

Architectural Review Advisory Panel

Proposal:

Pre-DA Referral (ARAP) - First Stage of Residential Development

Property:

461 Captain Cook Drive WOOLLOOWARE NSW 2230

Applicant:

Bluestone Property Solutions Pty Ltd

File Number:

ARAP13/0001

The following is the report of the Architectural Review Advisory Panel Meeting held on 7 March 2013 at the Administration Centre, Sutherland Shire Council, Eton Street, Sutherland. The report documents the Panel's consideration of the proposed development described above.

“3. Consideration of ARAP13/0001 – Pre-DA Proposal for Stage 1 of the Residential Development at 461 Captain Cook Drive, Woollooware

Council's David Jarvis, Kylie Rourke and Chris Greig outlined the proposal for the Panel, including providing details of Council's relevant codes and policies.

Nick Turner, Gordon Kirkby, Joel Munns, Ben Fairfax, Matt Crews, Bob Perry and Rob Burton addressed the Panel regarding the aims of the proposal and the constraints of the site, including providing details of the master plan that has been approved by the NSW Planning Assessment Commission.

Description of the Site and Proposal

The site is located on the northern side of Captain Cook Drive, adjacent to the Solander playing fields to the west and the Shark's stadium to the east.

The Stage 1 pre-DA residential proposal is for 200-250 apartments, construction of access roads and provision of infrastructure/services and associated landscaping in the south-western quadrant.

The site is within Zones 14 and 15 - Public Open Space and Private Recreation under the provision of Sutherland Shire Local Environmental Plan 2006 (SSLEP 2006).

On 27 August 2012 a Concept Plan (MP10-0229) was approved, subject to conditions, under Part 3A of the EP&A Act, by the Planning Assessment Commission as delegate of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. Conditions of Approval were issued by the DoP&I on 06 September 2012.

Context

1. Significance of broader context

The context of this site is of national significance. The two areas north and south of the mouth of Botany Bay are listed on the Register of the National Estate and their Statements of Heritage Significance include the importance to the landscape, waterscape

and environmental setting. In the development of this proposal, it is important that this heritage is not undermined.

The context of Botany Bay is remarkably different to Sydney Harbour and Pittwater. This needs to be fully described and mapped in order to assess how the proposed development will augment the Bay's character. The topography is relatively flat and unlike Sydney Harbour, the Bay edge is a wide arc making most of the area visible. There are strong defining elements of landscape and built form elements including: the distant silhouette of Sydney CBD; the maritime infrastructure of Port Botany and the airport; the wide and extensive boulevard of Norfolk Island Pines, defining the north – west edge of the Bay; the drama of Captain Cook Bridge, due west; the industrial edge on the south west; and the RAMSAR world heritage mangroves defining the southern edge. This poses particular challenges to the visual quality of the proposed development but it also provides a rich palette of contextual elements.

Given the flat topography that defines Botany Bay, new development needs to apply particular sensitivity to the height, massing, articulation and visual integration of the built form to ensure there is minimal visual intrusion to the wider bay from numerous viewing points and that where it is seen, that it contributes to the visual character of the bay. While it is acknowledged that the proponent has undertaken visual studies, it is not clear how the results of these studies have been applied to this development, other than to reduce the height of some of the buildings. Visual sensitivity involves more than the height of the proposed buildings.

The cultural meanings that are embedded in this Bay are not only broad-scale, but are also deeply layered over time. There is of course the richly layered indigenous heritage of the Bay, but there is also the significance of the 18th century European fascination with the plants collected by Sir Joseph Banks and Solander, resulting in the period between 1770 –1820 being known internationally as *The Era of Australian Plants*. Subsequent layers of use of the Bay for heavy industry are also intriguing and provide an interplay of elements, both day and night, that inform the complexity of the context. Mapping and analysing all these many layers and their residual and contemporary components would provide a contextual impetus for the proposed development to make a significant gesture towards Botany Bay.

