15 storeys is consistent with existing and endorsed proposed development within the Business Park and will align with the emerging character of nearby development sites. It is noted that the strategic planning framework does not specifically identify anticipated building heights within the 'Business Park' area, but rather requires proposed development to demonstrate appropriateness of heights on a site-by-site basis.

Specifically, development should demonstrate a design that appropriately integrates into the character of the area. In this regard, it is considered that the Proponent's submitted Urban Design Report satisfactorily demonstrates this, for the following reasons:

 Variation in building height is achieved through the 'stepped' building profile and intentional siting of each building which facilitates an acceptable building height transition from 5 to 7 storeys located along the Spurway Drive frontage (comparable to adjoining development at 7 Maitland Place) up to the tallest elements (11 to 15 storeys) fronting Columbia Way which respond to the site's topographical decline towards Columbia Way. This is shown in Figures 9 and 10 below.



Figure 9 Building height transition



Figure 10 Building height variation

 Being situated south of Spurway Drive, the proposed development will not overshadow adjoining residential properties north of the site (or any residential land). The supporting shadow diagrams demonstrate that at least 34% of proposed landscaped areas within the site receive solar access between 11am to 2pm during the winter solstice, as shown in Figure 11 below (to ensure future development of the site maintains adequate solar access to adjoining properties along Columbus Way, it is recommended that additional provisions relating to building design be included in the draft site-specific DCP);



Figure 11 Solar access for landscape areas

 The large site area enables the development to arrange density within a built form that mitigates visual and privacy impacts on adjoining low-density residential properties (2 storey seniors housing on the northern side of Spurway Drive) and reduces the development's overall perceived bulk. In particular, the 15m setback from Spurway Drive provides sufficient spatial separation (35m) between adjoining seniors housing and the closest buildings (Buildings B and E).

Ultimately the proposed urban design outcomes ensure a high amenity can be achieved on the site and the proposed built form will sensitively transition to the interface along the Centre's periphery, thus demonstrating that the proposed height and density controls are acceptable in this regard having regard to the specific outcome on this site.

Landscaping and Public Domain

The site currently contains 76 trees generally located within the periphery of the existing lot boundaries and along the Columbia Way setback. Existing trees on-site do not comprise any endangered species. The proposed development requires the removal of 45 existing trees and in response, the proposal seeks to facilitate the planting of an additional 193 trees to facilitate tree replacement at a rate of 4:1 and approximately 25% total tree canopy cover throughout the site, as indicated in the Proponent's Landscape Masterplan (see Figures 12 and 13). The supporting Urban Design Report specifies an allowance of 30% deep soil landscaping throughout the site, which will ensure the ability for trees to mature with deep and established root systems.



Figure 12 Extent of proposed tree canopy



Figure 13 Extent of proposed soft landscaping

The submitted Landscape Masterplan identifies that only 29% of the site would be occupied by building footprints, with the remainder of the site comprising of soft landscaping (31%), a large central (publicly accessible) plaza and accessways and through site links, as shown in Figures 12-14. The proposed 15m rear setback along the Spurway Drive frontage provides a vegetation buffer between the proposed development and adjoining seniors housing to further soften any visual impacts. It is recommended that a breakdown of the extent of proposed open space and site coverage be included in the Proponent's draft site-specific Development Control Plan.

The ability for the development to comprise smaller building footprints (site coverage) and as a result, accommodate adequate spacious building separation and substantial open space and

landscaping at the ground plane will result in a high amenity for users of the site, positive interface with the public domain and a sense of openness which will minimise the perceived bulk of the development. Ultimately, the proposal to provide more slender (and slightly taller) buildings in order to achieve these important ground plane outcomes is considered superior to the alternative of shorter, bulkier buildings with a greater extent of site coverage.



Figure 14 Public open space and 'amenity zones'

The site demonstrates reasonable pedestrian permeability, offering multiple through-site links, which will improve access and walkability for residents north of the Precinct to the Business Park and Norwest Metro Station.



Figure 15 Proposed through site links and accessibility

The Proponent has submitted a site-specific Development Control Plan (DCP) in support of the planning proposal (see Attachment 9). The DCP includes a general control requiring the provision of public access to the central open space and embellishment in accordance with

the submitted design concepts to secure the positive landscaping and public domain outcomes contained within the Urban Design Report and Landscape Master Plan.

