

8 Myrtle Street, Prospect

"Domus Citriadora"

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Prepared for Blacktown City Council

Independent Urban Design Report

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1 The brief

The brief for this report from Blacktown Council requested the following tasks to be done:

- Provide independent advice on the overall design and bulk/scale of the development proposal, including any appropriate recommendations, should any non-compliances or issues be identified;
- Provide independent advice on the overall design and bulk/scale of the development proposal, giving consideration to the zoning history of the site;
- Determine whether the bulk/scale of the development responds appropriately to the local context (i.e. being the broad suburban context/setting in which the site is placed, not simply just the adjoining/nearby development). The assessment should have regard not only for the current local context, but also for the planned character of the area in the foreseeable future;
- Identify whether the design and scale (in terms of bulk and height) responds appropriately to the immediately adjoining developments; and
- Determine whether the proposal satisfies the 'design quality principles' of SEPP 65, in particular Principle 1: Context, Principle 2: Scale and Principle 3: Built Form.

This report addresses the above tasks under the following headings:

- Bulk/scale
 - non compliances
 - in relation to the zoning history of the site
 - in relation to the broad suburban context
 - in relation to adjoining land uses
- SEPP 65 Design quality
 - Built form
 - Landscape
 - Aesthetics

The SEPP 65 principles of Context and Scale are addressed in the bulk/scale section. Landscape and Aesthetics are added to the brief because they are intrinsic to appropriate built form and it is not possible to consider some of the design quality principles without reference to others.

2 Bulk/scale

2.1 non compliances

Council's assessment of the proposal shows that the proposal complies with the local bulk/scale planning controls. The assessment is supported.

2.2 in relation to the zoning history of the site

Historically the site was zoned for an industrial use which gives the site a unique history. An industrial zoning is an anachronism given its incompatibility with the surrounding residential area and the local neighbourhood shopping centre.

Clearly, Council rezoned the site to the current medium density zone in order to provide a compatible use with surroundings.

Under the current planning controls, the density of the permissible residential development on the site is significantly higher than the adjoining single dwelling residential zone. It is understood that this came about as part of the incentive to change the industrial zoning.

There is a reasonable expectation given the planning controls that a development of the sort proposed is appropriate subject to merit.

A previous development proposal was approved for higher density residential development. It is noted that in many respects the proposal is superior to the approved residential development application on the site (for example, the proposal has greater clarity in its arrangement with a central internal street and the quality of the architectural design is better).

2.3 in relation to the broad suburban context

The broad suburban context is characterised by single houses, mostly single storey and with landscaped front gardens. The proposal is mainly 3 and 5 storey apartments with extensive common landscaping.

The proposal has a contrasting built form and scale compared to the general suburban context. The question is whether such a contrast is acceptable and appropriate. It is normal for a village centre to have a degree of contrast to its broader suburban context. Typically, a village centre or neighbourhood centre has larger footprint buildings, one or two storeys higher. So the 2-3 storey apartment buildings are acceptable and appropriate.

The question is whether the three 5 storey buildings are acceptable and appropriate. The unusual circumstance of the proposal is that it is on a large site adjacent a large site containing the shopping centre (which is primarily one large supermarket building in an expanse of carparking). The large site gives an opportunity for higher buildings of larger scale because the visual impacts can be mitigated by locating intervening 2-3 storey buildings between existing houses and the shopping centre and providing substantial areas for landscaping.

A further consideration is whether the 5 storey buildings should be reduced to 3 or 4 storeys, or the fifth floor set back from all sides in order to reduce the scale and bulk of the proposal. On balance, it is considered unnecessary to do this because the visual impacts are well moderated by the following:

- To the north the 5 storey buildings are separated from existing suburban development by Myrtle St and a 3 storey apartment building and large areas of landscaping.

- To the east the 5 storey buildings are separated from existing adjoining suburban development by 2-3 storey apartments (that have an appearance and scale not dissimilar to townhouses), a garden setback zone and a wide internal street with street trees.
- To the south the 5 storey buildings are separated from existing suburban development by a very wide area of open space for stormwater as well as landscaping on the site.
- To the west the 5 storey buildings are separated from suburban development by a large supermarket shopping centre and a main road.

