

**UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE**  
**Response to the Urban Design Consultative Group Meeting #2**  
**Student Accommodation Project DA11/1063 & DA11/1065**

SEPP 65 Principle	UDCG Comment 16 November 2011 (Meeting #2)	UoN Strategic Response	UoN Technical Response
<b>Generally</b>	<p>Following the submission of this proposal at the October meeting and the subsequent report of the Panel the University requested a further discussion to cover issues on which the panel had not been briefed at the first meeting. The application itself was unchanged but the applicant presented information covering the strategic planning issues that had been addressed before proceeding to the design of the buildings. These included the process of site selection, development of the Precinct Masterplan, the car parking strategy for the campus and the subject site, a 'Site Constraints Analysis', and the options considered for buildings on the site itself. It was noted that the Masterplan as developed for the University had proposed a series of interconnected buildings of varying heights disposed around four semi-enclosed courtyard spaces, with a 'hard-landscaped' central pedestrian circulation spine linking all the buildings.</p> <p>It is noted that the 'Concept Analysis' of the Precinct Masterplan then registered concern about a number of its features, including the limitation of views from the buildings, removal of significant trees, and a perception that the configuration of buildings would produce an outcome more appropriate to an 'urban' context. As to satisfying the needs of future student residents the University advised that the ambience of the traditional 'college' with its courtyards was no longer considered to be the most desirable model. With factors such as greater mobility, many overseas students, the need for accommodating a significant proportion of students with partners, and their different lifestyle expectations it had been concluded that a more 'open' configuration of the buildings would be preferable.</p> <p>These considerations lead to exploration of various options for a group of separate taller buildings in a more open landscape, including up to six or more 'towers', with cars being accommodated in a separate detached car-park structure. These options as presented all proposed 'Y' shaped plans accommodating a mix of single and shared student rooms, in buildings limited to 8 storeys in height for reasons of economy related to BCA requirements. This process lead to the solution as</p>	<p>The University appreciated the opportunity to brief the UDCG on the design and project evolution since project initiation. This allowed a discussion on project definition, masterplanning and strategic alignment.</p> <p>The masterplan concept proposed three sets of interconnected podium clusters with nine 25 meter towers protruding above. The configuration of these buildings formed semi-enclosed courtyards with an urbanised landscape.</p> <p>Based on expert advice on contemporary student accommodation the University continued to develop its masterplan building configuration, avoiding semi-enclosed courtyards and cloistered colleges.</p> <p>The desirable contemporary solution is a more socially inviting and inclusive model where the spaces between buildings are open and generous, view corridors between buildings are plentiful, personal security is increased by overlooking onto open spaces, and access to sunlight and breezes is enhanced.</p> <p>Callaghan is an open environment with buildings placed as individual elements within the bushland setting, providing a sense of visual transparency with ease of movement across campus. It is acknowledged that these characteristics, unique to the University of Newcastle, should be retained and enhanced. The proposed DA design purposefully avoids models that are better suited to urban campuses and outcomes that are incompatible with the existing context at Callaghan.</p> <p>The University's DA proposal has reduced the number of buildings to four, eliminating the lower podium elements with the express aim of opening up the ground plane, achieving improvements aligned with the project principles, equitable and comprehensive social interaction and strategic alignment.</p>	

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	<p>proposed, with four residential towers which it was argued resulted in less site coverage, 'more permeability', reduction in overshadowing and maximizing of views from upper storeys.</p> <p>The additional information was appreciated and was valuable in giving a better understanding of the processes that had lead to the design as presented and reviewed at the previous meeting. After further discussion of the issues, the Panel considered that there it could not resilie from the conclusions reached at the October meeting, but that it may be helpful to succinctly clarify its concerns.</p> <p><i>The following comments should be read as complementary to the more detailed October report:</i></p>		
<b>Context</b>	It is not at issue that the site chosen is appropriate for its purpose and consistent with the sound strategies for presented at the meeting for physical development of the University.	Noted and agreed	
<b>Scale</b>	See below under Built Form	Ditto	
<b>Built Form</b>	<p>The most critical concern goes to the form and layout of the residential blocks. With the four very similar buildings, the same in their plan layout and height but varying only in relation to details and external materials and finishes, it is very difficult to create any sense of individual identity. It is appreciated that the 'Y' –plan is an economical layout for servicing, but it does result in relatively bulky visual impact from all viewing angles, whether from within or close to the site or from more distant positions. The elevations and photo-montage views tend to confirm this reading. From the more distant viewpoints the profile of the building forms does not seem to have empathy with the site. The overall image presented would be that of the type of large-scale high-rise housing development, which is characteristic of many mid-20<sup>th</sup> century expanding cities, rather than the more intimate and individual forms that traditionally distinguish residential development on academic sites.</p>	<p>Residential development on academic sites varies widely from identical repetition to strongly unique. There is not a distinguishable or identifiable singular type.</p> <p><b><i>Inference that the masterplan design offers a more attractive design solution:</i></b></p> <p>As mentioned under the General Comments above the masterplan concept proposed a mass urbanised approach with formal courtyards, large podium clusters with a total of nine towers each with an effective height of 25 meters. This was seen by the University as a lesser solution for reasons outlined in the UoN response to the first UDCG meeting dated 19 Oct 2011.</p> <p>The masterplan solution included the following aspects that were avoided in the proposed scheme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-enclosed, gated and cloistered communities</li> <li>• Sterilisation of deep planting</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Inference to a lack of individual identity:</i></b></p> <p>Ground floor elevational treatments in combination with building specific landscape treatments provide legible differentiation between buildings at the ground plane (see UoN comments in response to the 191011 UDCG Meeting notes).</p> <p>The buildings are meant to be read as an overall composition as opposed to vigorously individual. Many academic examples of the repetitive architectural technique exist.</p> <p>The four buildings vary in relation to detail, external materials and finishes. The buildings will be identified at ground level by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan configuration, reflecting the facilities provided.</li> <li>• Ground floor fenestration</li> <li>• Variety of landscape arrangements</li> <li>• Graphic design</li> </ul>

