

## Planning Proposal

### 9 Albert Street and 31 O'Connell Street North Parramatta

### Revised Heritage Assessment: 08 May 2024

#### Background

An initial proposal was developed responding to the controls for building height and siting that had been set out for the site and the adjoining site. Council have responded to the submission with an alternative approach to the overall massing and form of the site that has been developed into the current proposal. This revised heritage impact assessment responds to the revised proposal in the context that the form and massing have been negotiated with Council and in general terms are an appropriate way to proceed. As an overall observation, the current proposal is a significantly preferred approach to the ones that were required under the earlier controls demonstrating the complexity of developing meaningful and nuanced controls for significant uplift in development in areas such as the subject site.

There is no fundamental issue with developing the site as it has been identified as a site that is capable of major development. The assessment responds to the way in which the site is developed. This is fundamentally an urban design issue as good urban design encompasses the broad range of contextual issues that are found on and around a site. As there is an adjacent heritage precinct and further away very significant National heritage sites, the urban design approach has to take this context as a key driver of how form is located and designed on the site. In this situation the heritage considerations largely relate to how the urban form and materiality establish a broad contextual setting in which the diminutive heritage elements nearby can have some meaning.

DKO have prepared a new set of documents that form the basis of this assessment.

The proposal is to develop a now vacant piece of land on the corner of Albert and O'Connell Streets in North Parramatta. The site contained the former North Parramatta Infants School that was abandoned some years ago and has since been demolished. Photos within the various reports show the school buildings extant as well as the site being now cleared as demolition took place recently. The former buildings had no heritage value and the site is not a heritage item nor within a heritage conservation area, it is however adjacent to the North Parramatta HCA to the east.

The updated planning controls for the site are set out in the urban design report and are not repeated in this report. In summary, the site is designated for large scale development for commercial and residential uses and, as a now vacant and quite large site, is capable of development. This heritage assessment considers the development of the site in relation to the heritage sites and precincts around it.

There are no heritage elements on the site itself, consequently the heritage considerations are contextual ones.

#### Context

The Tanner Kibble Denton heritage study of the broader precinct (as part of the planning for the State and National listed sites along the river front) included this land. The 2014 study established that the site had minimal heritage value and that only the two former medical examiners residences at the south of the block,

outside the subject site fronting Fennell Street, had moderate heritage significance. These buildings are not heritage listed.

The area is however interesting as on the western boundary of the subject site there is a significant level change with an escarpment edge with the adjoining site to the west at a much lower RL. This was the quarry site used for the construction of buildings on the sites to the west and retains stone elements evidently built by one of the residents of the Asylum. This site is also not heritage listed and the rock face and other elements do not form part of the subject site. The adjoining land to the west is occupied by an aged housing complex which is presently undergoing partial redevelopment. It does not form part of this application but is part of the context of the site.

To the south of the site, fronting Fennell Street and within the street block are two interwar health staff residences (noted above) with newer developments located between them. Within the block of Albert, O'Connell, Fleet and Fennell Streets, there are no listed heritage buildings or features. However, a set of brick stairs and stone edged walkway to the north on the alignment of Albert Street and stone walling and kerbing along Fleet Street have heritage interest. On the western side of Fleet Street is the nationally significant Asylum and Orphanage site with its landscaped grounds and fine colonial buildings.

The subject site does not extend to either Fleet or Fennell Streets.

The following illustration from the TKD 2014 study summarises the heritage significance of the areas to the south and west in relation to its built form. This is the most recent and comprehensive assessment of significance of the site and relates it to the sites to the west that are largely of heritage significance. The plan gives a graphic indication of the relative significance of the built elements.

Within the block in which the site is located the two medical buildings to the south are toed as moderate significance and the stone walls and stairs as high significance, all other built elements have no significance.

The drawing also shows that the buildings to north and south of the block, that are contained within the study area, have no heritage significance.