In conclusion, while the proposal contains buildings that are higher than the broad suburban context and do contrast in scale and bulk, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable and appropriate because visual impacts are mitigated on the broad suburban context by the size of the site, the location of the site, the proposed arrangement of built form on the site and the extensive landscaping proposed.

2.4 in relation to adjoining land uses

The land use to the west of the site is a neighbourhood shopping centre comprising a supermarket/service station and car parking and a small group of shops on the corner of Myrtle Street and Flushcombe Road. The centre has poor amenity due to lacklustre building design, predominant hard surfaces and a lack of trees. The proposal provides an improvement to this context.

To the north and south, the site is well separated by a street and a wide grassed drainage way from single house residential development. The proposal is sufficiently separated to mitigate impacts to the north and south.

The land use to the east of the site is residential comprising single storey, single family homes. There is some tree screening along the boundary. **This eastern interface is the main adjoining land use affected by the proposal.** Generally rear yards of these houses face the shared boundary. This interface has been carefully considered as follows:

- The controls on the subject site allow for 5 storeys with a 3 storey interface along the eastern boundary. The proposal complies with the controls.
- The proposal further reduces the building bulk by stepping down to 2 storeys towards the eastern boundary with a setback of 6m to the eastern boundary.
- If the site was zoned for 2 storey townhouses, the required setback would be 2m to the eastern boundary. It is considered that the proposal is better than such a "lesser" development intensity zoning.
- I have walked along Rydal St to observe the interface between the site and the line of dwellings along the eastern boundary and consider that the 5 storey buildings proposed for the subject site would not be readily seen from the rear yards because of the angle of view being screened by the intervening 2-3 storey buildings proposed along the eastern part of the subject site. The higher bulkier buildings are appropriately internal to the site and adjacent to the supermarket.
- By stepping down the 2-3 storey apartment buildings on the east side of the site and by the window design of the eastern facades,

overlooking potential is well controlled and overshadowing is within acceptable limits. It is noted that overshadowing occurs after 2.30pm across the rear yards in midwinter but does not occur at the equinox.

- The proposed apartment buildings as they face the eastern boundary have the appearance of townhouses.
- Planting is shown in the proposal within the setback zone of the the proposal. This is considered sufficient. The householders of Rydal St can plant further screen planting if they wish.

3 SEPP 65 Design quality

In the issues addressed below reference is made to the relevant section of the NSW Residential Flat Design Code (RFDC) which is the code that provides guidance in applying the SEPP 65 Design Quality Principles.

3.1 Built form

The layout of the buildings on the site is generally well done. There is a clearly legible roadway that runs north-south through the site and terminates with a view of the open space/drainage land at the southern end. The buildings have a range of heights that respond well to the edge conditions of the site. However, there are a number of site planning and building design issues that should be addressed as follows:

Entry gates

The need for the gates at the entry is questioned. An open entry is more compatible with the physical and social nature of the neighbourhood. Gated communities are to be discouraged for the social well-being of the wider community. (RFDC p56 Safety)

Recommendation 1: delete the entry gates.

Streetscape

The internal street is on deep soil providing a valuable opportunity to put street trees along the street thereby softening the built environment, providing shade for cars and pedestrians and lowering the urban heat effect caused by hard surfaces. The objective should be to achieve at least 50% tree canopy cover of the street and parking spaces. The trees should be planted as street trees and not be contained within low walls. (RFDC p20/21 deep soil)

Recommendation 2: Provide sufficient tree planting to provide at least 50% canopy cover once the trees are mature to the internal street and the space between the buildings.

Retaining walls and pedestrian ramps

The pedestrian ramps and retaining walls lining the west side of the internal north south road state Street emphasise the hard surfaces of the development and provide poor amenity. The open space between the 5 storey buildings needs to be as close to grade as possible especially as it is an artificial level created by the roof of a car park. To substantially reduce the numerous ramps and retaining walls all three of the 5 storey apartment buildings should be lowered by at least one metre or so into the

ground. (RFDC p 45 Fences and Walls, p46/47 Landscape Design, p60 Building Entry)

Recommendation 3: Lower the three 5 storey apartment buildings by at least 1 metre and resolve the walkway between the visitor parking spaces and the buildings to be landscaped on both sides.

