

MILLER UNION DEVELOPMENT

Union Street, Cooks Hill, Newcastle
Supplementary Character Report

Issue	Date of Issue.	Revision Description.	Author.	Checked	Approved
A	04.10.11	Final	GB	MM	GB

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction and Purpose	1
2.0	The Site	1
3.0	The Proposal	1
4.0	Relevant Development Controls	1
5.0	Existing Character	2
5.1	Existing Character: Inner Area	2
5.2	Existing Character: Outer Area	2
6.0	Future Character	3
7.0	The Proposed Development	4
7.1	The Proposal and Existing Character	4
7.2	The Proposal and Future Character	4
8.0	Conclusion	5
	Appendix A: Figures	2
	Appendix B: Character Statement by ADW Johnson	4

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

This report presents an urban design character assessment which is supplementary to the Character Statement prepared by ADW Johnson (attached as Appendix B) for the proposed development known as 121 – 123 Union Street, Cooks Hill in the Newcastle City Council Local Government Area. It includes responses to the relevant principles established for the assessment of context under SEPP 65 and relevant Land and Environment Court principles. While the Hunter Region Joint Regional Planning Panel has requested a Character Statement relative to the boarding house, this report provides commentary in relation to the proposal as a whole.

2.0 THE SITE

The subject site comprises two parcels, Lots 1 and 2 in DP 1050041 and the street address is 121 – 123 Union Street, Cooks Hill. It has a total area of 10,329 square metres. It was previously low-lying swamp lands and currently contains a building and associated works which will be demolished to make way for the proposed development.

3.0 THE PROPOSAL

The proposal is for the:

- Demolition of all existing structures on the site;
- Construction of a residential flat development containing a total of 102 units
- Construction of a boarding house containing 112 bedrooms and a managers residence
- At grade and basement car parking for the residential flat building containing 115 car parks,
- 21 visitor car parks and bicycle racks (including at grade parking under Building C which is a flood requirement)
- At grade/semi basement car parking for the boarding house containing 13 car parks, 23
- motorcycle parks and 123 bicycle racks/storage

4.0 RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT CONTROLS

The local planning controls applicable to the site are set out in detail in the Statement of Environmental Effects accompanying the Development Application. Under Newcastle LEP 2003, the site is currently zoned 2(b) Urban Core Zone, permitting multi-unit residential development with consent, and will be zoned R3 Medium Density Residential under Council's new LEP. An FSR of 0.9:1 and a height limit of 10m will apply to the site under the new LEP. Under the applicable State Environmental Planning Policy, the boarding house portion of the development has a maximum permissible FSR of 1.4:1. Newcastle DCP 2005 also includes a 10.0m height limit and setback controls.

The site immediately adjoins the Cooks Hill Heritage Conservation Area to the north-east.

It is included within the 'Substantial Growth Precinct' mapped in DCP2005, encouraging the redevelopment of the site for urban housing at higher residential densities.

5.0 EXISTING CHARACTER

Assessing character requires the definition of the local area surrounding the subject site. It is useful to consider two types of local area:

- An inner area defined by points from which the proposed development can be seen (referred to as "visual catchment" in visual impact studies)
- An outer area surrounding the site of approximately a half kilometre radius, which corresponds to about a 10 minute walk.

5.1 EXISTING CHARACTER: INNER AREA

As documented in the ADW Johnson Character Statement (refer context photographs in Appendix B), the existing character of the inner area in terms of land use comprises residential development, the Newcastle Grammar School and Union Park. Built form is very diverse, including:

- Single storey detached dwellings adjoining the subject site and which lie within the Cooks Hill Heritage Conservation Area
- Two storey town houses on Corlette Street
- One and two storey buildings on the adjoining school site
- The YWCA building on the corner of Corlette Street and Parkway Avenue, which is three storeys plus pitched roof
- Flat buildings along Parkway Avenue, which are three storeys plus pitched roof

The architectural character of these developments also varies considerably, largely reflecting the era in which they were built.

The existing character of the inner area is difficult to define because built forms are so diverse. Whilst detached dwellings predominate to the north, three storey buildings with pitched roofs are characteristic to the south.