78 Summary Built Heritage Significance Diagram for the Cumberland Precinct.  
Source: Nearmap with TKDA overlay 2014.



Figure i: The site is the former North Parramatta Infants School (lower right of drawing)l which, along with the buildings immediately to the west, are all indicated as having little significance. The former school has since been demolished.

## The Site

The subject site is currently vacant, a late twentieth century school complex having been demolished recently. Prior to the school development the site had been vacant and had no development take place on it. The 1943 aerial photo (figure iii) is informative as it shows the site as a vacant area without any apparent use, several small perimeter trees and pedestrian tracks across it leading from the south to the stairs at the end of Albert Street. There is also a track from the end of Harold Street to a set of stairs on the land to the west (down the escarpment). The lower land, a former quarry site, shows a tiered edge and what appears to be a formally laid out grassed area. The stairs no longer remain.

There is no specific heritage significance to the site. Both Albert and Harold Street are shown on early city plans as extending west to Fleet Street across and adjacent to the site. While Albert Street now connects as a pedestrian link, Harold Street was not taken up within the site and the road reserve was incorporated into the adjoining lots. An 1883 map (figures ii and viii) shows the site located on city blocks 84 and 85 and show the cross streets over the site.

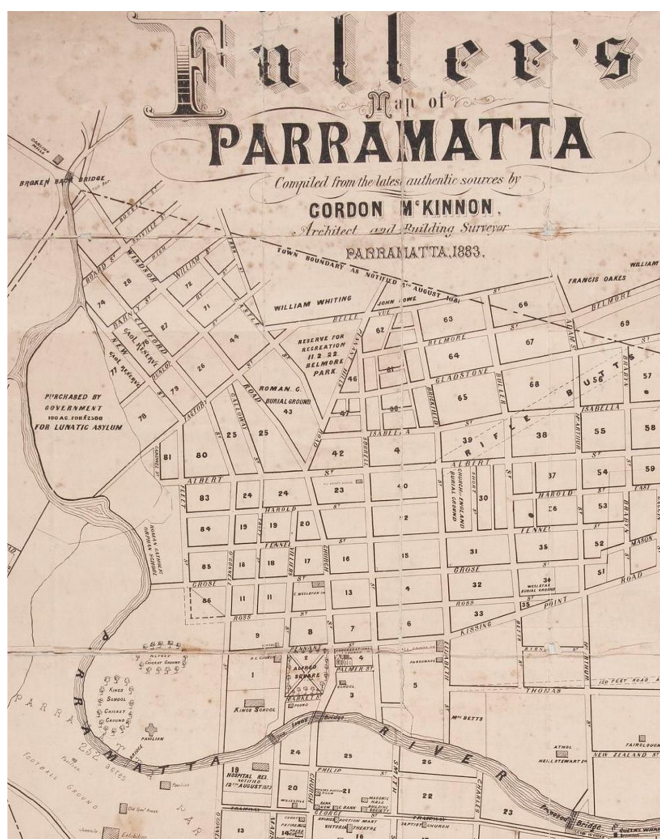


Figure ii: 1883 Fullers Map of Parramatta showing the site on blocks 83 and 84. The map shows a clear change from the city grid ending in Fleet Street and the riverfront lands of the Asylum and Orphanage and Parramatta Park. The change is a largely topographical one where city/residential development takes place on higher ground with the early sites located along the riverfront. The subject site, while not developed as part of the surrounding residential form is located on the higher land that was broadly taken up as part of the city. Refer to figure viii for a detail of the blocks.





Figure iii: The 1943 aerial photo from Sixmaps showing the site and adjoining areas. This photo is the basis for the following sketches. The site is the irregularly shaped lot with a cleared area in the centre.

## Adjoining Development outside the 2014 study area

Two streets adjoin the site, Albert and O'Connell Streets.

