


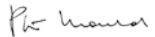

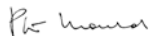
PEER REVIEW 33 CROSS STREET, DOUBLE BAY

PREPARED FOR WOOLLAHRA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
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Public Works
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Document Control

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		Name	Signed	Name	Signed	Date
Draft	Peter Mould	Helen Lochhead		Peter Mould		21.02.11
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Peter Mould, NSW Government Architect

Government Architect's Office, Department of Services, Technology & Administration

McKell Building, Level 18, 2-24 Rawson Place SYDNEY 2000

T: 61 2 9372 8463 F: 61 2 9372 8499

E: peter.mould@services.nsw.gov.au

W: www.govarch.services.nsw.gov.au

CONTENTS

1.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
2.	PROJECT APPRECIATION	5
3.	PRECINCT ANALYSIS	6
4.	RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSAL	7
5.	CONCLUSIONS	13

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The development site is of critical importance because of its size and location and although it can meet amenity standards and contribute positively in many ways to the public realm, its bulk and form and are problematic.

The uses are supported being an appropriate and sustainable mix, and the resultant circulation and open space positively contribute to the precinct. The building mass and complexity however impact on the relationship of the development to its surrounding context.

Some reconfiguration in the overall planning and massing of the development may provide better design options for the site, but there will need to be some trade off in terms of open space and height which is not currently available in the Development Control Plan (DCP) controls.

The proposal demonstrates good design in aspects of the architecture and public domain.

The proposal demonstrates the value of the courtyard in opening up the site and providing open space and in extending the pedestrian network of the precinct. The amount of activity of this space is dependent on retail uses and these remain undefined. The design of this courtyard needs further development in terms of overshadowing and activation.

There will need to be continuing negotiation on height and floor space to reach an acceptable solution.

We believe that the site can tolerate a development of 5 storeys to Cross Street and an additional 2 storeys (total of 7 storeys) set back a further 3m.

Issues of overshadowing the public domain need further consideration, but these will be assisted by the recommended lowering of height.

Overall the proposed development is too complex in form and needs further simplification.

Detail issues such as materials palette, sun control and privacy to apartments needs further development or clarification and their visual impact understood.

2. PROJECT APPRECIATION

2.1 PROJECT SCOPE

The Government Architect's Office has been engaged by Woollahra Council to undertake a peer review of the proposed mixed use development at 33 Cross Street, Double Bay. The review is based on the Statement of Environmental Effects, prepared by GSA Pty Ltd, and Drawings by PTW Architects.

2.2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

A high level review of the proponent's development proposal option has been undertaken with regard to:

- the impact on immediate and local contexts;
- amenity impacts arising from the proposal;
- suitability of the built form on the site (bulk and scale);
- public domain benefits and/or impacts.

The proposal has been reviewed only with respect to the above Terms of Reference. It has not been assessed in terms of its compatibility with the existing planning controls or its compliance with State Environmental Planning Policies such as SEPP 65 and the Residential Flat Design Code, although reference is made to those documents.

It should be noted that this office undertook an Expert Review for the Department of Planning (September 2009) of the previous Ashington Proposal for this site. Some of the analysis done for that review informs this report.

3. PRECINCT ANALYSIS

Character

Double Bay Town Centre is close to the harbour and located in a large natural valley between the ridges of Darling Point/Edgecliff and Bellevue Hill.

The building stock is varied in style and condition with no particular style or period dominant. The architectural and streetscape quality is generally undistinguished with the exception of the heritage precinct of Transvaal Avenue.

The precinct north of New South Head Road has a fine grain subdivision pattern.

The amalgamation and redevelopment of some sites along the north side of Cross Street have created buildings of different height and bulk to the predominant building stock. The existing building on the subject site is one of those.

Street Pattern

The street pattern north of New South Head Road has a complex mix of roads, laneways and small open spaces that provide a variety of pedestrian choices and experiences which add to the amenity and character of the place.

The centre provides a pleasant pedestrian experience due to the almost continuous shop fronts along streets and through block arcades. The improvement program of paving, footpath widening and pedestrian crossings carried out in the 1980s and 1990s enhances this experience.