To date, the proposal has not referred to the broad scale context. Instead it has focused on finer grain contextual elements such as weatherboard cottages and intimate engagements with the water, sand and mangroves. In this regard, it has not fully recognized the sensitivity and specificity of its context, but also the very real potential the proposal has to capitalize on such unique natural and built resources. Despite its sensitivity to the finer grain detail, the proposal needs to be much more informed by a big idea – a site specific gesture that contributes to the wider context of Botany Bay.

2. Isolation

Due to its isolation from residential networks and transport links, the site presents major challenges in terms of access, permeability, compatibility with adjacent sites, built form legibility, safety and security. To create a vibrant new “centre” or “village”, the “desired future character” must be clearly articulated, not only for the site but also for its edges, adjacent parcels and greater suburban and landscape context. In order to resolve the very real issues of isolation that the approved Concept Plan embodies, the proposal must

demonstrate how it contributes to this desired future character (ie physical and visual) through the provision of clear active links, an appropriate mix of dwelling types, a well considered provision of services required in the area and a high quality public domain network. Importantly, the proposal must invite social and cultural interaction with its context to truly be part of it.

Being part of a larger Concept Master Plan with a seldom used oval at its core, the site also presents real challenges regarding the large distances between different parts of the master plan concurrently being developed. The significant walking distance from the residential precinct to the proposed retail centre, the long street spaces along the perimeter of the scheme and open spaces within the site generally will require high levels of amenity and activity to establish sufficient levels of real and perceived pedestrian safety and comfort for those who reside in the new proposal as well as in adjacent areas.

However, there is little active street edge or amenities proposed for the first residential stage, other than those provided for private use. Although street activation is required as a condition of the PAC Concept Plan approval, only one apartment is accessed directly from the main entry street and no street level apartments are provided along its level western edge at all. With so little activity provided to enliven its adjacent environments and generate real streets, it is difficult to imagine how a safe walking environment will be provided in the current proposal.

Permeability and interaction with context is also compromised by the current proposal, which elevates streets high above its immediate context, preventing view corridors and direct pedestrian links through the new precinct at natural ground level. While the raised podium may allow additional parking and advantageous views out, it may reinforce the private nature of its streets and exclude rather than invite public use. Without the activity and passive surveillance that clear visual links and comfortable public streets provide, internal and external spaces risk being unattractive for pedestrians and potentially unsafe. Considering its isolation from the distant proposed retail mall, this is a major concern. It is therefore recommended that the podium strategy is reviewed entirely.

3. Public domain plan

Considering the importance of providing an amenable, safe and well integrated residential precinct, a comprehensive public domain plan must be developed now and not consigned to later stages. Not only could the proposed first stage otherwise fail to meet the urban design standards required by the PAC, unanticipated events or market slowdown could easily defer future stages, leaving public domain and contextual issues unresolved indefinitely. Also, for similar reasons, the physical conditions of edges and areas of land adjacent to the boundaries of each stage need to be fully described to demonstrate that high levels of amenity, permeability, activity and security are not compromised during the staging of the master plan.

4. Diversity

While the residential precinct is variously described as a “centre” or a “village”, it is not clear how the current proposal will look and work in reality. Villages are open communities with all sorts of uses and activities, with public streets and spaces providing a diversity of housing types, amenities and open spaces. A proposal of the scale should include many scales of buildings and residential dwelling types, designed by a number of architects. Centres on the other hand provide much more to the community than their

own needs and thrive on their strategic interaction with other centres. However, while this is not a physically “gated” community, the proponent made it clear that any communal facilities would be for the residents only. If so, it is in danger of being more like a resort than the kind of public “centre” that has been suggested. It is therefore strongly recommended that more consideration is given to the proposal’s diversity of built form, open spaces and provision of services.

It may also be worth considering alternative development options to increase diversity and the interaction between parts of the concept master plan.