Albert Street, where it adjoins the site to the north, is a dead-end street serving the site and a number of 3 storey apartment blocks dating to the 1960 and 1970 period that are located to the north. At the end of the street is a turning area and the brick and stone stairs stepping down to the level of Fleet Street. While the steps and rock faces around it are not heritage items and are not on the site, they have heritage significance in relation to the general pedestrian movement between the Asylum site and North Parramatta, this is, as noted, set out in the heritage study for the adjacent area.

O'Connell Street is a major traffic thoroughfare with no parking allowing the four lanes to operate as traffic lanes without parking. On the eastern side of the street is the North Parramatta heritage conservation area (HCA) that extends further east and south of the subject site but which terminates at Albert Street to the north. The HCA is mixed in character and integrity (refer to later analysis) and the focus of the current analysis is the interface and visual catchment around the subject site rather than the broader extent of the HCA.

The HCA is discussed in detail in the following section of this report.

## North Parramatta Heritage Conservation Area

The North Parramatta HCA historically, particularly in the area adjacent to the site, comprised small cottages and larger houses from the mid Victorian through to the early twentieth century periods set on generally large lots. Some dwellings occupied several lots and there were also a number of vacant lots. This is clearly discernible on the 1943 aerial and the overlay sketches in this report (figures iii-vi)

The area was characterised by dwellings, largely built close to the front street alignment, sometimes with small side setbacks but also with considerable open space between buildings. Street corners were generally tightly built to, and the corner buildings have mostly survived where many of the intermediate cottages have been demolished and the sites redeveloped.

Most redevelopment of the HCA (and the adjoining areas near the site) took place from the 1960s, as evidenced by how little new development can be seen in the 1943 aerial photo where the precinct remains largely as it was around 1900.

The predominant form of redevelopment has been three storey apartment blocks, some occupying an original lot but most being built on amalgamated lots. There are two apartment buildings fronting O'Connell Street opposite the site and all the sites north of Albert Street fronting the site, while not in the HCA, contains apartment buildings. Where sites are amalgamated for development or have apartment buildings there is a significant change in the character of the area.

The following drawings show the area around the site, including the HCA and the changes that have taken place since the 1943 aerial photograph. The TKD 2014 report does not include these areas in its historical analysis and drawings as the site was vacant apart from quarrying until the Interwar period.



Figure iv: An overlay of the 1943 aerial photograph showing the subject site in yellow, Heritage Items in orange and sites that have been changed (either by demolition and redevelopment or development on vacant land) in blue. Sites uncoloured are pre 1943 sites that are not heritage listed. The HCA is indicated with a dashed line. Paul Davies 2022.





Figure v: An overlay of the 1943 aerial photograph showing heritage items in yellow with the buildings shown in orange, contributory buildings in green and demolished buildings in purple. The purple shading on sites are former vacant sites that have been developed since 1943. Paul Davies 2022.





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Figure vi: An overlay drawing showing the subject site in yellow in relation to the HCA. Redeveloped sites are shown in blue and heritage streetfront interfaces are shown in orange. Paul Davies 2022.



Figure vii: An overlay drawing showing the visual catchment from the site with a 150 metre circle. Apart from some distant views to the west, 150 metres captures everything that can be seen in relation to the site. Heritage buildings are cross-hatched. Four view locations are identified. Paul Davies 2022.

The heritage character of the HCA, as it relates to O'Connell, Albert and Harold Streets and their interface with the subject site is quite mixed. Within the HCA of the 13 lots that existed fronting O'Connell Street in 1943, 3 have been amalgamated to form an apartment site and one dwelling was demolished also for an apartment building. There are 5 heritage items and 3 contributory buildings remaining along O'Connell Street. The corner of Harold Street has lots oriented to O'Connell Street where the corner of Fennell Street has lots fronting Fennell Street. The corner of Albert Street has lost the early buildings on the northern corners with the remaining group of 3 early cottages aligned to O'Connell Street. There is no clear hierarchy of streets historically although O'Connell Street clearly has had a more major role in vehicle movements over time.

