



Prepared for
HYG

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Urban Design Review of Planning Proposal 845 Pacific Highway, Chatswood

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1. Introduction

1.1 Preliminary

This report has been prepared by Architectus for HYG. It provides a review of material supporting a Planning Proposal for 845 Pacific Highway (hereafter “the proposal”), focussing on the proposed variation from setbacks outlined in the Chatswood CBD Planning and Urban Design Strategy 2036 (hereafter “the CBD Strategy”).

In preparing this report the following documents have been reviewed:

- Architectural Stage 1 DA Application drawings prepared by PTW – dated 7/22/2021 and 9/7/2021
- Urban Design Report prepared by PTW – July 2021 Revision C
- Landscape report prepared by Urbis - 21 September 2021
- Pedestrian Wind Environment Statement, Windtech, September 15 2021

This review is structured as follows:

1. **Introduction** – Including an overview of the site, its relationship to the CBD Strategy and the proposal's response to the CBD Strategy's key elements.
2. **Context of review** – Describing the strategic need for employment floorspace in Chatswood CBD, its application on this site, conflict with setback controls and the purpose of setback controls.
3. **Urban Design review of proposal** – Focussing on the proposal's variance from the proposed setback controls.
4. **Conclusions and recommendations**

1.2 The site and its context

The site is located on the north-western edge of Chatswood's Commercial Core. It is currently occupied by a seven-storey office building and a car wash. It is a focal point in views from the north from the Pacific Highway, marking an entry to the Commercial Core of Chatswood CBD. To the west across the Pacific Highway are a range of apartment buildings of a 2-4 storey scale. To the north on the eastern side of the Pacific Highway are also 2-4 storey existing buildings however these are proposed for uplift to taller residential towers (up to 90m in building height) as part of the Chatswood CBD Strategy. To the east across Railway Street is a large Mirvac development of residential towers. To the south is the Zenith Centre, one of Chatswood's largest office buildings, with the remainder of the Commercial Core behind.

1.3 The site in the Chatswood CBD Strategy

The site forms part of the Commercial Core outlined in the CBD Strategy, proposed for uplift to accommodate higher density office uses. The original form of the CBD Strategy was drafted by Architectus in 2016-18 for Willoughby City Council. It was adopted by Council in 2017 and has since been revised by Council several times based on a range of feedback including from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, who endorsed a revised plan subject to a number of recommendations in both August 2019 and July 2020.

Key recommendations in the current (September 2020) version of the CBD Strategy relevant to the site include:

- An unlimited maximum Floor Space Ratio for commercial uses.
- Height limits capped at the PANS-OPS height plane.

- Setbacks and street wall frontages have been defined, notably for the Pacific Highway seeking a 4m setback at ground floor and 7 metre street wall height, with 6m setback to towers above.

Heights and floor space ratios in line with the CBD Strategy have been included within Willoughby's comprehensive Planning Proposal which is currently under assessment by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. Setbacks and street wall heights consistent with the CBD Strategy have been included in Willoughby's Draft DCP 2020, which has been endorsed by Council for public exhibition on 15 June 2021.

1.4 The proposal

Key aspects of the proposal are described through figures 1-3 below. In summary of its relationship to key controls in the CBD Strategy:

- The site is 2,074sqm in area which is above the minimum site area described in the CBD Strategy of 1,800sqm to be not capped by a Floor Space Ratio limit.
- The proposal maintains a 4m ground level setback from the Pacific Highway as described in the CBD Strategy.
- The proposal varies from the podium/tower typology elements described in the CBD Strategy including:
 - A 6m general setback from street wall to tower
 - A 1:20 ratio setback to the building height
- The proposal also provides additional publicly accessible open space at ground level facing Railway Street which is not required in the CBD Strategy.



Figure 1 Aerial View from Northeast
Source: PTW Architects



Figure 2 Floor plan – Level 20
Source: PTW Architects



Figure 3 Open space – 3d view
Source: PTW Architects

2. Context of review

2.1 A significant office building cannot be built on the site which is compliant with the setback controls

A tower design that is fully compliant with all setback controls achieves a 577sqm Gross Building Area (491sqm GFA) as demonstrated on the diagram below.