While it has been suggested that the stadium will be the “heart” of the proposed plan - because of the Shark’s strong social status in the community – the stadium is in fact active on only twelve days per year and therefore risks being a lifeless barrier to interaction between the retail and residential components of the scheme. There may be an opportunity to re-think the Sharks Stadium in the way suggested, but this would require a concerted creative effort to open up the facility and perhaps allow pedestrian connection through it between the residential and retail precincts. The Panel accepts that there would be operational constraints to achieve this objective. However, if the stadium remains as proposed, poor connectivity across the entire site will remain a major challenge for all stages of the development.

To better resolve issues relating to connectivity, diversity and isolation, the proponents may still consider alternatives. If the existing stadium site were to be exchanged with the residential site for example, much greater interaction between living and active retail would be possible. Failing this, if some of the residential fabric were to be remodelled and integrated into the retail site, greater activity, diversity and interaction could result. Considering the environmental and commercial advantages to the scheme, it may not be too late or too difficult to revise the proposed strategy.

Scale

The architect’s statement refers to precincts undergoing transition and requiring a considered response to the scale of the existing development in order to achieve the scale needed for ‘*the desired future character of the area*’. However ‘the desired future character of the area’ described, only focuses on the elements within the site boundary. Without a clear understanding of the scale and character of the whole context however, it is difficult to assess the proposal in terms of scale.

It is notable that the proposed scale of the development is significant and without any precedent in this area. Notwithstanding this, there are a number of ways to integrate the proposed scale in an existing relatively unbuilt area.

First, it is possible to repeat one of the contextual elements in the Bay; the north–western boulevard of multiple rows of Norfolk Island Pines that create such a strong character to that part of the Bay. It is possible to bring Norfolk Island Pine planting along both sides of Captain Cook Drive from the Solander Fields, past the proposed development and along to Woollooware Road. The strength of this planting would provide an important backdrop to the proposed development, as well as creating an aesthetically pleasing experience for people using Captain Cook Drive. This massing of tall trees could also define the western and eastern boundaries for the development by penetrating along the current western boundary in association with the car park for Solander Fields and along the eastern

boundary along the extended Woollooware Road. The strength of these tall trees and their ability to ameliorate the bulk of the building could also be achieved by taking them through the ramped 'boulevard'.

To achieve this, the podium strategy could be confined to under buildings only, with public active streets remaining at grade. Alternatively, separation between Blocks E/F and G could be narrowed to allow a wider setback along Captain Cook Drive. Also, two (2) metre slits of deep soil could penetrate the proposed ramped 'boulevard' to allow for at least three (3) rows of tall trees, instead of the limited trees possible in the tree pits shown on the proposal. The arrangement of such deep soil slits would still allow for car movement under the ramped 'boulevard'.

While maximum building heights have been approved by the PAC, the Panel is concerned about the legibility, articulation and expression of discrete buildings and their relationships to Botany Bay and other significant landscapes. The inclusion of other dwelling types or other design strategies to reduce the scale of street spaces could further articulate the currently proposed built form and large street spaces and introduce a pedestrian scale that the proposal currently lacks.

Built Form

The Panel notes that it is unusual for one architect to design all the buildings in a development precinct such as this, which is comprised of many subsequent stages. This presents a great challenge to the architect, who must work very hard to introduce the level of vitality and diversity that the proposal requires. Nevertheless, diversity of form and interest could be achieved through the modulation of the built form in different ways other than height variation, including increasing the variety of dwelling types, street and open space widths and through the contribution of several architects, either chosen or selected through limited competition, such as was the case at Rhodes Waterside, Victoria Park and Macquarie Park.

The manner in which the built form defines the public domain is interesting, particularly the east-west public area and its penetration into blocks E/F at the third level. However, the proposal's focus on the fine-grain appears to miss the opportunity to allow the broader scale to influence the disposition of higher components, through site links and landscape elements.

While the built form arrangement generally allows compliance with SEPP 65 amenity standards and creates protected courtyard for residents, an environmental analysis of sun and wind is essential to allocate and shape the public domain.