There has always been a disparity across O'Connell Street with the eastern edge of the street forming the boundary between residential development and initially open space and then the school use. The land between O'Connell, Fleet, Albert and Fennell Streets has had a different and distinctive character and over time has accommodated a range of more institutional built forms than the surrounding residential areas. There has always been a change of form and character in the block that has set it apart from the adjoining residential areas. The Orphanage site to the west, an important heritage site, has a different character again to any of the blocks to the east. It contains very significant built elements within a broad landscape. There is an interface with that site across Fleet Street, particularly to the land below the escarpment directly opposite but no links to the subject site or areas beyond.

Council zoning and planning for the subject site and the whole block has been predicated on more intense development taking place. The issue of the broad approach to development on the site is determined and now forms part of the planning controls for the site. The recent input from Council that has changed the urban form of the earlier proposal (that responded to the controls that were in place) is a further refinement of the broader decision to see separation between the HCA to the east and the subject site to the west.

The matters that a heritage assessment need to consider are not the use or overall scale of development that may take place but how a particular design response to the planning controls responds to the heritage values of the adjacent HCA and, slightly more distant, to the Orphanage site.

### Consideration of relationship of the site to the adjacent heritage areas

The interface between the subject site and the HCA is important and, in some respects, challenging. The heritage significant sites in the HCA (both heritage items and contributory places) are single storey small cottages set close to the street. Other later developments, that are not significant and which detract from the character of the HCA, are mostly 3 storey apartment buildings that are set back from the street frontages. The controls for the subject site, provide for significantly higher and denser forms directly opposite the HCA and consider a large vacant site. This is in contrast to the potential of small infill development on the adjoining sites within the HCA.

The assessment of heritage impact is not whether development should take place on the subject site but how it should be designed to respond to some of the characteristics of the HCA and to establish a relationship across O'Connell Street that allows the scale and character of the HCA not to be diminished. The urban design report sets this out as a response to the heritage character of the adjacent HCA.

New development cannot replicate the form or scale of development in the HCA, that would not be appropriate.





Figure viii Elevated site view showing the revised proposal in relation to the surrounding areas and in particular the HCA immediately to the east of the site, it also shows the proposed maximum building envelopes for the site to the west.

Some of the characteristics that can inform new design are:

- The traditional pattern of lots in the HCA fronting O'Connell Street that can be reflected in articulation of the new built form
- Setbacks of buildings
- Extending the street forms and vistas such as Harold Street onto the site, responding both to the original block layout and allowing longer views through the site
- Creating new through site links that can respond to the tracks seen in the 1943 aerial photographs and which enhance the use of the stairs at the end of Albert Street
- Articulating the height of development along O'Connell Street to create variety in form as well as the use of setbacks and indents to modulate the built form
- The design of new development to use a range of materials including traditional materials that give human scale to the frontage
- Landscaping on the site can use planting forms from the nearby heritage sites to create continuity rather than the generic landscaping found around commercial and residential developments
- Creating a balanced relationship of new and larger and existing and smaller by the use of setbacks

The recent council review of the site controls and how they affect future development potential has resulted in the revised approach to the urban planning and massing of the site. This is a positive move that responds to the statements in the former Heritage Assessment that were critical of the height and massing controls.

O'Connell Street is a major thoroughfare and not a suburban street, the setting will always be uncomfortable for the diminutive heritage buildings on the eastern edge, but this is largely due to the traffic intensity and loss of the residential street character that arises from having a major road as the frontage to the HCA.



Figure ix Elevated view showing materiality. From DKO Design report.

The revised design approach creates a strong street wall along O'Connell Street with refined modulation and articulation and a relatively consistent street wall height. The generous building setback allows a wide 'avenue' with linear tree plantings on the western side of O'Connell that provides a substantial increase in the actual and perceived street width.

The introduction of the landscape edge to the street changes the character of the street dramatically and gives the smaller buildings to the east a more spacious frontage. The materiality of the new street front elements further assists in creating a more appropriate overall setting.

