

DA-2010/1682
PROPOSED MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT
CORNER OF BURELLI AND KEMBLA STREETS, WOLLONGONG

Urban Design Review: Update 1

HBO + EMTB Urban and Landscape Design

Project Number: SYU-002653

Prepared for: Wollongong City Council

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Issue	Date of Issue.	Revision Description.	Author.	Checked	Approved
A	9.09.11		GB	GB	GB

1.0 Introduction

This report follows an earlier document, dated 21 July 2011, providing an urban design review of a proposed development, known as Mid City Square, within the City Centre of Wollongong. The Applicant has made amendments to the proposed development and this report provides an urban design review of the amended proposal. The author of both reports is Geoff Baker, Urban Design Principal, HBO+EMTB Urban and Landscape Design, Sydney.

1.1 Background Information

A description of the subject site and its context and the original proposed development are provided in the earlier urban design review.

1.2 Changes to the Proposed Development

According to the Applicant's Planner, the proposed amendments to the development relate to the following:-

- *adherence to the 4 metre building setback above the street frontage height & facade simplification;*
- *alteration to ground floor level to achieve at grade entrances from Burelli & Kemble Streets with no external steps;*
- *splay corner to Burelli / Kembla Streets (with access provision) for lower floors;*
- *reconfiguration of ground floor access & tenancies to generate more active street frontages to both streets;*
- *removal of every second column to Burelli Street awning to reduce clutter;*
- *rethink of plaza area relative to landscape treatment & safety / security;*
- *reduction in access crossing width to Kembla Street;*
- *alterations to penthouses arrangements for solar access & amenity.*

These changes are shown on the following drawings which form the basis of this report:

Date	Number	Title	Author
Jan 07	DA11/B	Preliminary Masterplan Ground Level	PRD Architects
Jan 07	DA12/A	Preliminary Masterplan Upper Level	PRD Architects
19/08/11	08-051-SK01	Perspective Views	PRD Architects
19/08/11	-	Plan Level 11	PRD Architects
18/08/11	-	Plan Level 12	PRD Architects
-	-	Preliminary Plaza Sketch	-
18/08/11	-	Part Ground Floor Plan (L1)	PRD Architects

1.3 Regulatory Framework

Two local planning instruments are of particular relevance to this review:

- Wollongong Local Environmental Plan (WLEP) 2009
- Wollongong Development Control Plan 2009

2.0 Urban Design Review

Wollongong LEP 2009 includes Clause 8.5 Design Excellence which states in sub-clause (3) that “Development consent must not be granted to development to which this clause applies unless, in the opinion of the consent authority, the proposed development exhibits design excellence”. Sub-clause (4)(e) provides a list of matters which must be considered in making this determination. The following assessment includes those matters which are relevant to the proposed changes to the design of the development and the reviewer’s response. Clauses which are not applicable or deemed to be satisfied may not be cited.

(a) whether a high standard of architectural design, materials and detailing appropriate to the building type and location will be achieved

Amongst the drawings provided for the current review, only one sheet entitled “Perspective Views” relates to the exterior massing and architectural expression of the development. The term “under consideration” appears frequently in the notations on that sheet, principally in relation to the building’s facades. The assessment of the architectural design of the exterior of the proposal provided under (b) below is therefore necessarily limited. On the basis of the images provided, however, it is this reviewer’s opinion that a high standard of architectural design has not yet been achieved.

(b) whether the form and external appearance of the proposed development will improve the quality and amenity of the public domain

Clause 2.2.3 of DCP 2009, Chapter D13 requires a 4 metre setback of the tower section of a building above its base. Although plans above the base are not provided, a note on the perspective views sheet states that the 4 metre setback to Burelli Street is now incorporated into the building massing.

In reviewing the original proposal, the building’s “exuberant” architectural expression was judged inappropriate given the development’s civic location and the presence of nearby heritage items. In addition to a 4 metre tower setback to Burelli Street, it was considered that the multiplicity of facade elements were deployed to excess and that a more restrained articulation of the facades and the elimination of the columns supporting the canopies on Burelli Street would produce a more elegant and dignified architectural expression.

