

ATTACHMENT 2 – Urban Design Review Panel

607-623 Victoria Road, Ryde

Panel: Deena Ridenour

Date: 13 May 2016

Council has requested the panel review the proponent's letter response to the previous design review panel meeting. The proponent has noted that amendments in response to the DRP are minor and address landscaping and public domain in response to Council's letter.

Many of the concerns raised by the Panel in its advice of 10 June 2015 and on 8 December 2015 have not been materially addressed and as such remain relevant and should be read in conjunction with this advice.

The applicant controls the land which is currently occupied by retail car-sale buildings associate vehicle workshop.

The subject property is situated on a major road and is prominent due to the geometry of Victoria Road and the topography as Victoria Road rises towards Top Ryde.

The proposal is a DA submission for a typically 5 storey mixed commercial and residential development. The proposal situates typically 4 levels of residential use above a commercial car showroom and sales facility.

The site is predominantly governed by a maximum building height control of 15.5m and a floor space ratio of 2:1, although a rear portion of the site – referred to as Block 1A – has a height control of 9.5m and floor space ratio of 0.5:1.

Building scale and density

The proposal exceeds the development controls and is predicated on the false notion that the applicable building height control can be 'stretched' by 10% as of right. In any case, the proposal still consistently exceeds the 'stretched' height control of 17.05m, both at the street alignment and elsewhere across the site. The proposed floor space appears to be above the aggregated floor space control and also appears to have been transferred between Blocks 1 and 2, where no such mechanism currently exists. Although in single ownership, the two sites are not contiguous.

The proponent has presented an argument for additional height based on response to topography and the precedent of Putney Hill renewal site to the south.

The panel understands the topographic challenges across Block 1 and notes that the applicant has stepped the building heights in response to the site slope along Victoria Road. The stepping at ground level between Building 1 and 2 and at the western end of Building 3 creates partial floors with an awkward interface to the street. This is a product of the large showroom floor plates and limited stepping. While additional stepping would be ideal, this would undermine the showroom use. A more refined façade resolution is required at the interface with the ground.

The site as a transition between Putney Hill and the lower scale neighborhood to the north is supported in Council's height controls and key site diagram. No additional justification for exceeding Council's controls has been presented.

Beyond the numeric exceedance of building height and floor space, the resulting building forms are excessively bulky, particularly in relation to the lower scale neighbourhood to the north.

Buildings are overly deep, well in exceedance of the ADG building depth recommendations of 20m. Building 2 in Block 1 is approximately 34m deep and 33 m wide and both Building 1 and 2 in Block 2 are approximately 32m deep.

The proposed stepped building form and the reduction in setbacks in Council's key site diagram result in greater building bulk in closer proximity to the common boundary and to the low density residential properties to the north (particularly in its separation and privacy impacts upon numbers 7, 8 and 9 Maze Avenue). The ADG recommends greater separation at boundaries with lower density zones to reduce privacy impacts and improve residential amenity. For 5 storey buildings, a separation of 6 -9 metres (with half attributed to the subject site) is required plus an additional 3m at zoning changes between apartment and houses. A complying separation would also assist in increasing the laneway width and providing opportunities for tree planting along the common boundary. A reduction in building height along the laneway from 5 to 4 storeys would reduce separation distance requirements but would still require laneway improvements as detailed in this report.

The excessive depth combined with the inadequate building separation exacerbates the visual bulk and scale of the proposal and impacts on the privacy of adjacent residential properties. The applicant has not provided sufficient justification to support these basic non-compliances with key development standards and the Panel does not support the proposed building height and density.

Laneway

The Panel is generally supportive of the proposed internal laneway/street across both Block 1 and 2 as a device to potentially provide better separation to existing low scale residential development to the north and to provide residential address and amenity for new apartment buildings above the car dealership. But, the success of this strategy depends on:

- the width, use and design of the laneway
- interface with neighbouring properties and impacts on residential amenity
- function and use of the open space north of Block 1

The current proposal allocates approximately only 7m to the laneway and situates it entirely above basements, which means that no meaningful vegetation – particularly trees – are able to be accommodated within the share zone and most importantly along the boundary. The Panel recommends a greater allocation of space for the internal street improving building separation to the north, and creating a much stronger sense of street planting and vegetation for the proposed internal street system.

The functionality of the laneway and its pedestrian amenity and attractiveness is limited by its use for vehicles and its treatment with a singular paving material to the carriageway and with a narrow footpath, stairs and ramps pushed up against the building edge. The level change (two flights of stairs) between Arras Parade and the main laneway level separates it visually from the public street and further undermines its pedestrian use, legibility and safety.

Car carrier truck loading within the laneway is not acceptable. This is not compatible with the pedestrian use of the laneway and lobby entries but also provides a source of noise and a poor outlook for adjacent apartments.