Currently, the proposal's rapport with its flat context is somewhat abrupt and exacerbated by the raised podium, which tends to lengthen the proposal's already very long elevations and increase its overall mass. While the removal of podium would reduce the apparent length of the development, the development of smaller scale typologies at its edges may ameliorate the proposal's apparent relentlessness and detachment from context. There are further possible benefits of not building the broad ramped 'boulevard', and instead providing a temporarily narrower new street on ground level. The proposed first stage will sit more comfortably in the existing topography, the existing eastern practice ground may possibly be retained in the short-term and substantial infrastructural savings would also be likely.

The Panel is particularly concerned about the quality and amenity of the public domain along its southern, western and eastern edges - and when it is going to be provided. There is a great opportunity to review the western edge of the site, to make a proper street on the west and introduce directly accessible apartments skinned onto the open car park. Similarly, the eastern side street could engage with a revitalised creek, and beyond to an activated western Stadium edge. Rather than promoting “shopping on-line” as a project quality, the proponent may benefit from highlighting the social contact of shopping – linked by high quality public streets - as the superior quality being provided by the proposal. By having more low speed trafficable internal roads, shared street environments and even a narrow two lane road on the north, greater connectivity, activity and surveillance could result.

Density

While the proposal appears to comply with the approved GFA, issues of context, streetscape, active edges, public domain and other public amenity issues required by its conditions of consent remain unresolved. As mentioned, a better solution may be to reduce the retail area and create an integrated retail/residential development at the eastern end of the site, allowing for reduced density at the western end, possibly even with mixed use. Diversity always allows for more interesting resolutions.

The proposed density is not inconsistent with other residential developments of this scale in Sydney however its lack of access to public transport is a significant issue. It is likely that residents will be substantially car dependent until such time as a regular public bus route or routes to key destinations are confirmed and established.

Resource, Energy and Water Efficiency

At this stage there is insufficient information to make an assessment of these aspects, but this is where the proposal could shine. Retaining the water on a contaminated site will be essential and this could be integrated with the open space areas on the various podia. Wind and solar energy could reflect the exciting state of the art innovations and provide a signature for the development. There is unlimited solar access and strong winds from the south could be fully exploited and incorporated into the built form.

Landscape

The landscape proposals for the northern parkland and riparian interface are delightful - but the wider contextual landscape that reflects the changing site and its impact on the environs has not been addressed. There is a strong need for a landscape definition of the western, southern and eastern boundaries of the site. This needs to be at a big scale and go beyond the site in the same way that the proposal for the north of the site extends the boundaries and connects with the wider context. The architect's statement refers to a hierarchy that responds to the variety of activities within the site but the top of the hierarchy is missing, and that is the arrival at the site, the visibility of the site and the role that the landscape design plays in addressing this and ameliorating any adverse impacts.

The landscape design of the northern part of the site will provide many delightful spaces. There are also some sensitive gestures along the western boundary. However it would be preferable to have very strong (tall and multiple rows) tree growth along this boundary. The ramped ‘boulevard’ as presented will not support strong tree growth – again, four (4) rows or at least three (3) rows of large tall trees are needed along with appropriate

growing conditions. The recommended selection of species for the ramped 'boulevard' is again the *Araucaria spp* so that the entire residential complex appears to exist within a forest.

The east-west courtyard will be a pleasant space. However when the next phase is constructed, this area will be in shade. The small balconies with plantings need to be detailed as their aspect is not clear. Nor is it clear how the plants will grow. At a very fine scale, the drainage swales are delightful. The vines associated with the underground car park are delicately rendered but will need careful detailing to ensure plant growth.

The landscape proposals for the hill of the stadium will be a contribution to the precinct, as will opening the stadium for general entry.

Amenity

The adequacy of the internal amenity of the first residential stage will be examined and assessed once the development application is submitted. Importantly this should be considered in light of the future building towers, which may somewhat erode the amenity.

