

3) Appendix C

**Urban Design and Visual Impact Assessment
prepared by
Architectus**

Urban Design and Visual Impact Assessment to support Planning Proposal

679-685

Old Northern Road, Dural



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Project and report	Urban Design and Visual Impact Assessment to support Planning Proposal 679-685 Old Northern Road, Dural	
Date	January 25, 2022	
Client	Healing ONR Pty Ltd	
Version and date issued	Issue A (Draft to Client) - 08/12/21	Approved by: Oscar Stanish
	Issue B (Final to Client) - 19/01/22	Approved by: Oscar Stanish
	Issue C (Final to Client) - 25/01/22	Approved by: Oscar Stanish
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This report is considered a draft unless signed by a Director or Principal	Approved by: 	

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this report

This Urban Design and Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) has been prepared by Architectus on behalf of Healing ONR Pty Ltd to support the planning proposal for an additional permitted use to allow for a health services facility and an increase in height from 10.5m to 14m, located at 679-685 Old Northern Road, Dural.

This report describes the urban design considerations and visual impact for an indicative health services facility concept design for the site in accordance with the planning proposal's proposed controls.

1.2 Methodology

This assessment is based on best practice and Architectus' experience in the field of the assessment of visual impact.

This assessment has been undertaken in the following three steps:

1 Preliminary visual context analysis

Analysis of the broader context of the site and nature of the existing town centre and potential views towards the site. This was conducted through a site visit and desktop analysis.

The majority of photos used in this report have been taken on 25 May 2021, and therefore show the recently completed Thompson Health Care residential aged care facility. VIA view 4 was taken on 15 November 2021.

2 Photomontage assessment

Detailed assessment of key views identified in the visual context analysis. To assist in the positioning of the camera, a 3D model was created through the combination of the model supplied by HPI, geo-referenced imagery and Architectus' own modelling. After matching focal length and positioning the camera, this allowed each view to be made as accurate as possible.

3 Conclusion and Findings

4 Further urban design considerations

1.3 The Site and its Context

The site is located within the Round Corner Town Centre, situated at the eastern edge of the centre. It is a well established town centre in the locality, being identified as a town centre within The Hills Shire Local Strategic Planning Statement. Round Corner has a number of shopping arcades including 'Dural Mall', 'Round Corner Plaza' and 'The Village Green'. Additionally there are a high number of smaller and larger business around the town centre, with the larger national businesses likely to be on long leases.

The town centre sits adjacent to the intersection of Old Northern Road, an important north-south arterial road linking Wisemans Ferry and the Hills, and Kenthurst Road, which heads west to Kenthurst and Annangrove.

Old Northern Road runs along a ridgeline with occasional long distant views of the Blue Mountains to the west. Additionally, Old Northern Road is the boundary between the Hills Shire LGA to the west and Hornsby Shire LGA to the east. The site is located within the Hornsby Shire LGA as it is east of Old Northern Road.

The DA approved Dural Skyline is located directly opposite the site at 488-494 Old Northern Road. The Hills Development Control Plan 2012 envisages the site to serve as a gateway element to create a sense of arrival when arriving at Round Corner from the south along Old Northern Road.