Development Control Plan

The site-specific DCP submitted by the Proponent seeks to establish a building envelope for future development on the site and identify land designated for public open space. The DCP contains the following controls:

Control	Current	Proposed	
Front setback	Min. 20m for public roads	7.5m (pending widening of Columbia Way)	
Side and rear	Min. 20m (secondary	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	
setback	frontage); or	6m side (east / secondary frontage)	
	Min. 10m	10m side	
Site coverage	Max. 50%	No change - Existing site coverage control of 50% would continue to apply	
Active frontage	N/A	Majority of ground floor building frontages	
Vehicular Accessway	N/A	1 on Spurway Drive	
		2 on Columbia Way	
Parking	Min. 1 per 25m ² GFA	Min. 1 per 35m ² GFA	
Dedicated land	N/A	10m Columbia Way	
		10m new road link along eastern	
		boundary (Columbia Court	
		extension)	

Table 3

Proposed Development Controls

The proposed development controls are generally reflective of the development concept and landscape master plan submitted by the Proponent, and are considered appropriate. The reduced setbacks along Columbia Way and the Columbia Court extension seek to enable active street frontages along these pedestrian route (refer Figure 16). The reduction is considered appropriate in this location noting the intent to achieve active frontages and the transitioning character of the Norwest Business Park (whereby parking will increasingly be located in basements and within building envelopes, rather than occupying large areas of the ground plane and front setback areas as is currently the case).



Figure 16 Proposed active frontages and vehicular accessways

The proposed 15m setback along the Spurway Drive frontage, while still providing an active interface, would allow sufficient space for a 'softer' frontage along this boundary with greater tree canopy and landscaping, which will act as a buffer between the proposed development and adjoining lower scale seniors housing.

The draft DCP identifies land to be dedicated to Council for future road widening of Columbia Way and construction of the proposed Columbia Court extension, reflective of the Proponent's submitted Letter of Offer for infrastructure contributions.

To provide certainty that other key urban design elements will be facilitated at the Development Application stage, it is recommended that the draft DCP be updated to also include the following additional controls:

- Maximum site coverage of 35%, generally reflective of the outcomes envisaged within the submitted Urban Design Report;
- Access and connectivity (including through-site links) consistent with the submitted Landscape Masterplan;
- Landscaping requirements (31% soft landscaping, 25% tree canopy, 30% deep-soil landscaping) consistent with the submitted Landscape Masterplan and Urban Design Report; and
- Minimum solar access requirements (solar access for at least 30% of landscaped areas between 11am to 2pm during the winter solstice and 50% for adjoining properties) as per the submitted Urban Design Report;
- Towers over podiums be designed to maximise solar access on adjoining properties; and
- Clarify the minimum parking requirement relates to Gross Floor Area (GFA) of the development.

b) Heritage Impacts

The nearby property at RMB 47 Spurway Drive and Castle Hill Country Club, Spurway Drive is listed in Schedule 5 of The Hills Local Environmental Plan 2019 as an item of environmental heritage. Known as the Avenue of Trees leading to Caste Hill Country Club (Item 25), its significance relates to the planting of araucaria and mature eucalyptus as evidence of European settlement and use of this land since early 19th century.

The Proponent's Planning Proposal report notes that the proposed 5 to 7 storey building heights along Spurway Drive are similar to the existing height already permissible along this part of the site. Therefore, the resulting built form outcome will not result in any meaningful impact on the heritage significance of the item, in comparison to development already permitted on the site.

The heritage listing does not relate to existing trees along the site's immediate boundary with Spurway Drive, as significant trees are generally located further west (as shown in Figure 17).



Figure 17 Aerial imagery of the locality (1991 top and 2022 bottom) – Avenue of trees outline in dashed yellow

It is further noted that views and vistas between the heritage item and the Bella Vista Farm Park conservation area will not be impacted as the subject site is not within a view corridor that lies between the heritage item and the farm. Should the proposal proceed to Gateway Determination, consultation may be required with NSW Heritage to provide heritage comments.

c) Stormwater and Flooding

The subject site is identified as a Flood Control Lot under Part C Section 6 - Flood Controlled Land of The Hills Development Control Plan 2012 (DCP). The Proponent's Flood Assessment Report concludes that development of the subject site is expected to be feasible and generally in accordance with the requirements of Direction 4.1 and the relevant provisions contained within The Hills LEP and DCP.

It is considered that the planning proposal is unlikely to have any impact on neighbouring properties with respect to flooding, especially noting that the type of development proposed (albeit at a slightly lower scale) is already permitted on the site under the current planning controls.