Safety and Security

A development of this scale creates potentially significant safety and security issues. Changing the development into mixed use at both east and west would go some way to addressing these issues but, as submitted, safety and security issues are largely unresolved. There are concerns about the over-scaled, dead end and raised streets, and the lifeless external streets, all of which lack active edges and street level passive surveillance. Without substantial input and the kind of design "ingenuity" referred to in the PAC approval, the current proposal may not achieve its high social, cultural and market potential.

Social Dimensions

A development of this scale should provide well distributed public and private amenities for the wider community as well as its own residents. Without genuine shops or cafes for residents proposed for the first stage however, the environment is liable to be compromised, which could affect its social and market outcomes. It would be preferable for a wider mix of housing types – not just apartments – to be introduced so as to invite a greater mix of residence, street spaces and open space character into the precinct.

Aesthetics

Detailed comments will be provided by the Panel when the development application for each residential stage is submitted.

Aesthetically, in terms of vision and "desired future character", this proposal would benefit from diversity of architectural character as previously mentioned. Refer also to earlier comments regarding thinking of the larger scale in the arrangement and expression of massing, articulation and even colour of larger elements.

Recommendations and Conclusions:

The development process for this proposal challenges the usual purpose of an ARAP pre-DA submission. Items discussed by the Panel in pre-DA meetings are usually

concerned with site planning principles, strategies and options – many of which have already been established in principle by the PAC Concept Approval for this proposal.

There is a very large gap in the documentation provided. Presently there is a PAC approved set of envelope diagrams and elevations and an architectural proposal. However, key Master Plan, Public Domain Plan, Landscape Plan documents and supporting controls such as a site DCP-type document are still to be provided.

The Panel's ability to contribute has been substantially constrained by the process and the Panel notes that it was unfortunate that it was not afforded an opportunity to comment prior to the PAC determination as there are many critical design quality aspects of the proposal that were not considered by the PAC, especially at the broader scale. However the PAC's concluding recommendation in relation to outstanding design quality across all aspects of this proposal should be noted.

The proposal appears to have a general rather than site specific approach and the current design proposal appears introverted and un-connected to this exposed and isolated site within a sensitive landscape context. The Panel has the view however that the proposal could be significantly improved in terms of its physical and social engagement with its context, and may in fact still be improved if the proponent is willing to engage in further open discussion.

The Panel has raised substantial issues relating to compliance with the Assessment Requirements of the Concept Approval, such as lack of street activity, public domain quality, unclear future character, site constraints and staging issues that have not been adequately addressed. In the view of the Panel some strategic decisions – such as the raised access roads and lack of other uses - are in error and will determine that the precinct is always isolated and introverted. This could significantly impact on its market success and the proponent's objective of creating a genuine village or town centre environment.

The Panel's examination, review and critique prior to the meeting were limited by the lack of adequate architectural and landscape information specifically addressing the pre-DA. The Panel was provided only with outline architectural plans, two sketchy perspective views of buildings E/F, a design statement and brief SEPP65 compliance statement. While the "power point" presentation during the meeting was comprehensive and informative, no hard copies of the contents were made available to the Panel before or after the meeting."

Colleen Baker
ARAP Coordinator

18 March 2013

Architectural Review Advisory Panel

Proposal:

First Stage of Residential Development on the Site including Demolition of Existing Structures, Construction of a Two (2) Level Podium Containing Car Parking, Communal Facilities and Estate Management Office, Three (3) Residential Flat Buildings above Podium Level Containing 220 Dwellings, Provision of Infrastructure and Services Including Access Roads, Associated Landscaping and Public Domain Works

Property:

461 Captain Cook Drive WOOLLOOWARE NSW 2230

Applicant:

Bluestone Capital Ventures No.1 Pty Ltd

File Number:

DA13/0270

The following is the report of the Architectural Review Advisory Panel Meeting held on Thursday, 9 May 2013 at the Administration Centre, Sutherland Shire Council, Eton Street, Sutherland. The report documents the Panel's consideration of the proposed development described above.