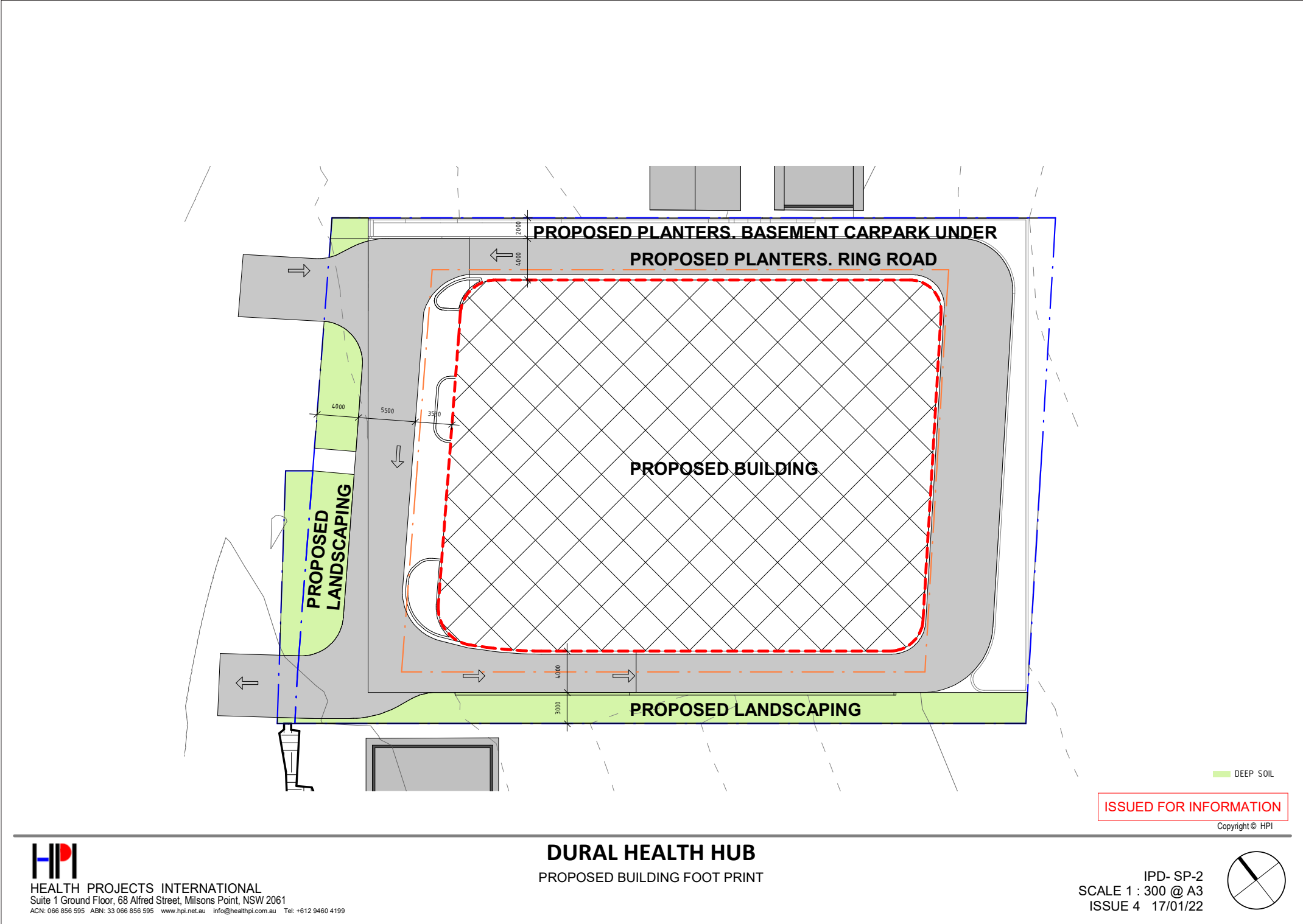
Existing development on site

The site is currently occupied by two residential houses.

1.4 The Proposal

The proposed health services facility is at a planning proposal stage. An indicative concept design has been prepared by HPI which reflects the proposed controls. It is generally a two-storey envelope that steps down with the topography.

The VIA photomontages prepared in this document include envelopes, trees and foliage that are based on the HPI indicative concept design, which has incorporated landscape and arborist inputs.