5.2 EXISTING CHARACTER: OUTER AREA

The existing character of the outer area is defined in part by a wider range of uses, including substantial retail and commercial developments. Built form is even more varied and in addition to the inner area includes:

- Four storey residential and commercial buildings on Darby Street to the east of the site
- An eight storey apartment building further east on Union Street
- Commercial buildings at the Junction

The architectural character of these developments also varies considerably, again largely reflecting the era in which they were built.

The wider Cooks Hill Heritage Conservation Area, according to Council's website, "contains buildings that represent all of the architectural phases of Newcastle's history."

ADW Johnson note that in the Cooks Hill precinct 35% of the housing stock is currently semi-detached dwellings or townhouses, 39% is flats or apartments and 26% is detached houses. The character of the outer area reflects this distribution of residential types.

They also identify other key features of the locality, including:

- Good walkability and connectivity, resulting from the generally flat topography and grid street patterns
- Mostly attractive streetscapes with tree-lined streets
- Good access to shops and services at The Junction and at a greater distance Newcastle City Centre

6.0 FUTURE CHARACTER

Directions for desired future character are contained in the Newcastle Urban Strategy 2009. The broad goal for the city is stated as:

"The aim of Newcastle Urbanism is to provide greater choices to the community, in terms of access to housing, employment, transport, and social and cultural services, while offering reduced travel demand, improved air quality and greater identity for Newcastle, its city centre, and its district and neighbourhood centres."

Achieving this goal requires increasing the intensity of residential development in existing neighbourhoods where there is good access to public transport, employment and social and cultural services. The precinct outside of the Cooks Hill Heritage Conservation Area within which the subject site lies is clearly appropriate for more intense levels of development. Figure 1 shows that in addition to the Cooks Hill Heritage Conservation Area, there are two additional Heritage Conservation Areas to the northeast. These areas are zoned with relatively low Floor Space Ratios and are generally constrained such that little additional development will occur in them. The subject site is located within one of the Substantial Growth Precincts closest to Newcastle City Centre. It is entirely consistent with Council's future planning strategies to see this and similar sites developed to their maximum potential.

ADW Johnson's Character Statement lists the broader aims of Newcastle LEP 2003. These include:

"To encourage a diversity of housing types in locations that improve access to employment opportunities, public transport, community facilities and services, retail and commercial services, and the like."

They also list the objectives for the 2(b) Urban Core Zone within which the site is located. These include:

"To provide for a diversity of housing types that respect the amenity, heritage and character of surrounding development and the quality of the environment."

Newcastle DCP 2005 locates the subject site within a Substantial Growth Precinct where the highest residential densities in Newcastle apply. The Precinct objectives are:

- Promote a substantial increase in new dwellings, greater housing diversity and new built form.
- Encourage redevelopment or consolidation that allows for more compact and sustainable urban form.
- Create a vibrant place for people to live in proximity to community facilities and services, commercial centres, employment, and transport nodes.
- Encourage public transport, walking and cycling as alternatives to the car.

Realisation of these objectives within areas designated as Substantial Growth Precinct will clearly result in residential development which is relatively dense for Newcastle and which will introduce new building types, most notably apartment buildings. The numerical controls for FSR and height to which the site is subject reflect this. They are clearly intended to accommodate multi-unit development well beyond the scale of detached dwellings or town houses.

Increased levels of development outside Heritage Conservation Areas are a natural evolution in the inner parts of cities. In the case of Cooks Hill, the first dwellings were "colliers huts". Building scales, types and architectural styles have been evolving ever since.

7.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Since the submission of the proposal for Development Approval, two key principles identified in Land and Environment Court cases have been raised as tests of its merit:

- Are the proposal's physical impacts on surrounding development acceptable? The physical impacts include constraints on the development potential of surrounding sites
- Is the proposal's appearance in harmony with the buildings around it and the character of the street?

The first principle is addressed in the two Height Reports provided by HBO+EMTB. The second principle has more to do with the relationship between the character of the context and the proposed development.

It is important to note, as the Court has pointed out, that the second principle does not mean that a proposed development should be the same as its neighbours. Harmony can be achieved where differences exist, including differences in density, scale and/or appearance.