The subject site has the potential for a through block link from Cross Street to William Street via Galbraith Walkway.

Scale

The Double Bay Town Centre sits in the valley floor. The topography rises at the edge of the centre quite quickly to the surrounding ridges to the east and west and more distantly to the south. The predominant height of buildings in the Centre is two storeys with a few up to six storeys.

The DCP controls allow buildings with street frontages of four and five storeys (up to 16.5m high). These controls relate the allowable building height to the topographic form and by restricting the height in the Centre. This allows the built form to reflect the valley floor and remain substantially within the line of the predominant tree canopy.

The height of the existing development on the subject site sits predominantly within the tree canopy.

4. RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSAL

4.1 IMPACT ON IMMEDIATE AND LOCAL CONTEXTS

COMMENTS

Generally

The proposed building being 3 storeys taller than the existing building and built closer to the boundaries is more prominent and has a more significant visual impact than the existing building. The designers have helped ameliorate this impact through a series of strategies that include a mixed palette of materials, stepping the building form and introducing a variety of shapes (drums, curved winter gardens, projecting balconies, etc).

From distant views these strategies are hardly relevant as the predominant impact of the building is its bulk and silhouette against the existing background conditions.

Colour, materials and form have more significant impact on middle distance and immediate views, with the latter particularly impacted by profiles, details and finishes.

The visual impact from some viewpoints is not significant. The development is fairly unobtrusive when viewed from a distance. However there are several key viewpoints as illustrated in the SEE where the impact is more prominent.

Local Context

The height and bulk is evident when viewed from the harbour and although higher than the existing building it still falls within the backdrop of the built development on the rising hills behind.

When viewed from the surrounding hills the development intrudes into the harbour vista from some viewpoints and in others is evident above the existing tree canopy.

These impacts on the local context are considered to be moderate and therefore acceptable.

Immediate Context

The impact on the immediate views (ie when viewed from Galbraith Walkway, Cross Street and Transvaal Avenue) is more obvious. The north elevation although not continuous is higher and closer to the boundary than the existing building. The impact is also increased through the change of use from hotel (wherein the small balconies would get intermittent use at best) to residential where 24 hour occupancy is to be expected with regular use of the northern balconies. It is unlikely that the proposed vegetation on the balconies would be allowed to grow beyond seated eye height to maintain views to the harbour. Therefore overlooking impact on neighbours to the north has substantially increased. The set backs on the upper floors will help to decrease this impact.

The impact of overlooking also occurs on the west and the setbacks are smaller than the north so again overlooking is an issue. To the east is commercial development and so amenity issues of overlooking are less of a concern. However the development is here, from Transvaal Avenue and from Cross Street, most evident in the public domain. The existing building has a strong visual impact when seen from Transvaal Avenue but, with predominantly blank walls, it is mute. The proposed building is taller and active by day and will be illuminated by night and the combined impact will be much greater on Transvaal Avenue.

The impact on Cross Street is different. The existing building is set back further than the proposed development. The proposal appropriately builds in line with the neighbouring building to the west but with bay windows and balconies projecting beyond that alignment (3m back from the boundary).

The upper levels (5 to 7) are set back a further 2.3m and the top level well set back and unaligned with Cross Street. The street wall is modulated with projecting bay windows and balconies, and the bay window element is repeated on the upper levels as winter gardens projecting almost to the edge of the lower storeys. These are visually too dominant on this elevation.

The building has been articulated to reduce the visual bulk. Curves have been introduced to add interest but in some instances are discordant with the overall form of the building.

The corner drum elements, whilst recessive in plan, are visually very dominant and read (because of their external blades) as vertical elements. They sit uncomfortably on the rectilinear form of the base and add to the complexity of the skyline. Their impact is increased by the overhanging roofs which increase their prominence and visual impact.

CONCLUSION

Visual impacts at a local level are moderate and therefore acceptable. Overlooking and privacy are potential issues but can be managed through detailed design resolution.