Dural Health Hub, Proposed Building Footprint Plan
(HPI, Issue 4, 17/01/22)

Introduction

1.5 Approved and Proposed Development



Round Corner is an urbanised area currently undergoing infill development, including: a recently completed aged care facility and two proposed/ approved developments in close proximity to the site, they are:

- **705 Old Northern Road**
A recently completed 2-3 storey residential aged care facility run by Thompson Health Care. Development was approved by the NSW Land and Environment Court (LEC) and permitted under the Seniors SEPP.
- **488-494 Old Northern Road**
Dural Skyline is a commercial/residential development currently DA approved for Stage One (2 storeys), with two additional stages (18 townhouses and 46+ apartments (7 floors)) subject to future development applications. The site is subject to a site specific DCP within The Hills Shire DCP 2012.
- **669 Old Northern Road**
DA approved for 440 seat Maronite Catholic Church and community facility, generally comprising of 2 storeys. Existing house on Old Northern Road to be maintained. This is a permitted use in the RU2 Rural Landscape zone.



View of 3D model of Round Corner, Dural

Introduction



Recently completed and currently proposed/approved developments will change the scale and visual context of the surrounding area.

669 Old Northern Road

DA approved



705 Old Northern Road

Recently completed



488-494 Old Northern Road

Stage 1, DA approved



1.6 Visual Impact Assessment Methodology

Architectus’ methodology for the assessment of visual impact used in this report has been developed based on the New South Wales Land and Environment Court Planning Principles as written in *Tenacity Consulting v Warringah Council [2004]* and *Rose Bay Marina Pty Limited v Woollahra Municipal Council and anor [2013]*.

In this report, a qualitative assessment of each view is set out under the following principles:

- 1. Importance of the public domain view;
- 2. Visibility; and
- 3. Visual absorption capacity.

A visual simulation (photomontage) of the proposed development has been prepared for each view. The photomontage was then used to determine the visual impact of the proposed development. Subsequently each view is given a overall view impact rating taking into consideration the above three principles. The photomontages shown demonstrate the building form only; they do not show detailed articulation or material selection.

Standards for photography and photomontages
An understanding of the field of view of photographs and photomontages is important in understanding impacts represented on a page.

One standard typically adopted in NSW is the use of a 35mm FX format camera at 50mm focal length (or equivalent) to represent a view on a page similar to how it would be perceived by the human eye at the location.

However, for this project, a 50mm focal length would not provide a clear understanding of the breadth of the view and/or the size of the proposal. Therefore, throughout our view impact assessment a wider-angle view has been used.

All photos were captured on a Sony A6000 which has an APS-C sized sensor (roughly 24mm), this results in a crop factor when compared to a 35mm FX (full frame) sensor. As such, although all photos were taken at 16mm, their equivalent 35mm focal length is 24mm.

1 Importance of the public domain view

It includes consideration of the following factors:

The context of the viewer (including whether the view is static or dynamic, obtained from standing or sitting positions);

Elements within the view (including whether iconic elements are present, the existing composition of the view, and any existing obstructions to the view);

- The number of viewers;
- The distance to the proposal; and
- The period of view.

The features are described for each view and a final categorisation of view importance has been produced as a summary. The following table provides a definition of example use cases for each categorisation of the importance of the view:

	Definition
High	Unobstructed views of highly valuable or iconic elements from highly important locations in the public domain.
Moderate-High	Generally unobstructed views including important visual elements from well-used locations. The view attracts regular use of this location by the public.
Moderate	Views including elements of moderate importance with little obstruction which are obtained from moderately-well used locations. The view may assist in attracting the public to this location.
Low-Moderate	Views with some important elements which may be partially obstructed or from a less well used location. The view may be a feature of the location however is unlikely to attract the public to it.
Low	Views from spaces or streets with little pedestrian use or obstructed views or views with few important elements. Obtaining views is not a focus of using the space.

Some elements which form part of the consideration of likely visibility can be quantitatively estimated. The table below shows the criteria used in evaluating the relative number of viewers and period of view.

Number of viewers	
	Definition
High	> 1000 people per day
Moderate	100 - 1000 people per day
Low	< 100 people per day

Period of view	
	Definition
High (long-term)	>60minutes
Moderate	1-60 minutes
Low (short-term)	<1 minute

2 Visibility

Visibility provides a categorisation of how visible the proposal will be in the view. The table below provides a definition of the categories used.

