



level 3 / 1 booth street
annandale nsw 2038
p 61 2 8557 6466
f 61 2 8557 6477
mail@kennedyassociates.com.au
www.kennedyassociates.com.au
Nominated Architect State Kennedy Registration Number 5828

Consultant Peer Review - Report

Bowden Brae Village Normanhurst

Proposed Stage 1 Concept Masterplan

At the request of Uniting Age Care, I have undertaken an independent urban design peer review of the Stage 1 DA Village Concept Proposal prepared by PTW Architects for the redevelopment of the Bowden Brae Retirement Village at 40-50 Pennant Hills Road, Normanhurst and currently subject of a Development Application before Hornsby Shire Council.

The work I have done has included:

- site visits
- meeting with the design team at PTW
- reviewing the design of the proposed development in terms of its overall site planning, massing, streetscape, external appearance, impacts and architectural expression
- reviewing Hornsby Council Controls, particularly the Hornsby Draft DCP as it applies to residential flat buildings
- providing preliminary feedback and making recommendations to PTW regarding the project
- reviewing the design, as amended, resulting from those recommendations

Given the long history of the Bowden Brae Retirement Village, as well as the fact that the project was well advanced when I was engaged and there had already been in principle support from Hornsby Shire Council for the proposed development, I did not review the development in terms of its appropriateness from first principles but rather reviewed the scheme from an urban design perspective in terms of its physical competence and quality.

Therefore, the core questions I addressed were:

- does the proposed development occupy its site in an physically intelligent and environmentally appropriate manner
- does it provide an appropriate response to the site constraints
- does it provide good access to and movement within and through the site
- does it provide an appropriate built form
- does it provide appropriate public and communal space
- does it achieve an acceptable fit within its context
- does it achieve an acceptable standard of amenity for its occupants
- does it maintain a reasonable level of amenity for its neighbours
- is it good design

In my opinion the project does meet each of the above criteria.

The site benefits from its occupation of almost the entire block defined by Pennant Hills Road, Frith Avenue and Jasmine Road and its adjacency to Normanhurst Boys High School (nil impacts), but is then constrained by the significant fall across the site (nearly 20 metres), the substantial number of existing trees on the site, the impacts of and inability to provide access off Pennant Hills Road, the need to retain and provide reasonable curtilage to the existing dwelling on the corner of Frith Avenue and Jasmine Road, the need to retain and work with a number of existing buildings on the site, the need to respect the existing residential character of Frith Avenue, the need to achieve a high level of internal amenity and solar access to both individual units and public spaces and the necessity of achieving a yield that ensures the financial viability of the project without undermining the equal imperative of good place making and delivering future residents a high standard of public and private lifestyle.

In addressing these issues the project provides a variation on a perimeter block site model that has been modified and adapted to accommodate existing structures on the site, retain a significant number of existing trees, respect the existing house, address the fall in the land and minimise the impacts of Pennant Hills Road.

Key to the overall strategy is its approach to way finding, massing and scale.

The development, which can be accessed from each of the 4 street frontages, utilises the existing entry points in Jasmine Road and Frith Avenue to create two principal points of entry on opposite sides of the site, with several other informal access points.

The design's approach to entry, way finding, individuality, communal open space, and the manner with which the northernmost building 'bends' to address the remaining house and, in doing so, also provides two additional routes through the site, are all well considered and successful.

Each of the three new key building masses varies in height and shape and to a lesser degree orientation. Each addresses a different corner or interface and each, through its stepped massing, reflects the shifting topography of the site. The development utilises the significant fall in the land to produce a series of highly articulated building masses. This results in a variety of building types and shapes, multiple outlooks and orientations and a range of internal environments.

The north eastern streetscape to Frith Avenue remains largely unchanged, due to the retention of the existing buildings located along the street.

Through the above strategy none of the proposed new buildings have a street frontage of more than about 60%-70% of the overall street frontage and, whilst the proposed buildings are overall generally 5 storeys in height, the creation of a highly articulated and stepped massing reduces the overall visual impact of that massing so that the visual character of each building will generally be 4 storeys or less.

Moreover, from what is shown in the limited amount of detailed fenestration undertaken on the project to date (being primarily the building facing Frith Avenue), it can be seen that the project has been designed to further address these issues (bulk and height) through the use of a tripartite massing involving a distinct and clearly articulated base (2 storeys), middle (2 storeys) and top (attic). These layers are achieved through a number of mechanisms including shifting of grids, off setting of solids and voids and the clear separation of the top attic level. The buildings will be further articulated through the use of balconies and louvres. This approach also reflects the ideas within the Hornsby Draft DCP with respect to the massing and articulation of residential flat development.

This design approach will assist in not only reducing the apparent bulk, size and monolithic character of the development but also in providing strong visual interest and a sense of individuality for each building.