Notwithstanding this, further consideration should be given to how the built form (particularly basement car parking entry points) are configured to enable vehicles to be directed towards Spurway Drive for efficient evacuation in the case of major flood events, rather than towards Columbia Way where overland flooding can be hazardous in depth and speed of flows. Should Council resolve to proceed with the planning proposal, it is recommended that the Flood Assessment be revised to address this matter, prior to proceeding to Gateway Determination. It is also anticipated that the Energy, Environment and Science Group will provide comments on flooding, should the proposal progress.

Should the proposal proceed to finalisation and subsequently, a Development Application be lodged for the site, an updated flood model should be prepared to reflect the development's footprint, landscaping and road configuration and to determine more accurately the movement of flows through the site to establish appropriate flood planning levels. This could be addressed at the Development Application stage, along with the preparation of a flood emergency response plan, a flood evacuation plan and a detailed assessment of the specific development's compliance with Council's design specifications and flood modelling guidelines.

d) Traffic and Parking

Traffic

Transport for NSW, the Department of Planning and Environment and Council have commissioned the preparation of detailed regional traffic and transport modelling for Norwest, Bella Vista and Showground Station Precincts. This work is underway and is not yet completed. The findings of the traffic modelling will ultimately identify the capacity of the regional road network to support growth within these precincts and identify the extent of upgrades required.

Based on the proposed development concept of 71,516m² GFA with 2,043 car parking spaces, the supporting Transport Impact Assessment (TIA) anticipates that development will generate 937-941 AM and 670-674 PM peak hour vehicle movement. This represents an increase to the potential traffic generation that could be generated from the site under the current planning controls (594 AM trips and 400 PM trips).

The assessment concludes that existing traffic conditions are not representative of future conditions and that an assessment based on current conditions and intersection configurations would not provide meaningful results to inform the planning proposal.

Notwithstanding, having consideration for *future* mode share targets set by Transport for NSW, it is anticipated that traffic generation from the development would be in the order of around 625 vehicles in any peak hour. The distribution between modes of travel is provided in the table below.

Travel Mode	Mode Split Target	Trips (AM or PM)
Vehicle (driver or passenger)	47%	750 (625 vehicles)
Train	30%	470
Bus	13%	210
Walking and Cycling	5%	80
Working from home / did not work	5%	80
	Total	1,590 trips

Table 4

Distribution of mode of transport (peak)

It is noted that the proposed development includes the dedication of 10m wide strip of land along Columbia Way and the site's eastern boundary for road widening and half road construction of an extension of Columbia Way, as secured by the Proponent's Letter of Offer. Although development is not entirely reliant on the provision of these road items to facilitate sustainable traffic access, both items would support the improved distribution of traffic for both the proposed development and the broader Norwest Precinct. The distribution of traffic generated by the proposed development is illustrated in the figure below.



Figure 18 Traffic distribution

The analysis concludes that the future road and site access connections from Spurway Drive will reduce reliance on Norwest Boulevard to provide access to/from the site and the marginally higher traffic generated by the proposal will be further dispersed across the road network, with any additional traffic impacts on Norwest Boulevard intersections likely to be manageable.

It is difficult to assess the likely traffic impacts at this time, in the absence of the completed regional traffic modelling and during a transitional period where behavioural change is occurring amongst those accessing Norwest for employment. Further consideration of the proposal with respect to traffic will be required, in consultation with TfNSW and in light of the findings of the Regional Traffic Modelling, which are expected to be available in late 2022. In the interim, it is considered appropriate for the planning proposal to progress, noting that there will be scope for further consider traffic implications through the Gateway Assessment and public agency consultation phases, prior to any finalisation of the proposal. As detailed below, it is also noted that there may also be opportunity to substantially reduce traffic generation potential on the site and mitigate potential issues, through further reducing the parking rates applicable to the site such that there would be minimal increase in the number of parking spaces on the land in comparison to development of the site to full capacity under the current planning controls.

Parking

The supporting Transport Impact Assessment (TIA) identifies that Council's current applicable car parking requirements for the site are high and do not take into consideration the significant improvements in public transport provision surrounding the site.

The planning proposal seeks a reduced parking rate of 1 space per $35m^2$ and would result in the provision of 2,043 car parking spaces. Previous analysis of other comparable strategic centres indicates that a reduced parking rate would be appropriate for Norwest in the range of between 1 space per $60m^2$ and 1 space per $80m^2$ (that is, lower than the reduced rate requested by the Proponent). Parking rates applied as part of other planning proposals within the vicinity of the site are shown below.