	Definition
High	The proposal will dominate the field of view.
Moderate	The proposal will form part of the overall composition of the view.
Low	The proposal will be noticeable as a minor part of the field of view.
Negligible	The proposal will not be noticeable.

3 Visual absorption capacity

The visual absorption capacity is an estimation of the capacity of the landscape and built environment to absorb development without creating significant visual change that would result in a reduction of scenic or visual quality. This is usually dependent on vegetation cover, land form and existing built form and is influenced by the level of visual contrast between the proposed development and the existing elements within the physical environment.

The degree of contrast between the various elements of the development and the physical environment/ landscape setting in which they are located determine the level of visual absorption. Factors such as scale, shape, colour, texture and reflectivity of the development compared to the visual context define the degree of contrast. For the purpose of this study, the rating outlined in the table below has been used in the assessment of visual absorption capacity.

This rating concentrates on the bulk of the proposal in relation to screening factors and contextual development.

Rating	Definition
High	Existing landscape and built environment able to absorb development. Low degree of visual contrast will result from building envelopes.
Moderate	Existing landscape able to absorb some development. Some visual contrast will result from building envelopes.
Low	Existing landscape unable to absorb development. High degree of visual contrast will result from building envelopes.

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2 Visual Context

Likely visibility from around the surrounding local context and Round Corner Town Centre

A review of the site based on a site visit and broad range of photographs taken (see page opposite) reveals that the visibility of the site from the surrounding context varies greatly due to the undulating topography, established vegetation and existing buildings. This has been summarised on the map opposite and divided in the following levels of estimated visibility:

Medium/High

This is only within close proximity of the site.

Low

Predominately within a 400m range from the site, including a portion of Old Northern Road and the western end of Franlee Road.

Negligible

Along the southern and eastern portions of Old Northern Road to Round Corner Town Centre and from further away from the site.

Selection of views for further analysis

The five key views identified on the map adjacent have been chosen for a photomontage assessment in the following chapter of this report as they provide representative locations for prominence with a focus on not just high visibility as shown opposite but also on the importance of views, which is highest around the Round Corner Town Centre and from Old Northern Road.



Visual Context

Closer to site



Looking south-west from 544 Old Northern Road



Looking south-east from Stonelea Circuit



Looking north from 488-494 Old Northern Road



Looking south from 502 Old Northern Road
From the existing Round Corner Town Centre.



Looking south-west from 548 Old Northern Road
Looking through a gap in the trees down the hill.



Looking south-east from Stonelea Circuit
Looking across Old Northern Road to the site.



Looking north from Franlee Road
Looking up towards the site, up the hill.



Further away from site



Looking south from 9/524 Old Northern Road



Looking north-west up Franlee Road

Visual Context

South to East

Views from a car, driving Old Northern Road from south to east.



East to South

Views from a car, driving Old Northern Road from east to south.



View opposite 679 Old Northern Road

Looking west from the ridge line towards the Blue Mountains in the distance.



3 Photomontage assessment

3.1 View 1 - Looking north from 488-494 Old Northern Road



Photo taken on 25/05/2021

The importance of the existing view is low-moderate. The proposal is predominantly obscured by vegetation and seen within the context of established Round Corner Town Centre.

Description of existing view

This view is primarily seen by cars travelling north along Old Northern Road. The view looks north from 488-494 Old Northern Road, with low-scale residential housing on the right of the view.

The site to the left is currently undeveloped however is DA approved for a mixed use development. Some mature trees are visible along the footpath on both sides of the road, within the front setback and within sites adjacent to the proposal. There are also some low-height shrubs/trees within the front setback of the houses on the right of the view.

This view has some importance due to its role as the gateway to the Round Corner Town Centre however is generally seen only in passing and is not one of the higher value views in the area.