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	<p>The Panel discussed at length the ‘Precinct Masterplan’ presented to the meeting: whilst it is appreciated that the plan configuration as illustrated is diagrammatic, this general approach to the design would appear to offer the basis of an attractive solution. Although the option was abandoned in favour of the submitted scheme, insufficient information was presented to convince the Panel that it could not have produced a far preferable solution. The considerable potential for variations in height, building forms, access arrangements, and landscape design appears very appealing. Adoption of the ‘Masterplan’ concept would also overcome concerns as to the unwelcoming scale of the 8-storey tower buildings in the open landscape. Whilst it is agreed that conservation of significant trees is desirable, and the riparian zone is critical, any development of this density will irrevocably change the nature of the site. The tall separated buildings as proposed would tend to be more dominant in the landscape, and would not necessarily result in a better overall outcome than a combination of lower building forms, even if there were to be marginally less of the existing vegetation retained.</p> <p>The location of car-parking in an isolated building remains of concern, and the earlier comments of the Panel stand. There may well be economic arguments in favour of the separate structure, and if so these need to be weighed against disadvantages in relation to amenity, security and possibly on-going management costs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Major environmental impact</li> <li>Removal of all trees</li> <li>Large development footprint</li> <li>Highly urbanised approach</li> </ul> <p>The purpose of tabling the masterplan was to demonstrate the robust analytical design development process that has taken place.</p> <p>The DA proposal provides an open, permeable, social, environmentally sustainable solution that allows the retention and improvement of the University's unique bushland character.</p> <p><b><i>The UDCG infers that the provision of four buildings each of eight storeys and each with a similar plan configuration generates an outcome equivalent to post-war residential expansion:</i></b></p> <p>The proposal not only responds to the project requirements, it sensitively and skilfully incorporates the environment, making excellent use of campus land which is a limited natural resource.</p> <p>The proposal incorporates high quality, environmentally sensitive, contemporary student accommodation with extensive benchmarking with similar projects highly successful elsewhere in the sector.</p> <p>This development symbolises a commitment to growth and development of accommodation on the University's Callaghan campus in alignment with its 10-15 year strategic planning.</p>	<p>Colour coding differences provide a palette of materials, finishes and colours that are regarded as a valid design technique with other recent student accommodation precedent projects that have received strong support in the sector.</p> <p>The proposed buildings were rotated to suit the topography, to retain as many significant trees as possible, to present building entries at the nodal interfaces and to present a variety of building surface and forms to those approaching and moving within the precinct.</p> <p><b><i>Inference that the building plan shape generates bulk:</i></b></p> <p>The Y plan shape generates the perception of reduced bulk and a dynamic building form (in comparison to a square or rectangular plan shape) when perceived by a viewer moving through the landscape in proximity to the development. The Y plan actually guides the eye through the spaces between buildings and into the landscape.</p> <p>In close proximity the majority of viewing angles hide the third spoke of the building, creating the illusion of only a two spokes.</p> <p>The building's spokes are limited to a single apartment width resulting in a slim and minimal ground plane footprint.</p> <p>The buildings are described by the UDCG as “towers” but due to their plan form and minimal width the proportion of the proposed buildings does not result in a tower appearance.</p> <p>The site has a significant slope and the buildings have been carefully placed from the top of the site near the Ring Road to the lower terrain near the riparian zone. Consequently, the ground floor entries and the tops of the buildings cascade down the site. There is a significant separation between the buildings. Viewed from close by or anywhere on the surrounding campus, the four buildings will not appear to be at a contiguous height.</p> <p>The facade design has been carefully developed with the use of a variety of horizontal planes and thin edges which protrude beyond the building form. The proposed buildings sit comfortably within the scale of the existing tall trees.</p>