A key and usually contentious matter in considering new forms of denser development is the question of height. The site has had controls that anticipate much greater density, bulk and height. The controls set an intent to manage the overall scale of development. The key elements of that intent, as articulated in the revised design approach, are to create significantly more space between new built form and O'Connell Street and, as a result, the HCA opposite and to establish a street wall height that even though higher and denser



than the HCA has a balanced relationship to it by virtue of setbacks, materiality, articulation, etc. This is successfully managed in the proposal.

The proposal also contains two taller elements that allows much greater ability to resolve the open space, setbacks and lower forms on the site while achieving a reasonable development response. It is noted that the height of these elements has no impact on the HCA opposite and whether they are slightly smaller or larger does not change the important relationships between the two sides of O'Connell Street as they are experienced from ground level. While the imagery shows aerial views, the experience of the proposed development for a pedestrian or someone in a car is completely focussed on the ground plane and how it is defined through the tree lined walkway, the setbacks that provide from the development filtered views across the road to the HCA and from the HCA a well-designed street wall set well back behind the avenue of tree plantings. The taller elements will of course be seen, but they do not form an important part of the experience at ground level.

A further observation is that when an HCA is mapped, the intent is to capture coherent heritage values, ideally with whole streetscapes but, where that cannot happen, by defining a clear edge. The internal streets of the HCA achieve this first objective as they allow an experience of small scale heritage elements along both sides of streets. In some instances an HCA boundary may be the rear alignment of properties in a street to capture both sides of the street. Where an edge such as O'Connell Street exists that marks the termination of the values that are sought to be protected within the HCA, a different relationship exists. In this instance that edge is degraded by the quality of the main road. Carefully managed development to the west, as is proposed is a sound urban outcome to resolve some of those edge issues.

HCA's are also intended to be experienced large from within, that is they are not created with the intent of looking out of them at surrounding development no matter what that development is. The proposal provides an excellent potential to see the HCA across O'Connell Street from a designed urban setting that is not currently available. Conversely, if a pedestrian is on the eastern side of O'Connell Street they will continue to experience the HCA as it is now and if they look west away from the HCA will see the extended setting that has been created. These are very positive benefits from the design approach that are not affected by the actual heights of the lower street front buildings or the larger elements behind.

The revised proposal has some areas of greater height. The setting of the larger form along Albert Street is logical, was originally proposed but did not comply with the council site controls. The higher form is setback from O'Connell Street so that the corner of O'Connell and Albert Streets can be read as the lower form and the orientation of the building with a large north face is a good environmental outcome.

A second larger form is set towards the middle of the site along O'Connell Street but is also set back from the main street front forms.

The site is separated into four distinct built forms along O'Connell Street with the major building separation adopting the east-west alignment of Harold Street. This was also a design element that was considered in the earlier scheme but which did not eventuate, again due to the way the council controls on the site operated. The alignment of open space allows longer views through the site to the west from Harold Street and it is noted that the conceptual planning for the site to the west also adopts this spatial arrangement to ensure that those long views are maintained when and if that site is developed.

## Asylum and Orphanage Sites

Any development beyond several storeys on the site will be seen from the Orphanage site as development is set above the escarpment face and elevated above the current development on the Fleet Street lots. The planning controls provide for much higher and denser development along Fleet Street that would, in time,



potentially screen, or at least in part screen, views to development on the subject site. There appears to be a clear intent in the LEP controls for the whole block to be developed intensely over time.

Any impacts on the Orphanage site are about what is potentially seen from that site of new development to the east. There are no impacts of development on views to the Orphanage as it cannot be seen from O'Connell Street or Albert Street due to the depth of the site, the level changes to the west and the vegetated edge along the escarpment line. It is noted that the rock face is located wholly on the lots to the west and does not form part of the subject site.