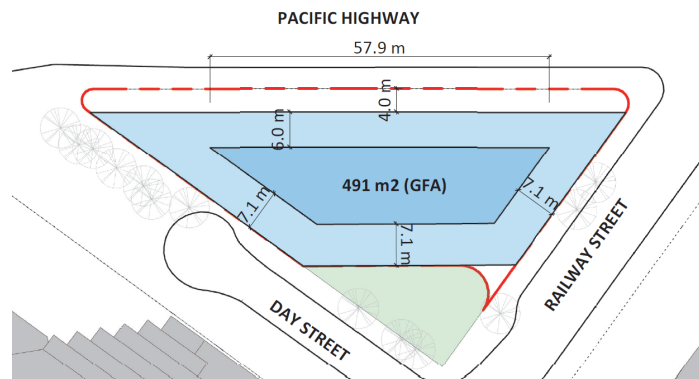


Figure 4 Study showing fully compliant tower setbacks
Source: PTW Architects

In Architectus' experience, for significant office developments in major office centres such as Chatswood, generally tenants seek floorplates that are 'premium grade' size which is defined by the Property Council of Australia as 1,500sqm Net Lettable Area (approximately 2,100sqm Gross Building Area).

A leading publicly available study for a similar centre in the office hierarchy which discusses this issue in detail is the study "Achieving A-Grade office space in the Parramatta CBD" (Urbis, 2019) which discusses "a building floorplate of over 1,500sq.m... is generally desired by prospective A-Grade tenants". This size is still below the most desirable floorplates which are evidenced by the 2000sqm+ floorplates of major new office developments in Sydney including Barangaroo and Parramatta Square.

'A Grade' offices are potentially deliverable though risk being not as attractive to tenants. 'A Grade' is defined by the Property Council of Australia as 1,000sqm Net Lettable Area, approximately 1,400sqm Gross Building Area. It would be very rare for a major office development to be delivered below this size.

From the above, it is clear that a significant office building would not be built on the site if setback controls are enforced rigidly.

2.2 The strategic importance of increasing employment in Chatswood CBD

There is a considerable strategic weight placed on the development of new office floorspace in Chatswood CBD throughout the strategic planning framework as evidenced through the following.

Greater Sydney Region Plan

Chatswood is noted as one of nine centres containing the majority of Sydney's standalone office market. It is noted that "The retention and growth of existing and new commercial office precincts is essential to grow jobs and Greater Sydney's global competitiveness into the future."

Northern District Plan

The Northern District Plan notes regarding Chatswood that "Maintaining and growing a high-quality commercial core will facilitate the continued growth of the centre as a major employment hub". Chatswood's employment uses are planned to from a 2016 estimate

of 24,700 to a 2036 baseline target of 31,000 and a 2036 higher target of 33,000 (representing 25.5%-33.6% growth across this period).

Actions noted for Chatswood include the following:

“Strengthen Chatswood through approaches that:

a. protect and grow the commercial core

...

c. promote the role of the centre as a location for high quality, commercial office buildings and a diverse retail offering

...”

Chatswood CBD Strategy

The first aim listed in the Chatswood CBD Strategy is “A reinvigorated commercial core area and economically buoyant CBD, to provide for future employment” and the first principle is “Promoting office growth in the core”. Its introduction includes a section “The future economy of Chatswood CBD” which has been supported by work from at least 3 leading urban economics firms (SGS, AEC, BIS Oxford Economics) and describes the current risks to the Office Core, that a significant change to controls and protection for office uses is required to achieve this and that if this is not done the future of the office employment in Chatswood is likely to contract.

2.3 The difficulty in finding appropriate sites for new offices and the importance of this site

The subject site has been considered part of the office growth for the future of Chatswood as is demonstrated by its inclusion in the original 2016 version of the Chatswood CBD Strategy (see Figure 3 below), developed by Architectus and Council with input from BIS Oxford Economics, where it is noted as one of the least constrained sites for office growth in the CBD. Since Figure 3 was developed the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has noted the potential for residential development to occur on some sites east of the railway, which may limit office potential on those sites placing greater emphasis on ensuring office development can occur on those west of the railway.

