SEPP 65 DESIGN VERIFICATION STATEMENT

RAILWAY LANE APARTMENTS

73-79 RAILWAY LANE, WICKHAM NSW 2293

Prepared by EJE Architecture
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1.0 PRINCIPLE 1: CONTEXT

Good design responds and contributes to its context. Context can be defined as the key natural and built features of an area.

Responding to context involves identifying the desirable elements of a location's current character or, in the case of precincts undergoing a transition, the desired future character as stated in planning and design policies. New buildings will thereby contribute to the quality and identity of the area.

The truncation of the railway line at Wickham at the end of 2014 and the construction of the Wickham Transport Interchange have set in motion the next stage of urban change in the suburb of Wickham. Planning authorities are keen to promote densification in areas that are well serviced by public transport, and have shown this interest in the area's Development Control Plan, allowing higher and denser development than in adjacent suburbs.

The subject site falls within this zone. On the North side of the West End of the City Centre, close to the location of the proposed transport interchange in the area bounded by Railway Lane and the Rail Corridor, west of Station Street, Railway Street and Wickham Park. This area is in a state of transition, with industrial, commercial and residential uses mixed together in a relatively small area. The subject site itself, on Railway Lane, is occupied by an Industrial Warehouse and an unformed Truck Parking Area, both of with which will be demolished as a precursor to the project. This description is typical of many new and proposed developments in the area.

To the north-west of the site is Hawkins Oval, a locally listed heritage item consisting of significant open space and sports grounds, which contains the Hawkins Oval Memorial, a separately listed heritage item. To the east of the subject site is the historic Lass O'Gowrie Hotel, a locally heritage listed item, which is the only heritage building in the immediate vicinity. Further along Station Street to the north is a former industrial site that is also a listed heritage site. Heritage buildings which dominate the Wickham area include the former Wickham School and the former Wickham Infants School to the east of the subject site. Further to the north is a significant group of masonry Wool Stores including the Winchombe Carson warehouse, the Dalgety and Elders Warehouses all of which are equivalent to four and five storey building in height. The remainder of the context is single and double storey, light industrial and residential developments from a range of eras.

Figure 01: Hawkins Oval and Wickham Park taken from the south. The Subject site is in the bottom right corner of the image.