Site	Parking Rate
DCP 2012 – Commercial (existing)	Min. 1 per 25m ²
2-4 Burbank Place	Min. 1 per 60m ²
Norwest Station Site	Min. 1 per 60m ²
14-16 Brookhollow Avenue	 Council endorsed July 2021: Max. 1 per 60m² Council endorsed June 2022: Min. 1 per 100m² Max. 1 per 75m²
7-15 Columbia Way (subject proposal)	Min. 1 per 35m ²

Table 5

Comparison of Parking Rates

It is acknowledged that over time there is likely to be significant change in travel behaviour (mode shift) within the Sydney Metro precincts. While it is difficult to quantify the extent of this shift prior to or during this transition period, it is anticipated that there will be an overall increase in the percentage of workers that will utilise public transport to get to and from their place of employment. For this reason, it is reasonable for Council to consider reduced car parking rates for the site, given it is located approximately 830m walking distance from the Norwest Metro Station and 400m – 500m from the closest bus stops.

While the proposed parking rate (1 per $35m^2$) is lower than the currently required minimum (1 per $25m^2$), it is higher than the rates endorsed by Council for other similarly located sites (1 per $60m^2$) and is higher than the rates advocated for (and enforced) by Transport for NSW (for example, 14-16 Brookhollow Avenue, Norwest where TfNSW required a parking rate range of minimum of 1 per $100m^2$ and maximum 1 per $75m^2$).

The setting of parking rates can be an effective mechanism in influencing travel behaviour and, in the context of commercial developments (which are predominantly a "destination" rather than a point of origin), the amount and availability of parking provided within a development is a key determinative factor in the behaviour of workers accessing site and subsequently, the amount of traffic generated to and from the development. It is noted that Council is currently undertaking a review of current car parking rates for the Shire's Strategic Centres. Finalisation of this review is imminent and it is anticipated that the car parking rate in the Shire's strategic centres will need to be reduced in light of the recent opening of Sydney Metro Northwest and given the scale of growth that is projected to occur within the Shire over the next 20 years (which will be unable to be accommodated if parking rates and traffic generation is not reduced). In the context of Norwest Strategic Centre, it is apparent that the traffic network (including potential future upgrades) will be unable to accommodate the strategically envisaged increase in development densities, without a significant reduction in parking rates and traffic generation characteristics.

To illustrate this notion, if the subject site was to develop under the current planning controls for the maximum permitted GFA of 30,320m² (including the existing parking rate of 1 space per 25m²), there would be 1,212 parking spaces. Effectively, this is the amount of parking and subsequent traffic generation anticipated under the current planning framework. In comparison:

- If the FSR is increased for the site to permit 71,516m² and a parking rate of 1 space per 35m² is applied (as requested by the Proponent), there would be 2,043 parking spaces on the site, being an increase of 831 spaces (and private vehicles) that can be

accommodated on the site in comparison to the current planning framework ("Scenario A").

Alternatively, if the FSR is increased for the site to permit 71,516m² and a parking rate of 1 space per 60m² is applied (as endorsed by Council on other sites within Norwest), there would be 1,191 parking spaces on the site, being a reduction of 21 spaces (and private vehicles) that can be accommodated on the site in comparison to the current planning framework ("Scenario B").

As demonstrated above, Scenario B represents a more sustainable model of development uplift in the precinct whereby significantly increased development yields can be permitted alongside reduced parking rates in order to result in no net increase in the number of cars that can be accommodated on a site (any by association, generate a trip to or from a site).

Should the planning proposal proceed to Gateway Determination, it is anticipated that Transport for NSW will review and provide comments on the proposed car parking rates. On the basis of the site's location on the outer edge of the walkable catchment of Norwest Station, it is considered reasonable to apply the reduced parking rate sought by the Proponent as an interim measure, until the outcomes of Council's parking rate review have been finalised or alternatively, until TfNSW expresses a view with respect to parking provision on this site. It is anticipated that as an outcome of these processes, it is likely that the parking rate for this site will ultimately need to be further reduced, generally in line with the rate recently applied to other sites within the Norwest Precinct.

e) Voluntary Planning Agreement and Infrastructure Provision

An analysis of appropriate infrastructure required to service future demand on the site will be undertaken as part of the Precinct Planning for Norwest, which is currently underway. The Hills Section 7.12 Contributions Plan which currently applies to the site is intended to be applied to infill development under the traditional planning settings for Norwest and does not plan or cater for the uplift and growth anticipated as a result of the Sydney Metro Northwest. Accordingly, future contributions payable once the Precinct Planning has been undertaken are highly likely to be greater than the 1% of cost of work as is currently required.