7.1 THE PROPOSAL AND EXISTING CHARACTER

The existing character surrounding the site is very diverse and this is perceived most acutely within the inner area, where the proposed development will be visible. The scale of the proposal is clearly different to that of the adjoining dwellings in the Cooks Hill Heritage Conservation Area, however it would be a mistake to attempt to reduce the perceived scale of the development by mimicking architectural elements or features from those houses. Heritage consultants Heritas confirm that the difference between the old and the new should be clearly discernable.

The proposal achieves harmony with its neighbours through massing and architectural treatment. On Union Street the built form is separated into two buildings with a 12 metre gap between them. The smaller building adjoins the neighbouring dwellings in the conservation area, providing a transition in massing. Both proposed buildings have heavily articulated facades, with slots for circulation which penetrate through the full depth of the building. Articulation of the facades is further enhanced with two balcony zones. Gates along the street, which provide access via front courtyards to the ground floor apartments, give the whole composition a more domestic feel.

On Corlette Street a similar massing strategy is adopted, with a gap of 6.1 metres between the two proposed buildings. The larger building has a deep recess 7 metres wide at about its midpoint. This massing again reduces the scale of the development and is complemented by facade modulation using a variety of shading and screening devices and a related diverse palette of finishes and colours. The overall result is a well-mannered presentation to the street. Whilst the scale of the proposal is different to that of the buildings to its north and east, it is considered to be in harmony with them and the character of Corlette Street.

7.2 THE PROPOSAL AND FUTURE CHARACTER

The desired future character of the site's locality, as expressed in Council's planning documents and development controls, clearly anticipates development of the scale and character of the proposal. The permissible FSR and height limit will inevitably lead to apartment buildings. The issue is how well these new developments are designed. The proposal employs contemporary architectural expression. It does not seek to imitate earlier architectural styles which are present in the vicinity and it does not make inappropriately grand or pompous gestures. Its architectural expression derives from a thoughtful approach to context and climate. In time it will be seen to represent the architecture of its time, as do other buildings in its vicinity.

8.0 CONCLUSION

The existing character surrounding the proposed development is very diverse. Within the "Inner Area" (the visual catchment surrounding the site) residential building typologies predominate and range from single storey detached dwellings in the Cooks Hill Heritage Conservation Area to three storey flat buildings with pitched roofs in a higher density residential zone. The architectural character of these developments also varies considerably, largely reflecting the era in which they were built.

The Land and Environment Court test cited in Section 7.0 above -- "Is the proposal's appearance in harmony with the buildings around it and the character of the street?" -- applies most directly to consideration of the relationship between the proposed development and the Inner Area surrounding it. The most sensitive relationship is with the Heritage Conservation Area adjoining the subject site. The proposed development is of course larger in scale than the detached dwellings in the Conservation Area, an inevitable outcome of its higher density zoning. Whilst the proposal is not the same as its heritage neighbours, it is considered to be in harmony with them and the streets in the immediate vicinity of the site by virtue of its massing, articulation and architectural treatment. It is noted that the setbacks from the side boundary which adjoins the Heritage Conservation Area have been increased to as much as 17 metres for the proposed central building.

Importantly, the proposal does not attempt to replicate elements of existing buildings. It stands as contemporary architecture which is sympathetic to its neighbours. Heritage architects Heritas state that it is important to be able to read the Conservation Area separately from development on the subject site. They also note that the Conservation Area has many styles within it and that the proposed development will simply add another adjoining layer.

The desired future character of the Substantial Growth Precinct in which the subject site is located is expressed in the goals and aims contained in Council's Urban Strategy 2009 document and planning instruments. It is also implied in the key numerical controls they contain. With the highest FSR and height limit of any residential zone in Newcastle, it is inferred that the Substantial Growth Precinct is to be developed at or close to its maximum FSR. This is particularly the case for the subject site, which is amongst the potential SGP development sites closest to Newcastle City Centre. To achieve the desired planning outcomes the density of development on the site will be significantly greater than that of the adjoining Heritage Conservation Area. The urban design challenge is to achieve a sympathetic relationship whilst allowing the proposed development to achieve the development potential of the site. The proposed development successfully meets this challenge.