3. "Consideration of Development Application 13/0270 - JRPP Application - Stage 1 of Residential (Two Level Podium Containing Car Parking, Communal Facilities and Estate Management Office, Three (3) Residential Buildings Above Podium Level Containing 220 Dwellings, Provision of Infrastructure & Services Including Access Roads, Associated Landscaping & Public Domain Works) at 461 Captain Cook Drive, Woollooware

Council's David Jarvis, Kylie Rourke and Chris Grieg outlined the proposal for the Panel, including providing details of Council's relevant codes and policies.

Joel Munns (Landscape), Gordon Kirkby (Developer), Ben Fairfax(Planner), Nick Turner/ Rob Burton (Architect) addressed the Panel regarding the aims of the proposal and the constraints of the site.

Description of the Site and Proposal

The site is located off the northern side of Captain Cook Drive Woollooware, adjacent to the Solander playing fields and the Sharks Stadium, south of the Woollooware Town Centre and Rail Station.

The Stage 1 Development Application is for a two level podium containing car parking, communal facilities; an estate management office; three residential buildings above podium level containing 220 dwellings; and infrastructure and services including access roads, associated landscaping and public domain works (DA 13/0270). The number and mix of units is 71 x 1 bedroom, 122 x 2 bedroom and 27 x 3 bedroom.

The site is within Zones 14 and 15 Public Open Space and Private Recreation, under Sutherland Shire Local Environmental Plan 2006 (SSLEP 2006).

On 27 August 2012 a Concept Plan (MP10-0229) was approved, subject to conditions, under Part 3A of the EP&A Act, by the Planning Assessment Commission acting as delegate of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. Terms of Approval, Modifications and Assessment Requirements were issued by the DoP&I on 06 September 2012.

Applicant's Submission

Context

A number of contextual concerns relating to compliance with the Concept Approval were raised at the last ARAP meeting. These included the proposal's isolation from residential and transport networks, its apparent lack of street activation and its limited attempts to integrate the scheme into its future context.

Suggested design strategies to better integrate the scheme into its context have not been adopted. For example, the proposed internal "boulevard" for example - raised above ground level and dead-ended – would appear to alienate the proposed "ground plane" within the site from the existing, surrounding ground level. The western façade to the two storey above-ground car park does not provide an active streetscape to the Solander Fields and only limited active uses are provided along Captain Cook Drive.

The panel recommends that the proponent increase active uses along all street interfaces as required by the Concept Approval, and provide town house type units facing the Solander Fields at ground level. To achieve this, options should be explored with Council to upgrade, remove or relocate the existing Council Amenities Block. In any event, the Panel does not consider that the location of the Amenities Block is a sufficient basis for the non-activation of the building interface to the Solander Fields access way which provides a public connection to the foreshore from Captain Cook Drive, and, could become an integral part of the public domain.

It is unfortunate that the site analysis drawings and discussion undertaken for PAC were not also provided for ARAP. This would enable ARAP to discuss the responses to context in the original proposal.

Although there has been no rejoinder to ARAP's comments on the Pre-DA, it is good to see that Norfolk Island pines now define Captain Cook Drive and so add a contextual element. Although there has been some recognition of the importance of engaging with the street, the levels of the entries to the gym and offices are so far above the street that significant flights of stairs are required. Their resolution on the corners is awkward. Perhaps the stairs need to be reconsidered or at least more generous.

Scale

Other than the Stadium, the context is unbuilt. Therefore the scale of the proposal is entirely new and needs to be carefully handled, especially given its natural context. The staging of the proposal will temporarily ameliorate the scale, despite that fact that Stage 1 introduces some of the large scale elements.

Refer to the previous meeting's ARAP notes for further comments regarding scale and design strategies.

Built form

While the broader proposal is referred to as a “village” or “town centre”, it does not currently demonstrate a sufficiently developed diversity of appropriate uses, dwelling type, built form or public domain structure to engage with its context as a new centre. Without greater provision of services, activities, and street and dwelling types, the new precinct could remain isolated from its context, and lack the capacity to improve the attractiveness and safety of its streets.