Photomontage of Proposal

Assessment		
1	Importance of the public domain view	Low-Moderate
	Relative number of viewers	Moderate
	Period of viewers	Low
2	Visibility	Low
3	Visual absorption capacity	High
Overall view impact rating		Low



View 01 Location

3.2 View 2 - Looking south from 502 Old Northern Road



Photo taken on 25/05/2021

The importance of the existing view is low-moderate, viewing out from the Round Corner Town Centre. The proposal is visible however within the context of the centre the overall visual impact is considered to be moderate.

Description of existing view

The view is taken from the footpath under a street awning at 502 Old Northern Road looking south. It will be seen by pedestrians at the Round Corner Town Centre on the north-western side of Old Northern Road. It is similar to views from vehicles travelling south along Old Northern Road.

There is low-scale residential housing screened by some tall/mature trees on the left of the view. Some signs/advertising and shop frontage is visible on the right of the view, with tall trees and an undeveloped but DA approved site (488-494 Old Northern Road) for commercial and retail uses, is visible in the distance on the right of the view.

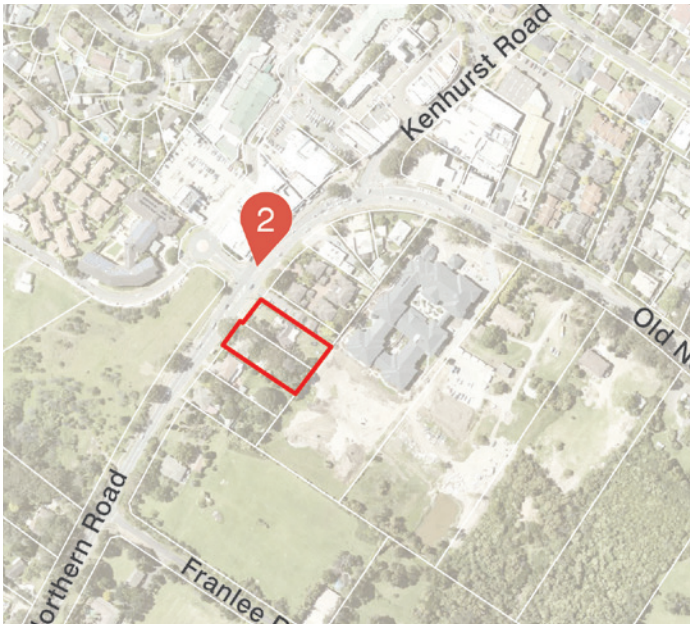


Photomontage of Proposal

The development on 488-494 Old Northern Road is visible up to the awnings of the Round Corner Town Centre. The view impact of the proposal should be considered in context of the similar height and bulk of the DA approved development on 488-494 Old Northern Road.

Assessment

1	Importance of the public domain view	Low-Moderate
	Relative number of viewers	Moderate
	Period of viewers	Moderate
2	Visibility	Moderate
3	Visual absorption capacity	Moderate
	Overall view impact rating	Moderate



View 02 Location

3.3 View 3 - Looking south-west from 548 Old Northern Road



Photo taken on 25/05/2021

The proposal is not visible in the view as it is obscured by existing buildings and vegetation and will be of low or negligible impact on this view of low-moderate significance.

Description of existing view

The view is taken from the footpath of 548 Old Northern Road looking south-west where there is a gap in trees which enables a limited view towards the site. It is similar to views which will be seen from cars travelling north-west along Old Northern Road. It has some significance as there are views across a landscape however it is only seen briefly as vegetation is denser along most of this section of Old Northern Road.

Only the rooftops of some low-scale development are visible in the mid-ground on the right of the view. The opposite side of the road is densely vegetated with tall and mid-height trees/shrubs. In the distance, the DA approved Maronite Church development on 669 Old Northern Road will be visible, however mostly obscured by the vegetation and buildings in the foreground. The proposal is not visible in this view.