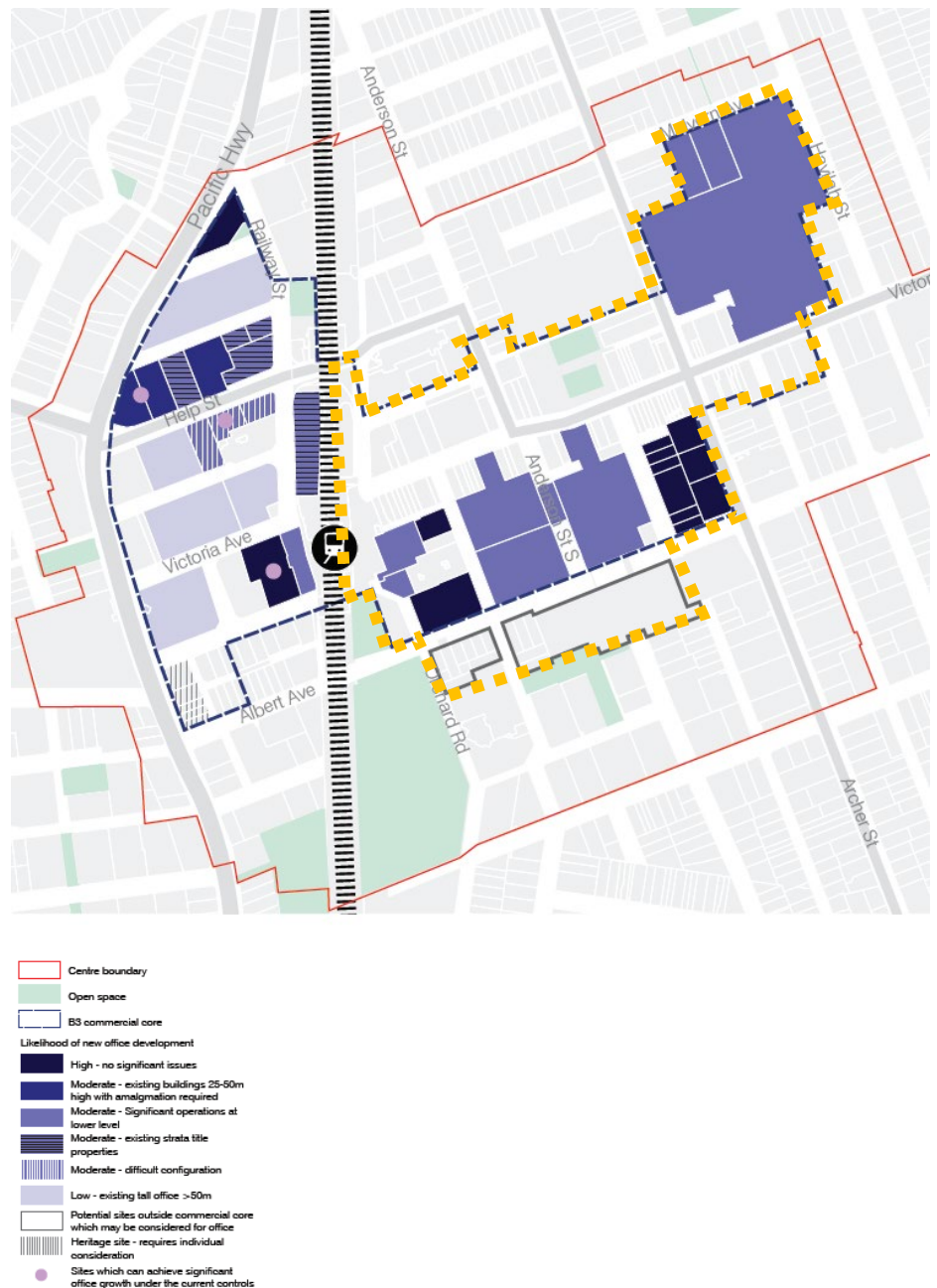


Figure 5 “Office Growth Potential” from the 2016 version of the CBD Strategy [figure 2.5.4] notes the site as one of the sites with the fewest issues in redeveloping for office use. A line (orange dash) has been added to indicate areas east of the railway where the Department has indicated residential use may be appropriate.