APPENDIX A: FIGURES

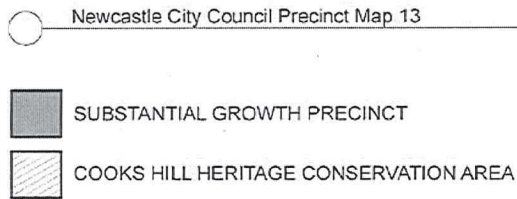
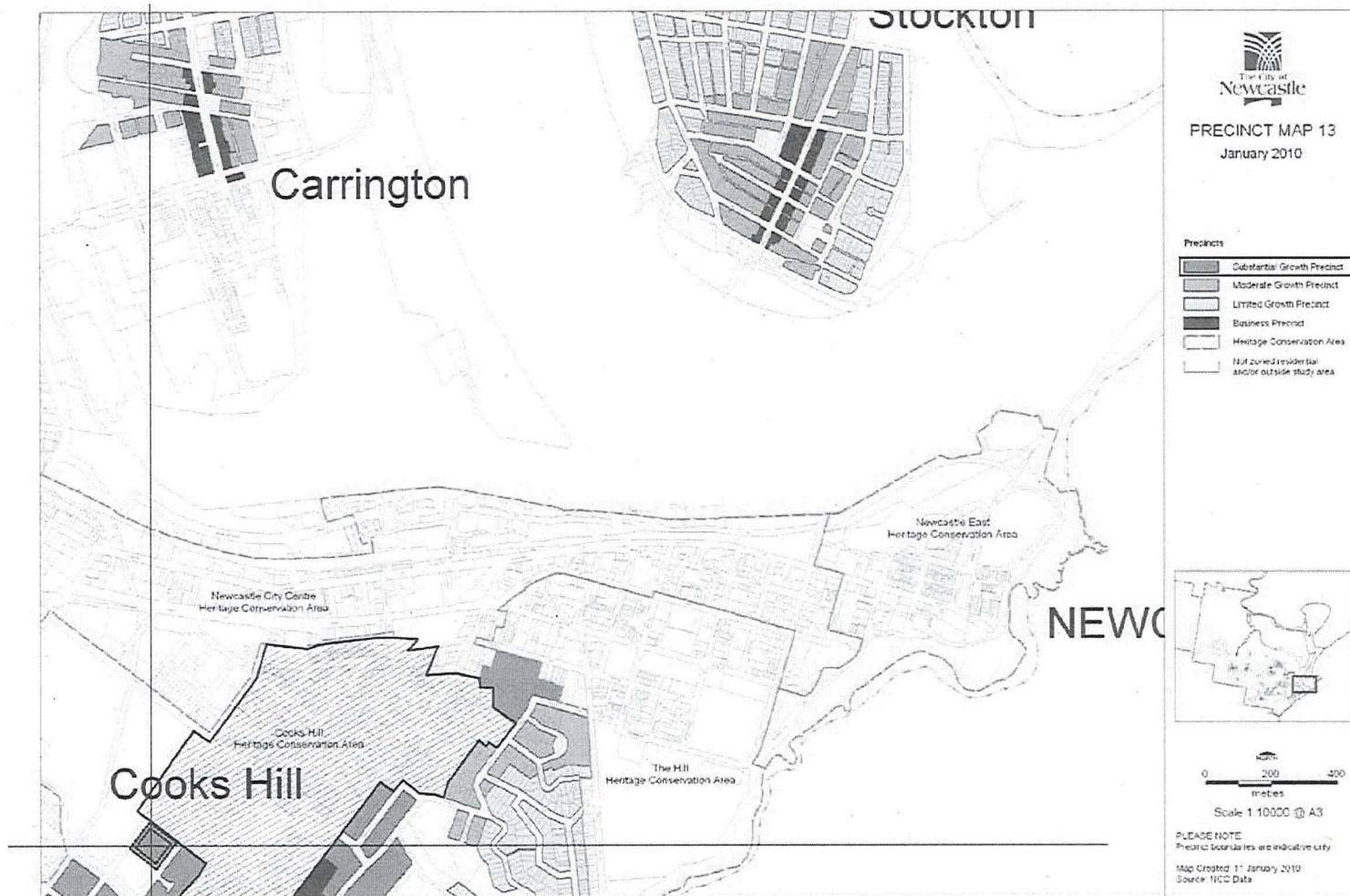


Figure 1 The site in relation to Heritage Conservation Areas and Strategic Growth Precincts