The greatest impacts are on Cross Street and Transvaal Avenue. The complex form of the building's profile should be calmed. A simpler form would be less visually distracting. The corner drum elements and their overhanging roofs should be reconsidered. The upper level bay windows that project almost to the edge of the podium building below should be removed – they negate the benefit of setting the upper floors back from the street. This set back too should be increased.

4.2 AMENITY IMPACTS

COMMENTS

Internal

The apartments are predominantly north facing and approximately 66% appear to meet the solar access requirements of SEPP 65 (a thorough study would need to be undertaken to confirm this). This is slightly short of the recommended 70% but is weighted by the single bed units stacked to the south.

On the proponents analysis more units than the recommended 60% meet the recommended requirements for cross ventilation.

The U shaped form of the building allows appropriate separation for units to achieve acceptable privacy and acoustic separation.

The units on level 2 overlooking the courtyard may have amenity issues including privacy and noise transfer from the publicly accessible courtyard. This is further exacerbated by the potential conflict from outdoor restaurant/café outlets in the courtyard.

The location of the car park exhaust has the potential to impact on the apartments to the south west as the predominant summer breeze is from the north east.

The external walls of the upper levels are almost completely glazed. Apart from blinds noted on the drum components there is no indication of other materials or elements on the drawings.

The amenity of these apartments for both sun control and privacy will mean the introduction of external or internal elements (blinds, screens, curtains) and the impact of these elements will be highly visible changing the character of the buildings as presented in photomontages (see the note under Section 4.5 Issues of Detail).

External

The proposed development has overshadowing impacts on the southern footpath and buildings on Cross Street in the morning from the equinox to through winter. There is a wide pavement on this side of the street and it is in part occupied by seating for cafés. There are several pavement cafés in the Double Bay Town Centre and with the popularity of 'café culture' this is likely to increase. Sun access is therefore desirable in the morning and at lunch time in all but the summer months.

The shadow diagrams provided show that in mid winter there will be an increase to the existing condition in shadows to the south pavement of Cross Street after 1pm. Currently the shadows of the existing building leave the pavement in part by 1pm and totally by 2pm.

The loss of amenity to the pavement is offset by the provision of a new public square open to the sky within the proposed site.

CONCLUSION

The nearly fully glazed upper levels will need treatment for sun, glare and privacy. These need to be modelled and their visual impact understood because of their close proximity to neighbours and the public domain.

The height of the proposal should be reduced to lessen the overshadowing to the south side of Cross Street.

The new Public Square is a desirable addition to this site. It needs further development to improve its amenity in terms of the activation of the undercroft spaces.

4.3 SUITABILITY OF THE BUILT FORM ON THE SITE (BULK & SCALE)

COMMENTS

The proposed development being a street wall to Cross Street and a courtyard form oriented to the north is consistent with the intent of the DCP. However there are key departures from the controls and the existing development in terms of height and floor space. Information in the documentation on these issues is reporting differently in different sections and some ambiguity remains as to the exact measures for floor space and height.

The proposal has three additional storeys and broader footprint compared to the existing building which combine to increase the visual impact. The roof form is complex and makes the skyline view more prominent.

The proposed floor to floor heights are less than some existing floors but the proposal is still higher than the existing building and considerably higher than other buildings in its immediate context.

The quantum of floor space and large building footprint (compared to the existing grain in the neighbourhood) make the building appear quite bulky.

CONCLUSION

In our review of the Ashington Proposal in 2009 this office recommended that the site could tolerate greater height than the current council controls allow. We recommended a street wall to Cross Street of up to 5 storeys and 2 more storeys set back from this. That is a total of 7 storeys with the minimum set back of the upper two of at least 3 metres.

We still believe this to be appropriate and that the current proposal is consequently too high.

4.4 PUBLIC DOMAIN BENEFITS AND/OR IMPACTS

COMMENTS

Benefits

The proposed development makes a positive contribution to the public domain in a number of ways:

- The provision of an activated street frontage with retail uses.
- The through site link that connects to a north-facing publicly accessible landscaped courtyard is physically direct and provides clear site lines to Galbraith Walkway continuing the pattern of Double Bay's courtyards and through block links.
- The activation of the courtyard with retail uses.