Source: *Chatswood CBD Strategy 2016*

Constraints in developing the office buildings west of the railway include the following:

- Existing residential and related uses (served apartments and hotels) are present on 6 sites within the Commercial Core (those in light grey in Figure 3, and described in Figure 2.5.3 of the strategy). These existing uses, typically in combination with strata titling, means redevelopment for commercial uses is highly unlikely on these sites.
- Heritage designations are applied to a site in the middle of one street block on the Pacific Highway, where the block would have to be amalgamated and building over the heritage building would have to be accepted in heritage terms to develop a significant office building on this block.

- Existing tall office buildings over 50m are present on five largest sites in the Commercial Core. This makes redevelopment uncertain even where there is a substantial uplift in controls.
- Several sites have a configuration unlikely to allow for a large floorplate office building - particularly those south of Help Street which are 24m wide, and facing a hotel building with minimal setback.
- The Telstra site close to the railway is described in Figure 3 as one with significant operations at ground floor level. In Architectus' experience the presence of large infrastructure including underground cable connections to similar Telstra sites often renders them too expensive to redevelop.
- Within the block north of Help Street, there is some potential to redevelop however development for a premium office building would require amalgamation; all sites include moderately sized commercial buildings (generally 25-50m) at present; and four of the seven sites also have existing strata-title which adds further difficulty to amalgamation. Uplift could be also achieved under existing controls with some amalgamation, however they have not redeveloped to their maximum FSR yet, so there is still uncertainty as to whether revised controls with further uplift will achieve redevelopment on these sites.

The above considerations leave the subject site and the RSL site close to the railway station as the sites which have been anticipated as the least fundamentally constrained within the Chatswood Office Core. The RSL site is able to redevelop to a significantly greater FSR under the current controls which have been in place for many years and therefore it can be questioned whether the owners would be enticed to redevelop even where further uplift is provided.

The above consideration places greater emphasis on the potential to allow for office floorspace on this site unless there is a compelling reason why this cannot be achieved.

2.4 The purpose of setback controls and how they may be considered for variation

The setback controls proposed for the site were originally developed by Architectus in 2016-17. Architectus' recommendations have continued through the CBD Strategy's refinements and are now proposed for adoption through the Draft Willoughby DCP endorsed by Council June 15, 2021.

Controls in a DCP such as setbacks are typically intended as guidance and should have some room for variation within individual development applications. There are no objectives specific to these controls, to assess variations against, only the following much broader objectives:

"The objectives of this Part are to:

- *establish a strong framework to guide future development in the Chatswood CBD and the local retail/commercial centres*
- *provide capacity for future growth by increasing residential densities and creating job opportunities by making provision for additional commercial floor space*
- *achieve exceptional design, and distinctive, resilient and vibrant centres*
- *create attractive and thriving local retail/commercial centres*
- *protect the heritage values of heritage listed items and ensure any new development integrates with the character of heritage conservation areas*
- *provide greening on and around buildings, and improve pedestrian and cycle links"*

In the context of this development, the most relevant considerations are the tradeoffs between the objectives to "provide capacity for future growth..." and "achieve exceptional design...".

To understand how the setbacks contribute towards “exceptional design” in greater detail, some interpretation is required as there is little formal documentation or objectives on these specific setbacks. As a guide for this, the objectives in Willoughby Council’s current DCP for building envelopes and setbacks gives a more granular approach to interpreting the benefits and issues of setbacks. These are as follows:

“D1.7 Building Envelopes and Setbacks

D1.7.1 - Objectives

- 1. To ensure the siting of buildings provides adequate separation for the amenity of residents and adjoining properties.*
- 2. To provide adequate space for landscaping.*
- 3. To achieve equitable access to sunlight and views.*
- 4. To minimise overshadowing of adjoining properties.*
- 5. To provide setbacks that reinforce the established streetscape pattern and allow for landscaping and open space to complement the streetscape.*
- 6. To minimise excessive bulk and scale.”*

The urban design review of the proposal contained in the following chapter considers this application on the basis of the above, focussing on the impacts of proposed variation to setback controls against issues including separation, open space, sunlight, views, overshadowing and bulk and scale.