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			<p><b><i>Inference that the building is not empathic with the site:</i></b></p> <p>The following design strategies generate empathic outcomes by enhancing the existing character of the site:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant tree retention.</li> <li>• Minimisation of building footprint</li> <li>• Minimisation of vehicular movement &amp; road pavement</li> <li>• Preservation and enhancement of riparian corridor</li> <li>• Maximisation of open space and building separation</li> <li>• Enhancing existing pedestrian corridors</li> <li>• Development of the student accommodation precinct in concurrence with strategic planning outcomes</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Inference that the image is characteristic of a mid-20th century high rise housing development rather than intimate and individual forms that traditionally distinguish residential forms on academic sites:</i></b></p> <p>The project does not meet the definition of a high rise development which contains a minimum of 12 storeys.</p> <p>The proposal is a series of 8 storey residential buildings interlaced with landscape space.</p> <p>The design approach provides the required accommodation density on a reduced footprint with maximum site permeability and minimum cut and fill.</p> <p>Traditional residential college forms are no longer typical of contemporary student accommodation.</p> <p><b><i>Inference that the project should be developed incrementally which will result in fascinating variety and ambience:</i></b></p> <p>Incremental development does not guarantee alternate design outcomes. The University has an immediate demand for this volume of accommodation which cannot be met by a staged development.</p>

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			<p><b><i>Inference that the visual and symbolic impact has not been considered:</i></b></p> <p>The visual impact of the development has been carefully considered. Review of the visual impact of the proposed development has been articulated in previous correspondence indicating limited to nil visual impact from the closest vantage points (See DA11/1065 visual studies).</p>
<b>Density</b>	The relatively high density is appropriate in the context of the planned future expansion of the University, and the desire to maximize accessibility to other parts of the campus.	Noted and agreed	
<b>Resource, Energy and Water Efficiency</b>	The matters raised in the October report could be readily addressed as the design is developed. No further comments are made at this stage.	Noted and agreed	
<b>Landscape</b>	See comment under Built Form	Noted	
<b>Amenity</b>	No further comment	Noted	
<b>Safety and Security</b>	No further comment	Noted	
<b>Social Dimensions</b>	The disposition and grouping of bedrooms with dining/kitchen facilities, together with the provision of a communal room at each level appears likely to create reasonable social grouping and interaction amongst student residents on each particular floor, although the panel defers to expertise in this area as to the optimum size and mix of such groups. Concerns as to security and access between floors raised in the earlier report should be addressed.	<p><b><i>Support for the proposal in relation to the social strategy is noted.</i></b></p> <p>A variety of residential living arrangements are provided to reflect the diversity of students and their needs.</p> <p>As opposed to residential flat buildings of similar scale, inter-floor access is required for University social interaction. This highlights one of the key differences between residential flat buildings and student accommodation.</p> <p>The proposal provides secure access to the ground floor of each building and security provision to upper floors. It must be noted that the security requirements are carefully balanced with the University's social requirements.</p>	

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<b>Aesthetics</b>	The design has been developed by respected architectural and landscape consultants and the aesthetic quality of the buildings viewed as isolated works of architecture is not at issue, nor is the character of the landscape when considered as a complement to the design approach. Concern goes rather to the broader question of the overall visual and symbolic impact of the development for the reasons discussed above.		<p><b><i>The UDCG support of the architectural and landscape design is noted.</i></b></p> <p>The combination of careful building placement, articulated finishes, interesting building form, and strong core design principles provide an attractive and appropriate solution for the campus.</p>
<b>UDCG Recommendation</b>	The application cannot be supported for the reasons set out above and in the October report of the Panel. The essence of these concerns relates not to architectural character, detailed planning or density, nor to the physical level of amenity for future residents, but rather to the overriding issue of whether a different design approach would not result in a more sympathetic social and environmental outcome for this important site	<p><b><i>The general support of the UDCG for the architectural character, detailed planning, density and the physical level of amenity for residents provided by the proposal is noted.</i></b></p> <p>The social and environmental outcomes are two of the project's primary drivers. The University and its expert advisors prioritised and carefully considered these matters during extensive pre-planning, consultation, definition, masterplanning and design development.</p> <p>The proposal is a conscious design approach to give each student a unique sense of living. The bushland campus is a precious commodity and the opportunity with this is to provide a point of difference away from internalised courtyards and urban constructs and provide students a high level of amenity, privacy and outlook.</p> <p>The UDCG's preference for a more urban design approach involving lower buildings in a podium courtyard configuration would result in less open landscaped space, a diminution in the number of significant trees on the site, reduced view corridors, reduced access to sunlight and reduced cross-campus access. Such a solution is contrary to the recommendations of the University's expert student accommodation consultants and extensive University consultation.</p> <p>The submitted proposal represents a sensitive site driven response and a development that is entirely unique to its context, leading ultimately to a successful and compatible development.</p> <p>Like most successful developments, the proposal is the product of the layering of many complex environmental, functional, social and contextual factors, each unique to this proposal.</p>	