In the first proposal, the three buildings are well designed for residential use. However, they would be greatly improved with more activity and diversity at ground level, especially as they will be built in an isolated setting. Unless this proposal can demonstrate high urban design quality and character, the success of future stages may be threatened.

The parapet height of Building E1 at its north-east corner is increased above the approved maximum limit of the approved Concept Plan, apparently for ‘cosmetic’ and screening reasons only, even though the roof area is adequate to locate and screen plant without increasing the parapet height. Other plan variations to the envelope of Building E1 also do not comply with the approved Concept Plan, even though adequate area is provided for articulation within the approved envelope. The increase in height in Building E1 at this junction and other variations to the plans have not been justified on an architectural basis and should be reconsidered to achieve compliance with the Concept Approval.

The built form along the western façade and the north podium includes an extensive screen from ground level to the second floor. Perspective 03 shows this screen as open mesh with timber mullions, heavily planted with creepers and vines. It is most unlikely such plant growth will occur for a number of reasons: the western edge is exposed to drying winds and sun; the overhead eave will prevent rainwater reaching the planting area; and it is rare to see vines growing up to such a height. If the proposal fails it will leave a long, exposed, two-storey, galvanized, mesh base to the podium. Given the difficulty of achieving such plant growth, it may be better to use a fine metal screen as an artwork, such as that on the Goulburn Street parking station in the city by the designer, Clemens Habicht (SMH, Spectrum, May 4-5, 2013, p26).

Density

While the Concept Plan has been approved at its current density by PAC, the Panel remains concerned that without public transport, it will be very isolated. It is also noted that the proposal does not appear to provide sufficient amenity, permeability and active streetscape to comply with the Concept Approval Schedule 3: Future Environmental Assessment Requirements, particularly requirements 3 and 17.

Stage 1 residential will have a high density that requires appropriate open space, particularly as the open space between buildings E1, E2 and F will only consist of mounded plantings and pathways.

Resource, energy and water efficiency

Due to time restrictions, resource, energy and water efficiency was not discussed in any detail at the meeting. However, it is noted that the proposal complies with BASIX and NatHERS requirements. In regards to the RFDC 'rules of thumb' the project appears to be adequate, although the responses lack the detail expected from a compliance statement.

Solar mid-winter access requirements have been based on 2 hours compliance instead of 3 hours. Given the site's orientation, current low density and openness to the sun, it is difficult to accept that 3 hours mid winter solar access is unable to be achieved. The panel therefore recommends that the proponent demonstrates the degree of solar access currently achieved by each dwelling and suggests design strategies to achieve the 3 hour solar access compliance required by SEPP 65.

Solar access diagrams and tables, on a level by level basis, demonstrating the number of hours of solar access received by the living rooms and balconies of each dwelling should be provided in order to properly verify the residential amenity for future occupants. The diagrams shall take into account overshadowing caused by Tower E1 on Tower E2. Refer Concept Approval Schedule 3: Future Environmental Assessment, requirements 5.

In a development of this scale, ESD design should be integrated throughout. The bioswale is tokenistic while not part of an overall drainage and water retention plan (p39 SEE). It is not clear how the leachate is being managed (p41, SEE).

Landscape

The use of Norfolk Island Pines is to be commended. It is good that the southern most trees in the 'Boulevard' will be in deep soil and that the planters to the north have increased depth. However the site analysis diagram indicates strong south-west winds which may funnel up the boulevard and hinder tree growth.

As stated above the vine-planted screen is unlikely to work. Also the stairs on the southern corners of the podium look tight and awkward. The courtyard space on the podium needs to be reconsidered for Stage 1. The removal of trees along the south-west boundary will need to be mitigated with off-site compensation planting. Where is this to be located?

Amenity

The apartment buildings are well planned internally and address the relevant objectives of SEPP65 and the RFDC. Apartments are well laid out and spacious. The communal courtyard and amenities proposed for Stage 1 appear adequate.