3. Urban design review of proposal

3.1 Views – distance

The tower's visual bulk is a consideration that is understood to have been raised regarding the proposal. It will be prominent particularly in views from the north as the first tall building in the office core, although further residential-led development is possible in alignment with the strategy further north. It is noted that the design is well below the maximum floorplate sought by Council in the CBD Strategy of 2000sqm GFA (approximately 2350sqm Gross Building Area or 1700sqm Net Lettable Area) for office uses. As noted in Section 2.1 of this report, small floorplate buildings are contrary to the modern commercial requirements of an office building. This limits the potential of breaking the building massing down where delivering new office buildings is seen as the strategic imperative. However, the proposal has sought to minimise this visual bulk through design approaches including the following:

- An inset 'gap' in the centre of the western façade that divides the building into two distinct vertical elements
- Narrowing the tower at the highest levels to reduce its visual bulk

This is considered an appropriate response in urban design terms and should be supported through to the final design.

3.2 Requirement for a podium-tower form

A podium is typically seen as an urban design approach appropriate for centres and is adopted widely. The general advantages of a podium-tower form include the following:

- Establishing a human scale
- Ensuring separation between towers that allows for adequate sun and light in a centre
- Responding to an established streetscape pattern
- Ensuring the effects of wind are minimised for pedestrians to enjoy an appropriate public realm

The proposal's response to each of these considerations is further detailed below.

It should be noted that although these are important considerations, it is appropriate to consider alternatives to a podium-tower form. One prominent example in Sydney where a similar exemption from a podium-tower approach was sought and has been seen as an exemplar outcome is 1 Bligh Street in Sydney which also features an inset instead of a podium and provides a broad set of stairs in the sun which provide an important contribution to the public realm. 1 Bligh St responds to a unique set of contextual circumstances by "completing" an existing urban space and providing the opportunity for further pedestrianisation of the area, which is being further studied by the City of Sydney Council.

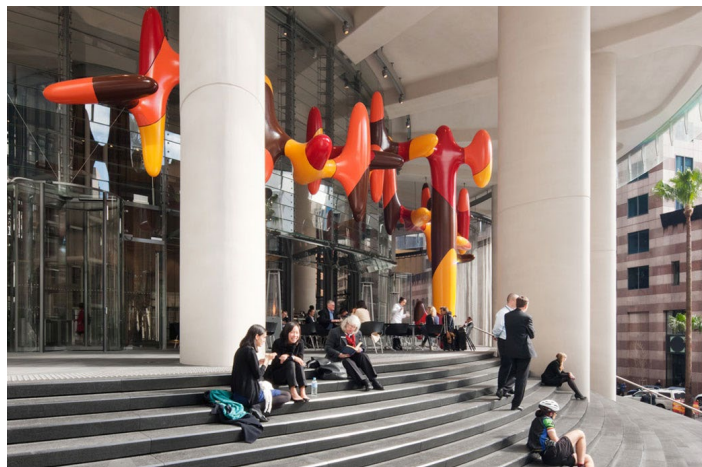


Figure 6 1 Bligh Street Sydney – An award-winning building which did not provide the podium-tower typology established in controls

Establishing a human scale

While a podium in built form scale is not provided, the awning described provides a human scale element that grounds the design and is appropriate to this need. The exact form and design of the ground level and awning will to be further refined through design development at a Development Application stage and should be conscious of this.



Figure 7 Awning establishing human scale
Source: *PTW Architects*

Ensuring separation between towers that allows for adequate sun and light in a centre

As the site is located on its own street block, it is extremely well separated from neighbouring buildings, approximately 32m to the east to the Altura Apartments and 20m to the south to the Zenith Centre towers at their nearest points. It is not considered that this tower would crowd the centre.