Photomontage of Proposal

Assessment

1	Importance of the public domain view	Low - Moderate
	Relative number of viewers	Moderate
	Period of viewers	Low
2	Visibility	Low
3	Visual absorption capacity	High
	Overall view impact rating	Low



View 03 Location

3.4 View 4 - Looking south-east from Stonelea Circuit



Photo taken on 15/11/2021

The proposal is visible and will be a similar scale and use to the existing and DA approved buildings. The overall visual impact is considered to be moderate and consistent with the surrounding street character.

Description of existing view

The view is taken from the roundabout on Stonelea Circuit, looking south-east across Old Northern Road towards the site. Viewers will primarily be drivers with some pedestrians using this route to access the Round Corner Town Centre to the north. There is a moderate number of viewers who will experience the view for a moderate period of time.

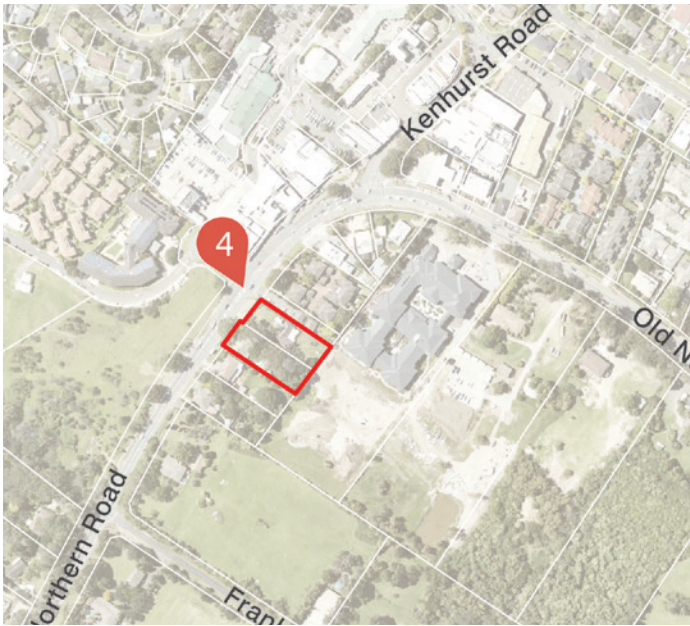
The proposal will form a part of this view, and is a similar scale and use to the DA approved development at 488-494 Old Northern Road (on the right of the view) and the maximum permissible building height of 12m of the existing Round Corner Town Centre to the left, which is indicated above by the red dotted line. The proposal is consistent with the existing and approved surrounding street character.



Photomontage of Proposal

Assessment

1	Importance of the public domain view	Low-Moderate
	Relative number of viewers	Moderate
	Period of viewers	Low
2	Visibility	High
3	Visual absorption capacity	High
Overall view impact rating		Moderate



View 04 Location

3.5 View 5 - Looking north from Franlee Road



Photo taken on 25/05/2021

The proposal is not visible in the view due to the DA approved Maronite Church development in the foreground. The proposal will be of low/negligible impact on this view.

Description of existing view

The view is taken from Franlee Road looking north across the rear of 669 Old Northern Road towards the site. It has been taken at the only break in the vegetation along the northern side of Franlee Road. This view would normally only be seen out of the side window of a car travelling along Franlee Road.

The existing home on 669 Old Northern Road is visible to the left of the image along with the roof of the Thompson Health Care residential aged care facility to the right of the image. Other buildings between the two are obscured by vegetation. The view looks up rising topography which further obscures the view.

The DA approved Maronite Catholic Church (shaded green in above photomontage) will completely obscure the view of the proposal.



Photomontage of Proposal

Assessment

1	Importance of the public domain view	Low
	Relative number of viewers	Low
	Period of viewers	Low
2	Visibility	Low
3	Visual absorption capacity	High
Overall view impact rating		Low



View 05 Location

4 Further Urban Design Considerations

In addition to the VIA considerations of the previous sections of this report, Architectus' engagement for this project includes a sieve mapping assessment (subject of a separate report, dated: 23/06/2021) and a broader urban design review of the project.