While a number of communal uses have been allocated facing Captain Cook Drive, none of these are available to the wider public to access or use. This restricts the amount of genuine street activity being provided, the commensurate street amenity and safety that would follow, and the proposal's capacity to interact with its local and broader context.

There is little open space amenity in Stage 1 as proposed. The site amenity plan is confusing. Why 'cart hire'? Is it intended that people will move around the site in carts?

Safety and security

Due to the limited street activity proposed and the isolation of the site – from public transport, adjacent networks and its proposed retail centre – serious questions regarding safety and security remain. As described above, the Solander Fields environment – currently described as dangerous – is of particular concern. Without clear visual access and active streetscape, the raised “boulevard” is also likely to become a remote and disconnected public space.

It is not clear how the open space between the buildings will work as Stage 1. Will the podium courtyard be fenced? How will the area for the Stage 2 pool and deck be treated in stage 1? Is it just a concrete slab?

Social dimensions

The proposal is at risk of being seen as an isolated environment that does not invite public access. A capacity to integrate physically and socially with the immediate and wider community remains the major concern for the entire development in the long-term. While there is no provision for any retail use, the gradient of the “boulevard” makes easy activation difficult, thereby restricting its potential for social interaction.

Aesthetics

In general terms the building forms, proportions and compositional strategies proposed for the development are of a good contemporary standard for buildings of this type. However, while there is some variation in architectural expression between the three Stage 1 buildings, they are very similar in style/character through their material and compositional tactics. While apparent consistency may (or may not) be a strength for the limited first stage, it could, lead to a homogeneous, resort-like character if subsequent stages simply extend the same language.

The external expression of the building lacks an effective sun shading strategy which leads to a homogeneous appearance of the elevations. There is a lack of an appropriate and integrated climatic response of the building facades to orientation. The south, east and west elevations have identical façade treatments while subject to very different sun exposure and heat gain. The west and east elevations, in particular, would benefit from a redesign to incorporate more effective sun control to reduce heat gain and energy consumption, and improve the comfort level for residents.

The challenge of building appearance relates to the very real issue of only one architect designing all proposed buildings. However it also relates to the consistency of proposed dwelling and building types proposed, which are single level apartments accessed from long corridors. This tends to relegate the task of architectural language to decoration rather than enrichment through genuine diversity. In this regard, it is suggested that townhouses or maisonettes are incorporated at street level, duplexes at upper levels, and that penthouses and other types are introduced to more fully respond to context, aspect, requirements for activity, streetscape and so on. Material as well as proportion and massing could vary with type. This would also benefit the development of the proposed “town centre” character and amenity.

The architect has provided some alternate views of the taller, tower building expression. However this seemed to be additional work in progress that should be resolved and submitted with the DA documentation.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Although approved by PAC, the Panel remains concerned with the general planning and distribution of discrete uses across the Sharks' site. However, the proponent appears unwilling to consider any significant change to the planning strategy and design of the Concept Approval. The proponent has not responded to the ARAP comments from the previous meeting. It is considered highly desirable that it prepares a response to the significant issues raised by the Panel in the previous and current reports. The Panel requests the proponent to provide the site analysis undertaken for PAC so that it is able to understand decisions about the proposal.

The buildings proposed for the Stage 1 DA residential site are competent in their individual planning and design. Greater variation through different design strategies, materiality and engagement of other architects would greatly benefit the long-term character of this new precinct.

The Panel has noted significant issues of compliance with PAC's Terms of Approval and Future Environmental Assessment Requirements, as well as SEPP 65/RFDC Requirements that still require attention. These issues include lack of street activation on all street frontages; lack of genuine public access to the site and connection to the foreshore due to the ramped "boulevard" and podium car park; lack of climatic response of the building facades - east, west and south are similar; homogeneous building expression; solar access verification; access to non-residential facilities; effectiveness of the bios wale; and non-compliance with the PAC approved envelope. "

Frank Stanistic
ARAP Chairman

20 May 2013