

REFERRAL RESPONSE

URBAN DESIGN

FILE NO: DA 315/2015/1

ADDRESS: 163A Victoria Road BELLEVUE HILL 2023

PROPOSAL: Alterations and additions to existing Bellevue Hill Public School including the demolition of buildings, the construction of a new school building and the refurbishment of the existing building to provide accommodation for an additional 450 students. The location of temporary demountables within Bellevue Hill Park during the construction period.

FROM: Tom Jones Urban Design

TO: Mr D Booth

Information

Statement of Environmental Effects: City Plan Services
Architectural drawings: Group GSA
Survey: Rygate and Company

Background

14 December 2014: The Department of Education's (DoE) project team visited Woollahra Council and spoke to the leader of team North East, Eleanor Smith. Eleanor's team is responsible for the assessing of the development application (DA). The Council are not the assessing authority for the work on state school grounds. However the Council is an important stakeholder. The DoE is obliged to consult with Council as a part of the community consultation process. This DA is a part of that consultation process.

15 April 2015: A meeting with the DoE's team responsible for the expansion of the Bellevue School was held at Council. The team presented the Development Proposal. This was a 3/4 storey building flanking the south side of Birriga Road to the east of the existing building. This was a developed and expanded version of the option shown to Eleanor Smith in December. Council officers discussed certain concerns. As I recorded the meeting, the following issues were raised:

- Trees (Andrew Simpson), expressed concern regarding the potential loss of a significant Hills Fig from the Bellevue Hill Park which adjoins the school site and the loss of two similar trees from the school grounds which contribute to the character of the park. Andrew Simpson also discussed the potential view loss from parts of the park.
- Urban Design (myself) discussed the master planning process and asked how and why the proposed position on the site had been selected. I expressed a

concern regarding the bulk of the building in the proposed location and its impact on the character of the neighbourhood and the presentation of the park.

- Traffic (Manjula Pushpapathan) asked about the expansion of Bellevue Hill School and whether there were plans for schools in the surrounding catchments. There was a concern that concentrating schooling would generate more traffic. The DCP requirement that schools provide on-site drop-of and pick-up on site was tabled.
- Planning (David Booth) asked what the outdoor space requirement per student was.
- Heritage (Kate Harrison) expressed concerns about the relationship of the old building to the new. However the existing school building is not a heritage item. Two Norfolk Pine trees on the site are listed. One of those trees is in poor condition and according to the Council's tree officer could be removed.

Officers asked for consideration and relevant information regarding their issues.

- Parks and Open Space were asked whether the schools could use any part of the park for an extension of the school playground. There was no clear picture of what was being asked for regarding fencing or flattening. Parks and Open Space were opposed to such use of the Council Park citing maintenance issues.

21 April 2015: The Architects sent Council the options analysis (requested at the 15 April meeting).

22 April 2015: I gave to Eleanor, to forward to the applicant, a response to the options review carried out by the applicant. That response, which was critical of the options analysis process, recommended reconsidering the siting of the building.

10 August 2015: Letter received from David Ryan responding to concerns raised in my previous referral dated 25 June 2015. Although I was not present at the December 2015 meeting when the applicant met Eleanor Smith, I did attend the 15 April 2015 meeting and, contrary to the assertion in the letter, I do not remember any council officer expressing any preferences for a particular option at that meeting. I disagree with many of the conclusions drawn by David Ryan in his letter, I particularly note the statement that:

The new school is consistent with the existing character and built form of the neighbourhood.

In my opinion the proposed is neither consistent with the existing or any stated future desired character for this location.

My opinion on this proposal remains as previously stated and is reiterated below.

Context

The Bellevue Hill Public School shares the top of Bellevue Hill with a public park. The school's land wraps around the north west of the hill where it fronts the road. Immediately in front of the school is a cutting made for the tram line which is now partly used as a car park. Currently the two storey federation period school which accommodates approx. 330 pupils is flanked by 8 demountable classrooms accommodating approximately a further 240 pupils, resulting in 550 pupils on site.

Proposal

The proposal is to add a building along the road frontage to the east. The building is four storeys high and sits approximately a storey above the pavement level at its east end. The frontage on the Birriga Road Boundary is approximately 125m long. This building will house an additional 670 pupils. This makes a total of 1,000 pupils on the site when the demountables are removed as planned.

Controls

Woollahra Local Environment Plan 2014 (WLEP 2014)
Woollahra Development Control Plan 2015 (WDCP 2015)

Compliance

Woollahra Local Environment Plan 2014 (WLEP 2014)

The site is designated for special uses. The use of the site for a school is permitted. The site is subject to a 9.5m height limit. There is no FSR control on the site.