Car ramps to visitor parking on east side

There are two visitor parking areas for the eastern row of 2-3 storey apartment buildings. Each parking area has an overly large entry ramp. The ramp to the south can be kept wide for truck turning (addressed below) but the northern ramp should be narrowed to a single lane and the remaining area used for deep soil planting of a tree and garden. (RFDC p62/63 Parking, p65 Vehicle Access)

Recommendation 4: Narrow the drive entry to the visitor parking between Blocks F and G and provide more landscaping. Provide for truck turning via the entry drive to the visitor parking area between Blocks E and F.

Second vehicle entrance from the existing roundabout

Remove the second vehicle entry as there is adequate access to the site from Myrtle Street and more space is needed for deep soil landscaping (addressed below). (RFDC p65 Vehicle Access)

Recommendation 5: Delete second vehicle entry to the site from the roundabout.

Truck turning area

There should not need to be a dedicated truck turning area at the southern end of the site. This space could be better used for landscaped area (see below). Truck turning could be accommodated via the entry to the visitor parking between Block E and Block F. Trucks need only reverse a few metres to pick up garbage from Blocks D and E. (RFDC p65 Vehicle Access)

Recommendation 6: Delete the truck turning area at the southern end of the site and landscape that area.

Corridors

The internal corridors in the 5 storey buildings are long and need some further modulation such as recessing the front doors of the larger apartments and providing sidelight translucent windows to their front doors. (RFDC p79 Internal Circulation)

Recommendation 7: Provide greater internal modulation to the corridors of the 5 storey buildings.

Entrances to the 5 storey buildings

The sense of arrival to the 5 storey buildings from the internal road needs to be improved. A direct axial entrance needs to be designed for each building. The proposal has a planter in front of each entry. A planter/garden including a major tree in deep soil needs to be planted to one side of the entry path. The recommendation to lower these buildings by 1m will also assist in resolving the current poor entry condition. (RFDC p60 Building Entry, p64 Pedestrian Access)

Recommendation 8: Make the external entry paths to the three 5 storey buildings direct by locating planting to one side of axial entries.

Storage

Storage is an important issue for apartment living. Check that the larger apartments have sufficient internal storage. (RFDC p82 Storage)

Recommendation 9: Check that the 3 bed apartments have adequate internal storage.

3.2 Landscape

Open space contributes significantly to the quality of life of the new residents. It is understood that the open space/drainage area south of the site was originally part of the site and was subdivided off some time ago. It is also understood that Council considers that the open space required to be provided by the site is satisfied by this subdivision. However, the drainage area is fenced off from the development and not available to the new residents for use. It is important that new residents have some outdoor landscaped to use if not the full amount that would normally be required given the history of the subdivision.

Landscaping

There needs to be at least 200sqm of deep soil (no structure under) with a minimum of 10m dimension at least in one part of the site. This could be in place of the truck turning area or between Blocks A and B. A common BBQ area and a children's playground is needed. The preferred location is the truck turning area because of its access to sunlight and proximity to the drainage open space outlook. (RFDC p44 Deep Soil Zones)

Recommendation 10: Provide at least 200sqm contiguous area of deep soil landscaping of min dimension 10m and provide a BBQ area and children's playground (with sunlight access in midwinter). The preferred location is in place of the proposed truck turning area.

Courtyards between Apartment buildings

Each large common courtyard between the apartment buildings on the western side of the site needs at least one deep soil planted tree in a central or near central location within the courtyard. Consider any reduction in car parking to be balanced by providing one car share parking space per 5 spaces lost. (RFDC p44 Deep Soil Zones)

Recommendation 11: Provide one deep soil tree in each courtyard between Blocks D and C, Blocks C and B, and Blocks B and A. Deep soil has no structure under. Where car parking spaces are reduced – consider replacing every 5 car spaces with one car share space (e.g. Go-Get).

3.3 Aesthetics

The three 5 storey buildings have too much sameness to their design. Visual differentiation should be further addressed through design variation of external building elements. For example, differentiation of balcony and balustrade treatments could provide further subtle variation. Consider providing ground level private courtyards to the ground level apartments of Block C to enable some design differentiation between the buildings at ground level. (RFDC p89 Facades)

Recommendation 12: Provide further design differentiation between the three 5 storey apartment buildings. For example through variation of

balcony and balustrade treatments, and provision of private courtyards to ground level apartments of Block C.

Quality Assurance

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