Architectus has provided input on broader urban design issues and is satisfied that the planning proposal can provide an attractive urban design response to its context. Key elements on these have been incorporated into the indicative concept design by HPI however further development on these issues will be undertaken at a DA stage. Key urban design considerations for the development of this proposal are as follows.

Character

Dural is known for its landscaped character. While, as demonstrated through this report, the site is not located within expansive rural views but sits within a partly urbanised view context, the character of Old Northern Road is an important consideration. Given the site is most visible from the public domain on Old Northern Road, this is best achieved by maintaining a significant setback to built form from Old Northern Road that allows for deep soil planting of trees that can continue the established landscaped character of Old Northern Road and help to screen the building scale. A further setback from the street for the top storey is also encouraged to reduce its visual impact. This has been achieved through the indicative concept design and is reflected through the photomontage views presented in this document.

Architecturally, the design of the frontage facing Old Northern Road should be high quality and designed to fit in with the context. Architectus would encourage materials of a natural character such as wood and stone where possible. This will be further developed at a DA stage.

Response to neighbours

The indicative concept design provides setbacks to neighbours that are compliant with the Hornsby Shire DCP 2013 controls for the site. Screening vegetation to neighbours has been incorporated into the indicative concept design as has the retention of existing trees, where possible. Architectus supports this solution.

5 Conclusion and Findings

The planning proposal for a health services facility will not have a significant impact on views from the surrounding context and is capable of providing a high quality urban design response to its context.

Summary of views assessed

The Visual Impact Assessment has provided a visual context review and assessment of photomontages of public domain views from five key locations around the Round Corner Town Centre. The overall visual impact of the proposal on these five views is as follows:

Overall view impact rating		
View 1 - Looking north from 488-494 Old Northern Road		Low
View 2 - Looking south from 502 Old Northern Road		Moderate
View 3 - Looking south-west from 548 Old Northern Road		Low
View 4 - Looking south-east from Stonelea Circuit		Moderate
View 5 - Looking north from Franlee Road		Low

The importance of views 1-5 was assessed as low-moderate.

Key aspects influencing Visual Impact

It was found that the key aspects influencing the level of visual impact by the proposal at these locations are:

- The proposal is located within the visual context of the established Round Corner Town Centre and does not affect highly valuable rural landscape views that Dural is known for.
- Given the hilly topography, established vegetation around the site and the significant distance between roads, the proposal is mostly only visible within close proximity.
- The most visually prominent aspect of the proposal is the 2 storey height, which aligns to the height of the surrounding buildings and is mitigated by taller established trees within the visual context and the front setback. It is noted that the mixed use DA approved development opposite the site at 488-494 Old Northern Road will further increase the visual absorption capacity of some views.

Further urban design considerations

In addition to providing a Visual Impact Assessment, Architectus has reviewed the broader urban design considerations of the proposal and provided input into the project team that has been incorporated into the indicative concept design by HPI and can be further developed at a DA stage. Key urban design considerations for the proposal include its character response to Old Northern Road, which is proposed to continue a character of vegetated setbacks, and the proposal's response to neighbours where setbacks and screening vegetation are proposed.

Conclusion

The planning proposal for a health services facility will not have a significant impact on views from the surrounding context and is capable of providing a high quality urban design response to its context.

Key recommendations towards the development of a final scheme at a Development Application stage include the following:

- Established trees on site are retained where possible and new screening vegetation and deep soil is encouraged along Old Northern Road within the front setback.
- Screening vegetation should be provided along the side boundaries to mitigate any privacy/overlooking issues.
- The facade design, particularly fronting Old Northern Road should be high quality and designed to fit in with the surrounding context.
- Council may seek views to be produced as part of a DA stage, in which case we would suggest views for consideration include View 2 (from the Round Corner Town Centre) and View 4 (from Stonelea Circuit) where the impact has been assessed as potentially higher than others.

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