Whilst the most recent images attempt to address a number of the issues raised earlier (and some aspects are still “under consideration”), it cannot be said that the overall outcome is clearly an improvement. More specifically:

- The proportions of the building massing lack refinement. Although these are largely set by the height and setback controls in the DCP, the architectural treatment of the building’s facades could significantly improve the *perceived* massing. There are a number of variables which relate to this issue that need to be explored in combination to achieve a satisfactory architectural whole:
 - Should the base and tower facades respond to their differing solar orientations?
 - To what extent should exterior glass framing and shading devices be employed?
 - Should the tower facade extend down to the base (rather than stop one floor above it)?
 - How should the colour and transparency of facade glass be handled?
- The canopy around the base of the building still lacks integration with the building facade behind it
- The penthouses employ a totally different architectural language to the rest of the building. They should be more integrated with the tower and base

(e) how the proposed development addresses the following matters:

(ii) existing and proposed uses and use mix

A coffee shop is now located on the northeast corner of the ground floor, opening out onto Burelli Street and the plaza between the proposed development and the “Corporate Square” building. It will receive winter sun and significant commercial exposure and contribute to the DCP’s call for “active street frontages”.

Concerns about the uncertainty of other street front uses remain and it is again noted that an agreement with the Applicant to provide active ground floor uses is highly desirable.

(iii) heritage issues and streetscape constraints

It is now considered that in terms of bulk and form, the revised proposal has an improved and satisfactory relationship with the heritage items in the immediate vicinity.

(v) bulk, massing and modulation of buildings

The relationship between massing and the architectural expression of the revised proposal is discussed under (b) above.

(vii) environmental impacts such as sustainable design, overshadowing, wind and reflectivity

The concern expressed earlier that the sloping tower facade to Burelli Street may result in adverse wind effects is now resolved with the vertical 4 metre setback of this facade.

Noting again the lack of resolution of the design of the building's facades, reflectivity still needs to be addressed. It is understood that reflectivity is to be limited to a maximum of 20%.

(viii) the achievement of the principles of ecologically sustainable development

In the earlier review it was noted in relation to the penthouse apartments that passive solar heat gain in winter was not optimal, with one unit facing south and having relatively minor exposure to the east and west. With two floors available and only two units to plan, a better outcome should be possible.

The changes now proposed do not go far enough. The southern unit should have significantly greater northern exposure. This may require the central lift which serves these apartments to open out to the west on Level 11.

It appears that further work remains to be done to control solar access on these penthouse floors.

(ix) pedestrian, cycle, vehicular and service access, circulation and requirements

The planning of the Ground Floor of the development has improved significantly:

- A main entry to the lobby is now provided directly off Burelli Street
- The fire passages exiting onto Kembla Street have been moved to the south face of the building, creating a longer uninterrupted frontage of commercial space to Kembla Street
- An entry to this space is now provided at the corner of Burelli and Kembla Streets
- Sight lines between the new plaza on the eastern side of the building and the lobby and elevators are maintained
- The earlier two storey high lobby running along the full length of the eastern side of the ground floor of the development has been eliminated and replaced with a coffee shop opening directly onto the plaza and lettable space to the south also accessible from the plaza. These improvements should result in a more dynamic public space. An external canopy along the eastern facade will provide a measure of weather protection.

Although it is not clearly indicated on the revised ground floor plan, it is assumed there is access from the plaza into the main building lobby. This entry should be confirmed with the Applicant.

(x) impact on, and any proposed improvements to, the public domain

Consistent with changes recommended earlier, a number of improvements are proposed for the plaza on the east side of the development:

- Planters have been reduced in size

- Numbers of steps have been reduced where possible
- Steps and a “sculptural element” now occupy the central axis of the foyer extended out into the plaza.

Although the plaza is located on private land, it will effectively become part of the public domain. It is noted that earlier drawings showed “Security Gates” across the plaza at its northern (Burelli Street) end. These are not indicated on the current ground floor plan. In any event, Council will need to ensure that appropriate opening hours for the plaza are maintained.

3.0 Conclusion

A number of significant improvements have been made to the proposed development, particularly at the ground floor and adjoining plaza. Compliance with the DCP’s 4 metre tower setback is also considered beneficial in terms of the relationship of the building’s massing to Burelli Street and the heritage items along it.

The issues which remain to be resolved to meet the design excellence test under Clause 8.5 of the LEP are:

- The external architectural expression of the building
- The poor standard of the layouts of the proposal’s two penthouse apartments in terms of ecologically sustainable design.