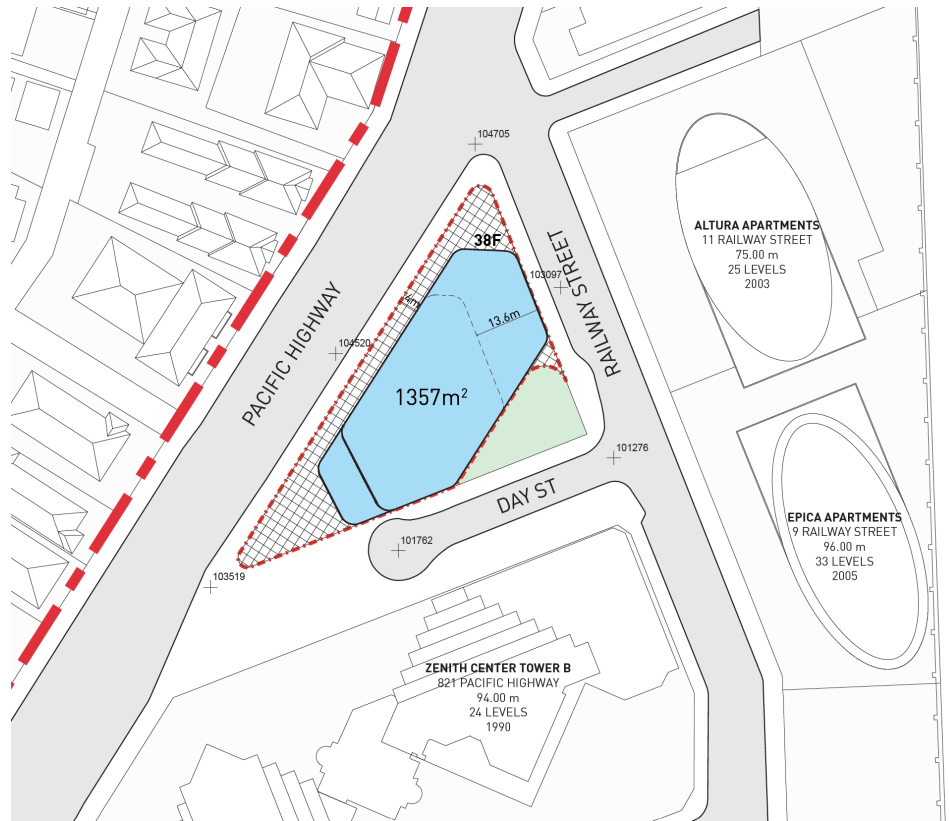


Figure 8 Diagram demonstrating distance from neighbouring towers

Source: PTW Architects Urban Design Report

Responding to an established streetscape pattern

Often, streets have an established street wall pattern which is important to respond to and a podium form assists with this. This is true across parts of Chatswood CBD, for example the part of the Pacific Highway between Thomas Street and Albert Avenue where there is a heritage fire station and neighbouring buildings of a similar scale.

Given the site's island nature, potential landscaped vegetation connection and landmark potential of the corner location on the Pacific Highway marking the northern entry to the office core it is particularly suited to a site-specific approach without a podium.



Figure 9 Images of the site showing a ‘tower to the ground’ approach on adjacent sites
 (top: Railway Street facing south from Pacific Highway, Altura tower on left, subject site on right,
 bottom: Pacific Highway facing south with subject site on left)
 Source: *Google Street View*

Ensuring the effects of wind are minimised for pedestrians to enjoy an appropriate public realm.

A preliminary wind assessment has been undertaken for the proposal by Windtech. It notes that the current design is broadly acceptable for pedestrian comfort in outdoor trafficable areas however does note some areas where improvements could be made through detailed design and recommends wind testing at a detailed design level. On this basis, the proposal is considered appropriate for a Planning Proposal level on this issue.

3.3 Increased publicly accessible open space to Railway Street

The proposal includes a 13.6m setback from Railway Street at ground level, intended to form a publicly accessible space. This is not a requirement under the CBD Strategy. However, it is seen as a beneficial outcome in providing a more generous usable public domain, linking to and enhancing Council's existing park at the corner of the street block. In particular, it emphasises Railway Street as a pedestrian connection and provides an opportunity for solar access around lunch time that is difficult to achieve in other parts of the high-density centre and important for workers and residents.