Prior to 1943 and until the western lots of the block were developed for aged care use and the subject site was developed as a school site, the land was open apart from the two health buildings fronting Fennell Street (Interwar buildings). Over time the lots have been developed and created a built interface to the Orphanage. The proposed development while larger than what has occupied the site previously responds to the planning controls and the changes of scale, form and design along the western frontage of the site. This assists in breaking up the form and scale as viewed from the west.

As noted above any development of more than a few storeys will be seen from the Orphanage grounds and parts of some buildings, particularly if the western part of the block is not developed as allowed for in the planning controls. This will be a change in the broader setting that has clearly been anticipated in developing the planning controls.

In some respects, locating higher development above the quarry face rather than below it allows the setting of the Orphanage to be expanded. That is the current low scale development on the eastern edge of Fleet Street creates an immediate visual setting that defines the edge of the Orphanage site as the quarry edge. While the sites east of Fleet Street are not part of the Orphanage site, the immediate visual setting benefits from lower development along Fleet Street. Setting articulated and higher built forms further east, with greater separation to the Orphanage site will be seen but will be in the backdrop of the site and will not significantly change the context.



Figure x: Detail of Fullers 1883 Map showing Blocks 83 and 84 that contain the proposed site. Note Harold Street was originally intended to dissect the site but was not created.

## Proposal

The proposal is set out in the DKO drawings and report with clear background analysis on the changes from the initial proposal. The proposal is well illustrated in figure ix that shows the setbacks, form, distribution of height across the site, the landscaped boulevard, vistas, etc. This report does not consider other aspects of the proposal but it is noted that creating roof gardens with small setback elements will further soften the overall forms as greenery develops at higher levels.

Set out following is a summary of the outcomes of the current proposal in relation to the heritage context of the site:

- The revised site setbacks allows the streetscape of O'Connell Street to be extended to the west to establish a more fitting relationship to the HCA opposite.
- The creation of, in effect, a landscaped boulevard along the site frontage changes the spatial arrangement of the street and assists in mitigating the impact of the heavy traffic usage that has had an adverse impact on the setting of the HCA. Separation of the proposed development from the road assists in creating a precinct approach across O'Connell Street in contrast to the road being a visual barrier between areas.
- The setbacks provide an outlook from the HCA to landscape with the larger buildings beyond, the rooftop landscape will further benefit this outlook.

- The landscaped boulevard allows a filtered view from the development site from what will be active frontages to the HCA beyond.
- The creation of the void space aligned with Harold Street reinforces the street grid pattern and allows longer views through the subject site.
- The massing of the buildings along O'Connell Street is articulated into discrete forms with varying materiality with a six level street form. The lowering of the street height and the setbacks provide a more generous relationship to the street and HCA opposite.

## Recommendations

It is always difficult to consider new larger scaled development within the context of small residential buildings or complexes such as the Orphanage site. However, it is possible to undertake development provided that the new work has a well-designed interface and form that creates good urban form and spaces as well as responding to some of the characteristics of the adjacent heritage places.

As observed, it is not possible to respond in height and scale to the small cottages by using similar forms. In relation to the HCA, the street separation allows a scale change by nature of the intensity of use of the road and then using the elements set out earlier of articulation, scale changes, materiality, pattern and rhythm of the street front buildings to establish an urban form that is varied and subtle while being of larger scale.

Using lower forms along O'Connell Street is essential to managing scale transitions. Designing the complex in response to the HCA and the significant sites to the west that are more distant is critical. While the term design excellence is widely used and not always understood, on this site the testing of design options through design excellence provides a contextual approach to design. The urban study focuses on the setting around the site as a starting point to develop forms, open space and massing. This is conceptually sound and can be further developed through a detailed design process to achieve a high-quality urban outcome for the site and area.

The initial reference scheme responded to the controls that were in place and to the context of the area. The revised scheme, with a much more nuanced set of site controls allows a significantly better contextual outcome particularly with regard to heritage matters. For a large up-scaling of development on the site, the reference scheme provides a well-balanced and responsive approach to heritage relationships and context.