Impacts

The proposed development detracts from the public domain in a number of ways:

- The overall bulk of the development, additional height and the overly complicated sky line profile, and their impact on the immediate surroundings.
- The additional overshadowing.
- The low scale height of the public entry to the courtyard.
- The amount of courtyard covered by building. This undercover area, even though it increases to 6m height to the north means that outdoor components of the retail outlets are undercover and so lose amenity. The treatment of the soffit (underside of the building above) and the lighting of this area become critical ingredients in its success. The rendering submitted to illustrate this space shows this soffit considerably higher than the plans or sections.
- The public entry to the courtyard is 6m wide but only 1 storey high at the street and is under the building for 32m only 12m of which is 2 storeys high.
- The loading dock in SW corner directly adjacent to the public through site link gives a very poor street presentation – a gaping void to Cross Street. It is questionable whether this is necessary to serve such a small amount of retail.

CONCLUSION

The activation of Cross Street, the through site link and the public open space within the development are all supported.

The issue of height and bulk (discussed elsewhere) and consequent overshadowing) need further consideration.

The configuration of the courtyard, its activation and undercroft areas need further development.

The loading dock facing the main street frontage (nearly 7.5m at Cross Street) should be removed or reconsidered so that its impact is lessened.

4.5 ISSUES OF DETAIL

COMMENTS

Some issues in the documentation require further clarification.

- The retail tenancies have some very deep plan areas. There is no indication as to the type of retail (except hints towards restaurant/café and associated outdoor seating). If restaurants are envisaged then issues of kitchen exhaust and service delivery need to be resolved.
- The vertical slot windows shown on the elevations (the southern corners of the east and west elevations) are not shown on plan, they work well elevationally but they are on the boundary – can they be built?
- The limestone cladding indicated in the drawings is referred to in the design statement as “lime stone finish” – is it real stone or not? It would be desirable for the public presence of the building that it is real stone.
- Other finishes are also ambiguous. The balustrades and slab edges in the drawings are called up as paint finish, but in the design report they are “integrally coloured concrete”. The latter is the preferred finish.
- The drawings indicate curved glass corners to retail and some apartments. It is important for the quality of the project that these remain curved glass and do not become faceted.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The proposed development makes a positive contribution the Double Bay Town Centre in terms of the new public square, the improved pedestrian network, the architectural quality and the mix of uses.

The basic premise of providing a central open space and redistributed floor space to greater height creates an inherent conflict between the proposal and its immediate context if the existing floor space is to be retained.

This development suffers from a large footprint and envelope that means any low scale options will inevitably be bulky and possibly ill proportioned. The proposal has opportunities for improvement but is on balance is an improvement on the 2009 Ashington proposal in terms of its reduced visual impact on the immediate vicinity and when viewed from the surrounding area, its overshadowing impacts and its contribution to the public domain.

In our review of the Ashington Proposal in 2009 this office recommended that the site could tolerate greater height than the current council controls allow. We recommended a street wall to Cross Street of up to 5 storeys and 2 more storeys set back from this. That is a total of 7 storeys with the minimum set back of the upper two of at least 3 metres.

We still believe this to be appropriate and that the current proposal is consequently too high.

The overly complex skyline with dominant overhangs further adds to the visual impact. A simpler more restrained form would help minimise this impact. In particular the upper level wintergarden elements facing Cross Street should be removed and the corner drum elements and their overhanging roofs simplified.

The amount of glazing on the upper floor apartments is questioned. The detail resolution of these highly visible components and their internal amenity needs further development. The visual impact of these elements needs careful consideration.

The public square within the development and its through site linkages are highly desirable. The amenity of the square in terms of activation and the amount of undercroft space need further development.

The loading dock as a primary and negative element on the Cross Street frontage is not supported. It is too wide and prominent and needs further design resolution or relocation.

There are a range of other detailed issues mentioned in this review that need clarification and response.

We believe the proposal in its current form would need to address the issues raised in our report prior to approval.