Woollahra Development Control Plan 2015 (WDCP 2015)

F2 Educational Establishments applies to this development. *The objectives of this chapter are:*

- *O1 To encourage well designed educational establishments that balance the requirements of students and staff, with the amenity of the adjacent properties.*
- *O2 To protect views and vistas.*
- *O3 To protect and conserve heritage conservation areas, and heritage items located on or adjacent to an educational establishment.*
- *O4 To encourage all schools to provide sufficient open spaces on site, and protect existing open spaces.*
- *O5 To encourage a safe, efficient and co-ordinated traffic network which considers all users.*
- *O6 To encourage community uses of educational establishments that do not unreasonably impact on surrounding residents.*

The proposal relates to these objectives as follows:

Objective 1: The proposed building is a carefully designed building which placed on the eastern wedge of the school site, will avoid impacting on the amenity of adjacent private properties.

Objective 2: The placement of the building means that it will block views of the entry to Sydney Harbour framed by the North and South Head from parts of the adjacent park. It will also change the character of that view in that it will be framed by a building rather than the existing Hills Figs.

Objective 3: There are no relevant conservation areas or heritage items.

Objective 4: The school has limited outdoor play space, much of which is in the shade and is currently used for demountables and for car parking. However, the proposal is adjacent to a public park.

Objective 5: The tripling of the size of the school will inevitably increase traffic generation as the size of the catchment increases outside walkable distances.

Objective 6: The distance of the building from surrounding dwellings will avoid significant impacts that might result from community uses out of school hours.

The following controls are particularly relevant:

F2.2 Building and urban design

C1 Development incorporates a high standard of architectural design, materials and detailing appropriate to the building type and location.

The proposed building appears to be carefully designed with quality materials and detailing appropriate to the building type. The location of the building is not appropriate however and is out of character with the context.

F2.3 Siting of development

C6 Development is sited so significant views and vistas from the public domain are maintained.

The proposed building blocks significant harbour views from parts of the Bellevue Hill Park.

F2.5 Open spaces

C1 Existing open spaces are retained.

The building occupies an open part of the school site which currently accommodates demountables. The building will require the removal of two Hills Fig trees immediately adjacent to the park and one similar tree from the park the canopy of which would conflict with the proposed building. The removal of these three trees will have a considerable impact on the character of the Park.

F2.6 Traffic, parking and access

C6 For a new educational establishment or major development of an existing establishment—an internal driveway for vehicles is provided for picking-up and dropping-off students.

The increase in pupil numbers and the broadening catchment will mean greater numbers of pupils will be driven to and from school. The existing tram track deviation will provide a potential drop-off and pick-up location.

Urban Design Review

Location

At 1,000 pupils this is a big primary school. The school will draw pupils from a wide catchment. Centralising primary school provision has implications for the wider community. Greater travel distances will impact on the role of the school as a community hub. Many pupils will be outside the “Ped Shed” (walkable distance) and will be driven to and from school with the resulting impact on community identity, early socialising, personal health, traffic congestion and safety. This is a policy planning issue which needs to be addressed by the State Government.

Siting

The site provides a number of potential locations for an extension to the existing school building. The location chosen is not in my opinion the most appropriate. The site was chosen with two criteria upper most:

- the usability of the site left clear for a playground and
- the impact the building’s bulk would have on the amenity of private dwellings.

There were other critical criteria that were not considered such as:

- the desired street character and
- the noise generated by playgrounds.
- the visual impact
- The impact on views from the public domain.

Placing the building to the east of the existing building in a wedge between Birriga Road and Bellevue Hill Park has freed up the flat potential playground area to the west of the existing school, but that space is close to adjacent residential properties that will be impacted on by future playground noise.

The proposed building is sited on what is currently almost an extension of the park. This area accommodates two large trees and is open at ground level allowing views through from the road to the park and glimpses of the ocean beyond. Bellevue Hill Park is tucked away and needs exposure to the broad public realm to be relevant, but the proposed building will block an amount of this exposure, changing park frontage into a 4/5 storey building.

The building blocks views from parts of the park to significant views of the harbour. The playground that this building location facilitates is close to dwellings and will have a significant amenity impact.

Placing the building at the western end of the site would be more appropriate, it would:

- consolidate an existing built up area with better more direct connections to the neighbourhood business centre and to the adjacent dwellings.
- be on a flat site.
- have a more consolidated circulation area and be a more efficient building.
- distance the source of playground noise.
- have no impact on the views from the park
- not change the character of Birriga Road east of Victoria Road.

Building

The proposed building is a four storey stack of classrooms that are single loaded off balcony corridors that are open to the atmosphere. The classrooms follow the curve of the road and provide a dramatic prow to the public realm that falls away to the east down Birriga Road. The single loading and the extensive northern aspect will mean that there is plenty of cross ventilation and solar access. However the open south facing corridors will be fully shaded and cold in winter. This configuration means the spaces that are for movement and could benefit from full sunlight will get none, while the classrooms where pupils sit for extended periods will need to be fully shaded. The building will also completely overshadow the play area to the south meaning that will be a cold unattractive space, particularly in winter.

As a piece of urban sculpture this building is engaging and dramatic. But as a school it has significant shortcomings. It also compromises the adjacent park and is in conflict with the suburban character of the location.

Recommendation

This is an important building for the whole community. For the reasons discussed in this referral, in my opinion, the Department of Education should reconsider the siting of this building.

Tom Jones
Urban Design