In recognition of this, on 13 July 2022, the Proponent submitted a Letter of Offer to enter into a Voluntary Planning Agreement (VPA) in support of the planning proposal. The Offer states that the developer would pay monetary contributions to Council and also includes the dedication of land and half-width road construction of the proposed extension of Columbia Court to Spurway Drive, as well as the dedication of a 10m wide strip of land along Columbia Way for future planned road widening of Columbia Way. A breakdown of the Offer is provided in the table below.

Offer Item	Rate	Value
Monetary Contribution	2.35%	\$7,790,720
Columbia Court extension (capital)	0.22%	\$755,000
Columbia Court extension (land)	0.08%	\$267,000
Columbia Way widening (land)	0.13%	\$441,000
Total	2.8%	\$9,253,720
Total 2.8% \$9,253,720		

Table 6

Breakdown of 2.8% monetary contribution

It is noted that the structure of the submitted offer proposes a 2.8% monetary contribution, which would then be offset (reduced) by the equivalent value of the proposed land dedication and half road construction at the relevant Development Application stage. This effectively

reduced the monetary contribution amount to \$7.79 million or 2.35% monetary contribution, as reflected in the above table.

In the absence of a completed precinct plan which would determine the local infrastructure required to support anticipated growth within the precinct, the total offer value of 2.8% of the total cost of works is considered to be a fair and reasonable infrastructure contribution offer which is in line with comparable VPAs and contribution rates for commercial development elsewhere within the Norwest Precinct and Shire. The offer is considered to be commensurate with the proposal's impact on the cumulative local infrastructure needs of the Precinct, in the absence of more detailed infrastructure analysis as part of Precinct Planning.

However, given the entitlement for the Proponent to transfer the achievable GFA from dedicated land to elsewhere on the site at the Development Application stage, it is considered that no monetary value should be attributed to dedicated land within the VPA. As shown in the following table, exclusion of the value of dedicated land from the value of the offer equates to a revised total value of \$8,545,720 (2.59% of the development cost).

Offer Item	Proponent Position on Value of Offer	Council Officer Position on Value of Offer
Monetary Contribution	\$7,790,720.00	\$7,790,720
Columbia Court extension (capital)	\$755,000.00	\$755,000
Columbia Court extension (land)	\$267,000.00	Nil (Transferred GFA)
Columbia Way widening (land)	\$441,000.00	Nil (Transferred GFA)
Total Contribution	\$9,253,720.00	\$8,545,720
Percentage of Development Cost	2.8%	2.59%

Table 7

Comparison of VPA Offer – Proponent and Council Officer

The tables below provides a comparison of the VPA offer associated with this planning proposal and other comparable VPA offers/executed VPAs (as well as the recent Contributions Plan for the nearby Norwest Innovation Precinct).

VPA	Rate	Details	
8 Solent Circuit, Norwest VPA	3%	\$47/m² - monetary contribution as well as recognition of a further value of 1% for traffic works.	
Circa Commercial Precinct, Bella Vista VPA	2.8%	\$46/m² - 2% monetary contribution as well as recognition of a further value of 0.8% for public open space embellishment and dedication.	
2-4 Burbank Place, Norwest VPA	3%	\$66/m ² - of development cost (monetary contribution).	
Draft 14-16 Brookhollow Ave, Norwest VPA	3%	\$142/m² - monetary contribution Accepted in principle by Council at its meeting on 27 July 2021.	
Norwest Station Site VPA	3%	\$119/m² - 2.5% monetary contribution plus 0.5% in local infrastructure works).	
Draft Hills Bowling Club VPA	3%	\$266/m² of non-residential GFA - monetary contribution and works. Yet to be considered by Council.	
Section 7.12 Norwest Innovation	2.8%	2.8% monetary contribution calculated at development application stage.	
Subject VPA Offer – 7-15 Columbia Way, Norwest	2.59%	\$119/m ² - 2.36% monetary contribution, dedication of land an construction of half road	

Table 8

Comparison of VPAs for commercial-only development

Having regard to the above, the 2.59% contribution to Council offered through a future VPA is substantially less than the local contributions accepted by Council through other VPAs for commercial-only development within Norwest and under the Norwest Innovation Section 7.12 Plan. On this basis, it is considered that a contribution value of 2.59% does not demonstrate a fair and reasonable contribution proportionate to the development uplift proposed.