Figure 10 Landscape design of site including significant ground floor setback from Railway Street (right of image)

Source: *Urbis*

Solar analysis undertaken of the proposal against a fully-compliant scheme demonstrates that there is not only the potential to provide a new space with excellent access to sunlight in midwinter (which few sites can provide in the CBD as this is on its northern edge) but also the potential to increase solar access to Council's existing park. The provision of this new open space is therefore commended.

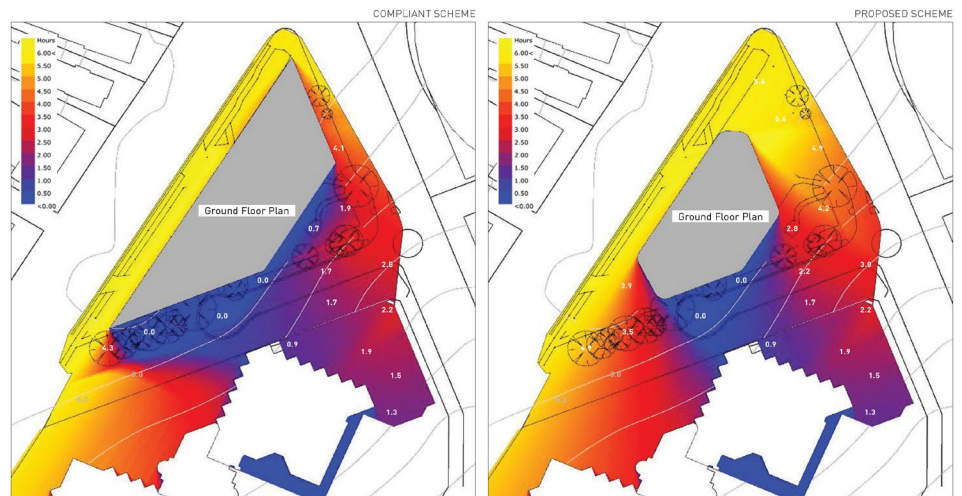


Figure 11 Midwinter solar access to open space – compliant scheme (left) compared to proposed scheme (right)

Source: *PTW Architects*

4. Summary and conclusions

In summary, the proposal is considered appropriate to be supported at a Planning Proposal stage. Some variation from the numeric tower setbacks identified in the CBD Strategy is supported on the basis of both site specific and strategic merit, as:

- Delivering new office floorspace in Chatswood is acknowledged as a critical priority through a broad range of strategic documents and this site has been identified to contribute towards this strategic aim.
- To deliver this, variation must be sought to the general setbacks sought in the CBD Strategy above street level.
- The floorplate size sought, which is shown at 1215sqm NLA maximum, cannot be reduced significantly further without compromising the ability to provide a significant office tower that is attractive to the office market.
- The proposal provides a response to varying these setbacks which is appropriate in urban design terms and has been sensitively considered on a site-specific level to maximise public benefit.
- The proposal provides a new publicly accessible open space that is not a requirement under existing or proposed controls. This is a commendable design response that provides a valuable contribution to the area, particularly as a space with lunchtime sun access that workers and residents can enjoy, which is not easily provided across the rest of the Commercial Core.

The variation is also in line with a consideration of the objectives of Council's adopted draft DCP 2021 where the setback controls are proposed to be implemented, as permitting the variation provides a substantial contribution towards the objective to "provide capacity for future growth..." and does not create a significant negative impact towards other objectives.

It is recommended that to ensure the best outcome on the site that any future development of DCP controls and/or design excellence processes include consideration of:

- Ensuring the visual bulk of the final design is reduced similarly to the concept design through:
 - Splitting it into two vertical elements
 - Narrowing the highest levels of the tower to ensure it does not read as being top-heavy
 - Reviewing the visual impact of a final design through rendered images from the Pacific Highway facing south towards the site.
- Ensuring the new open space proposed is delivered through appropriate controls or guidelines, and its benefit is maximised through further collaboration with Council and integration with the public domain in Council's existing park adjacent. Furthermore it is encouraged that the future of Day Street is considered with Council where it may be partly or fully closed, providing the opportunity for a further pedestrian focussed open space.
- Wind testing of a final design at ground level to ensure appropriate pedestrian comfort, in line with recommendations of the Pedestrian Wind Environment Statement (Windtech).