Also critical to the success of any development, and especially one on the north shore, is the quality of the open space and landscape provided. Whilst it is too early to comment on the detailed landscape design, the overall approach to site planning, including the creation of a variety of spaces, the retention of significant trees, the provision of multiple vistas and the degree of visual permeability into and through the site all provide a strong basis from which to achieve a successful landscape outcome.

All of the above demonstrate a strong and successful approach to the design of the project and in my opinion are confirmation that:

- the site organisation is reasonable
- the site planning is appropriate
- the locations of main entry points and service roads are appropriate
- the approach to bulk, scale and massing is reasonable

That is, with respect to its treatment of its site, the project is well founded and well designed.

The remaining core issue is then the relationship of the project to its external context. Given its somewhat unique location the context is, in fact, fairly limited and really only consists of the properties and areas immediately adjacent the site in Frith Avenue, Jasmine Road and to a lesser extent Pennant Hills Road.

The relationship to Pennant Hills Road and Jasmine Road are relatively straightforward, with none of the buildings facing those streets proposing anything radically significant or posing any questions other than the overall suitability of a four or five storey building in that location, an issue that is addressed below.

Therefore, in the end, the most significant contextual issue to consider is the relationship of the proposed development to the existing houses in Frith Avenue.

There have been a number of submissions on this issue relating to both streetscape and traffic. I am not qualified to comment on the impacts the development will have on traffic in Frith Avenue and will limit my comments to the streetscape, visual and amenity aspects of the proposed development.

In considering the impacts on Frith Avenue I note that:

- the existing UCA buildings facing Frith Ave, although 2 storeys in style, achieve up to 3 storeys in actual height as a result of the fall in the site
- because of both the way the land falls and the way the road changes direction, the most visually significant location regarding urban design impacts will be the northern corner of the site, at the bend in Frith Avenue
- because of the significant fall in the site, the buildings in that location may potentially have a greater visual impact / dominance than would occur on a level site
- the other area where the proposed development will have a significant visual impact on Frith Avenue will be the building facing north west onto the street, particularly at its southern end adjacent the existing dwelling on the corner of Frith Avenue and Jasmine Road

To address these issues the project has been designed:

- to maintain a clearly defined separation between the existing buildings and the new development
- to replicate the existing stepping of the facades down Frith Avenue
- to step down at each of its corners
- to be only 2 storeys at the each of the corners
- to ensure that the 5 storey portion only occupies approximately 50% of the overall north western street frontage to Frith Avenue
- to provide a highly articulated and varied facade including, as previously described, a tripartite compositional layering of the facade

These are all appropriate responses to the issues and context and evidence of good design.

However, the question remains, is it reasonable to propose a 4 or 5 storey building adjacent a predominantly one and two storey residential area.

There is no single correct or universally accepted answer to this question, which continues to be raised wherever medium and high density development is proposed in existing low density areas.

In considering this issue I think it is relevant to note that there are a number of other locations in Hornsby Municipality where the proposed zoning (R4) allows high density (5 storeys) on one side of a street and only low density (2 storeys) on the other, for example Fisher Avenue, Pennant Hills. That is, it appears that the Council have not only recognised the need to provide high density housing in previously low density areas but also have accepted that buildings of up to 5 storeys can be successfully accommodated in those locations.

This fits with the approach being taken by a number of other councils, for example Burwood Council, which have also zoned for and allowed 5 storey development immediately adjacent low density development.

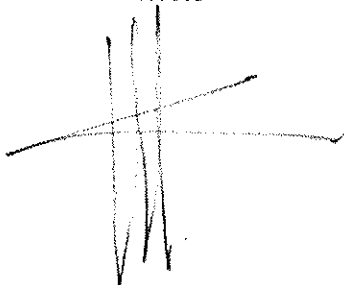
That is, the evidence is that there is a growing consensus within statutory planning that the proposed scale of the buildings and the resulting interface between the two scales of development is not only reasonable but, in appropriate locations, to be expected.

In my opinion this is a reasonable approach to take, especially where the development is as highly articulated and carefully modelled as is the case with this design.

Given the above and taking into consideration the detailed and careful approach to both massing and fenestration evidenced in the Concept Design, I am of the opinion that the proposal does address the streetscape issues associated with Frith Avenue in an acceptable and appropriate manner.

On that basis I am writing to confirm that in my opinion, from an urban design and architectural perspective, the Stage 1 DA Village Concept Proposal prepared by PTW Architects for the redevelopment of the Bowden Brae Retirement Village at 40-50 Pennant Hills Road Normanhurst and currently subject of a Development Application before Hornsby Shire Council, is both appropriate for its site and purpose and well designed.

Kennedy Associates Architects



Steve Kennedy

18 October 2012