The laneway building frontages are dominated by commercial service areas, emergency egress and waste management with little active frontage. While the proposal has amended the residential lobbies to incorporate colour and a stronger residential entry identity, the majority of the laneway has little pedestrian amenity.

Interface with Neighbours

The lack of deep soil and tree planting along the common boundary has resulted in retaining wall with a narrow stepped planter along the boundary. This is inadequate. The stepped profile offers limited planting capacity and the proposed fence separates the planter from the development. Maintenance access to this space would be difficult. A more meaningful setback to the carpark and laneway edge with deep soil zone along it would provide capacity to better manage level changes and avoid high retaining walls and fencing, particularly when viewed from adjoining properties. This would also

provide for large tree planting improving outlook and enhancing privacy for both existing and future residents.

Communal open space

The proposed communal open space in the remnant site is of concern. The location is separated from concealed from the laneway by commercial waste storage and

Communal open spaces on the roof are supported but should be easily accessible to all residents. The space on Block 1, Building 2 is not internally accessible to Buildings 1 and 3.

Victoria Road Frontage

The proposed basements extend to the site boundary along the Victoria Road frontage and the proposed landscape design therefore includes only low planter beds and turf verges. The Panel is concerned that the applicant's ambition for uninterrupted commercial presence and visibility is compromising the public realm treatment for a large extent of Victoria Road.

The Panel advocates for deep soil and meaningful tree planting along this important road frontage noting that tall, clear-stemmed trees will not impair the commercial presence of the site.

Residential Amenity

The Panel is concerned that the commercial functions of the site are compromising the amenity, outlook and address of proposed residential uses.

As noted previously, the sense of address for each of the residential buildings is constrained and does not provide acceptable levels of amenity and safety. The location of lobbies, particularly in Block 1, lack clear sight lines, direct routes of travel and legibility from public streets.

A large proportion of apartments rely on the Victoria Road frontage for outlook and amenity. The southern orientation and heavy volumes of traffic are a real constraint. The Panel is not convinced by – and does not support – the expansive use of screening for a large proportion of apartments. This occurs both along the Victoria Road elevations and along side elevations and along streets.

The louvres to the Victoria Road frontage appear to be an aesthetics choice for the building. The screens offer no potential for individual resident adjustment and do not contribute to the management of noise and pollution impacts along Victoria Road. Similarly the louvres along the façades between buildings appear to be solely used to direct views toward the north and away from opposing apartments and also do not address noise and pollution impacts along Victoria Road.

The rationale for the introduction of the random pattern of apertures is unclear and unconvincing. The Panel cannot judge why some apartments/room types get a certain outcome and others don't. For example some apartments get an outlook across the street or into the distance at upper levels but not protection from the busy road, while the majority have interrupted outlook between louvres.

Some apartments rely on 'blinker' windows and balconies to achieve a partial northerly aspect between the proposed buildings on Blocks 1 and 2 in response to insufficient building separation.

Light wells (Block 2)

While naturally lit and naturally ventilated circulation spaces are supported by the Panel, in the proposed configuration the area is not 'external' and should not be discounted from floor space calculations.

The Panel also notes that the voids in buildings within Block 2 increase the building depth apparent scale and bulk of the proposal. These voids provide little amenity for apartments as the voids are insufficient in dimensions and constrained by circulation and are a missed opportunity to provide meaningful courtyards as an alternative to the busy road frontage along Victoria Road.

Additionally, in the centre of Block 2, a number of dwellings have constrained access to sunlight and outlook as a result of the strategy that links the buildings above the commercial level.

Architectural resolution

The two blocks collectively represent over 200m of frontage to Victoria Road, commanding a very prominent address with high visibility.

The proposal illustrates an architectural language to Victoria Road, which the Panel does not support.

Rather than achieving a desirable balance between otherwise complementary commercial and residential uses, the design response aims to mask residential uses and unnecessarily emphasise the commercial presentation. The proposal reads as 5 'blank billboards' and offers the apartments behind these screens an inadequate level of amenity.

The current proposal appears over-scaled with fully louvred street and side elevations camouflaging the 3 and 4 levels of residential apartments behind them. The repetition of the horizontal louvres along the Victoria Road façade, combined with the curve in the road, results in a relentless and oppressive wall of development along the street. This is reinforced and exacerbated by the vertically louvred side elevations visible in the gaps between the buildings as illustrated in the photo montage.

Recommendations

The Panel's view is that modification of the scheme is necessary to bring better balance between to two predominant site uses and to provide acceptable levels of residential amenity.

The Panel recommends the concerns noted above be incorporated into a modified design solution.

The Panel recommends the developed proposal be resubmitted and referred to the Panel for further review.