If the Proponent were to submit a revised offer equating to 2.8% of the cost of the development excluding land dedication (for example, by way of additional monetary contributions), this would be considered a fair and reasonable contribution and comparable to recently supported VPAs for other sites throughout Norwest Precinct.

It is anticipated that future development may also be required to make monetary contributions towards regional traffic infrastructure (such as intersection upgrades along the regional road network), as an outcome of any public authority consultation with Transport for NSW, should the planning proposal progress. In the case of similar proposals within Norwest, the Department of Planning and Environment and Transport for NSW have required the inclusion of a Satisfactory Arrangement Clause, requiring regional infrastructure contributions to be resolved to the Government's satisfaction as part of any future Development Application.

Importantly, any such contributions towards regional infrastructure would be *in addition to* the local infrastructure contributions secured through the future VPA between Council and the Proponent. The resolution of regional infrastructure funding issues is ultimately the responsibility of the State Government and should the proposal proceed to Gateway Determination, it is anticipated that Transport for NSW will provide comment on this matter.

CONCLUSION

The planning proposal is considered to generally align with the relevant strategic planning framework and will facilitate a commercial-only outcome within the Norwest Business Park, contributing to employment targets and promoting the economic productivity of the Strategic Centre. While the assessment contained within this report indicates that the proposed Floor Space Ratio and maximum Height of Buildings will facilitate an appropriate built form outcome on the site, the report identifies a technical shortfall in the Proponent's submitted public benefit offer that seeks to address local infrastructure demand resulting from the development uplift being sought. Discussion should be continued with the Proponent with regard to the appropriateness of the proposed contribution to address local infrastructure, before the matter is submitted to Council for a decision.

ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Planning Proposal 7-15 Columbia Way, Norwest 14 July 2022
- 2. Appendix A Proposed LEP Maps 14 July 2022
- 3. Appendix B Survey 14 July 2022
- 4. Appendix C Urban Design Report 14 July 2022
- 5. Appendix D Transport Impact Assessment 14 July 2022
- 6. Appendix E Landscape Concept 14 July 2022
- 7. Appendix F Flood Assessment 14 July 2022
- 8. Appendix G Public Benefit Offer 13 July 2022
- 9. Draft DCP 7-15 Columbia Way, Norwest (3/2022/PLP)

ELECTRONIC DETERMINATION OF THE HILLS LOCAL PLANNING PANEL ON 18 AUGUST 2022

PRESENT:

Julie Walsh	Chair
Elizabeth Kinkade	Expert
Glennys James	Expert
Ken Willimott	Community Representative

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

NIL

COUNCIL STAFF:

The Panel were briefed by the following Council Staff on 18 August 2022:

ITEM 3: LOCAL PLANNING PANEL – PLANNING PROPOSAL AND DRAFT DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PLAN – 7-15 COLUMBIA WAY, NORWEST (3/2022/PLP)

COUNCIL OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION:

The planning proposal proceed to Gateway Determination.

PANEL'S ADVICE:

- 1. The planning proposal applicable to land at 7-15 Columbia Way, Norwest (Lot 2015 DP 857690 and Lot 200 DP 877496) demonstrates adequate strategic and site-specific merit to warrant progression to Gateway Determination, on the basis that:
 - a) The proposal is consistent with the strategic planning framework as it seeks to facilitate commercial uplift in the vicinity of the Norwest Metro Station, contributing to identified job targets and reinforcing the role of the commercial core of Norwest as a specialised commercial office precinct.
 - b) The proposal demonstrates an appropriate balance between realising the additional commercial uplift envisaged by the strategic planning framework and enabling an appropriate built form outcome at this location within the business park, at the interface with lower-density residential areas; and
 - c) The proposed development concept demonstrates an appropriate urban design outcome that responds to surrounding development, maintains visual amenity and the privacy of adjoining low-density residential properties, includes generous public open space, a highly accessible and permeable ground plane and soft landscaping, contributing to the urban tree canopy and landscaped character of Norwest Business Park.
- 2. The revised Planning Agreement offer submitted by the Proponent on 12 August 2022 (which was before the Panel) represents a fair and reasonable contribution towards local infrastructure and, if accepted by Council, should be publicly exhibited alongside the planning proposal and Development Control Plan.
- 3. Notwithstanding the above, before the proposal is suitable for submission for Gateway Determination, the site-specific Development Control Plan submitted by the Proponent should be further amended to include additional controls that would secure the key urban design, landscaping and public domain outcomes proposed within the Proponent's supporting material.

VOTING:

Unanimous