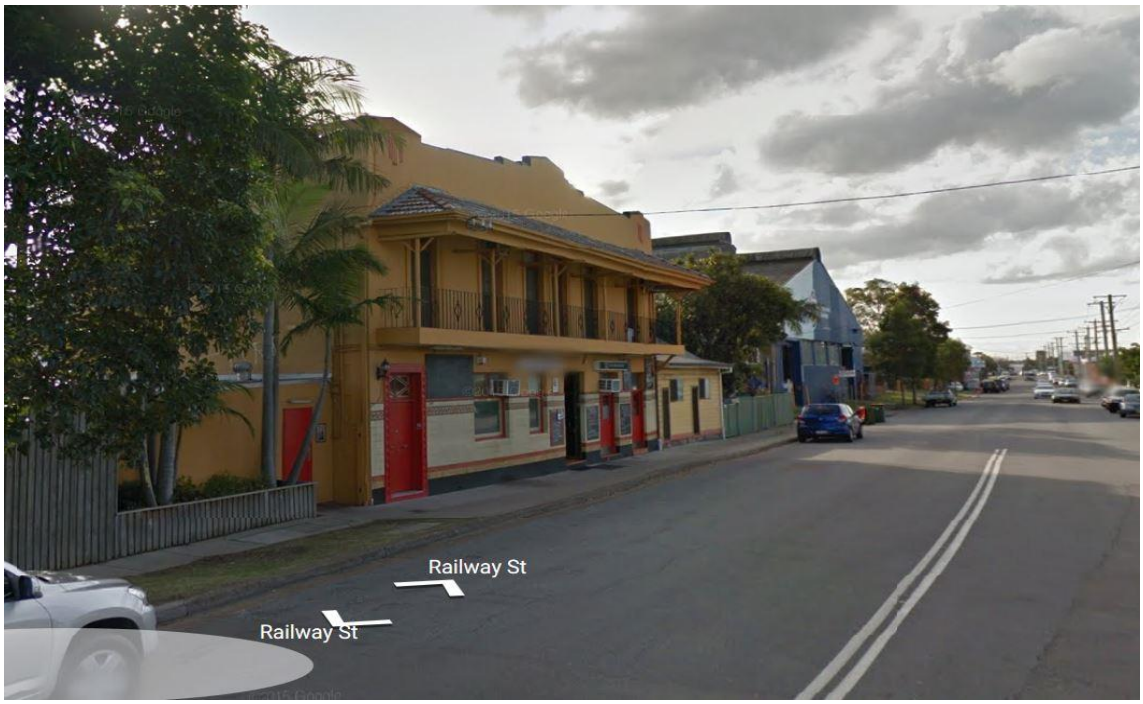


Figure 02: The Lass O'Gowrie Hotel on Railway St. The site is to the rear and west of the hotel.

Adjoining the northern boundary of the site are industrial buildings on large lots, facing Station Street. These buildings are also zoned B4 Mixed Use & are subject to the similar planning controls, therefore it is feasible that these lots could be also accommodate a similar development to that proposed for 69-79 Railway Lane in the future.

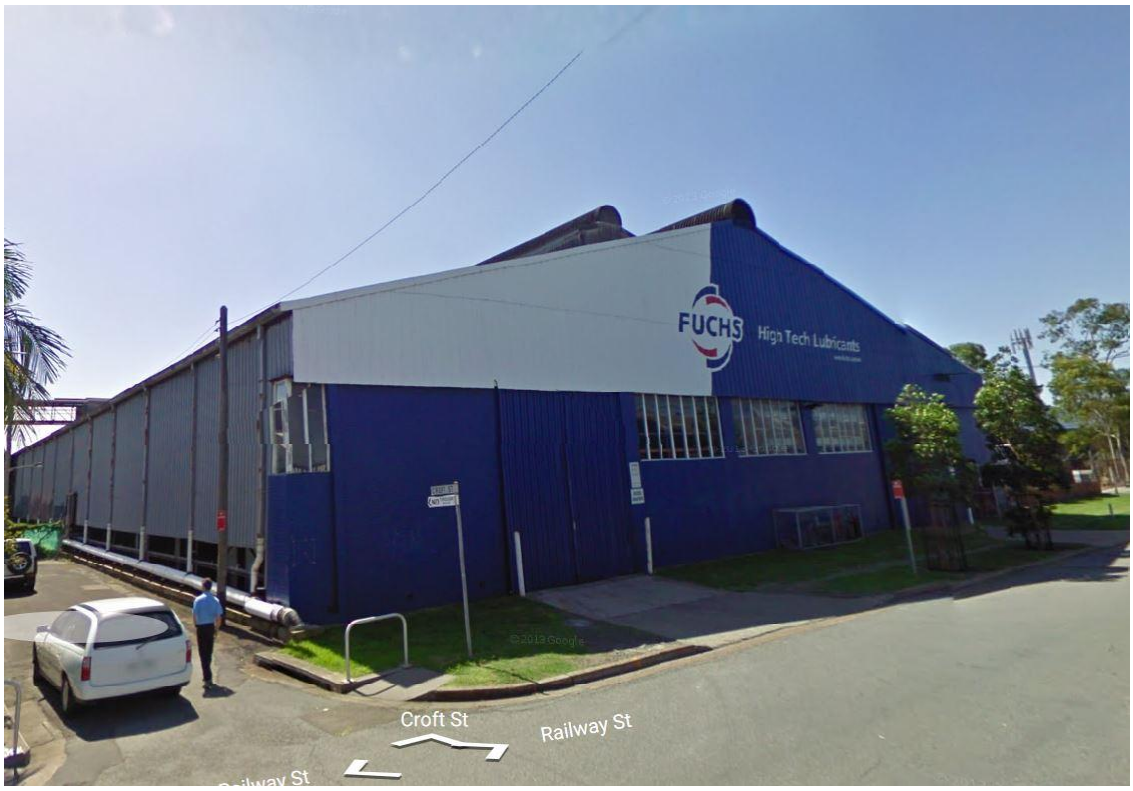


Figure 03: View of Industrial Building on Northern Boundary of 69-79 Railway Lane

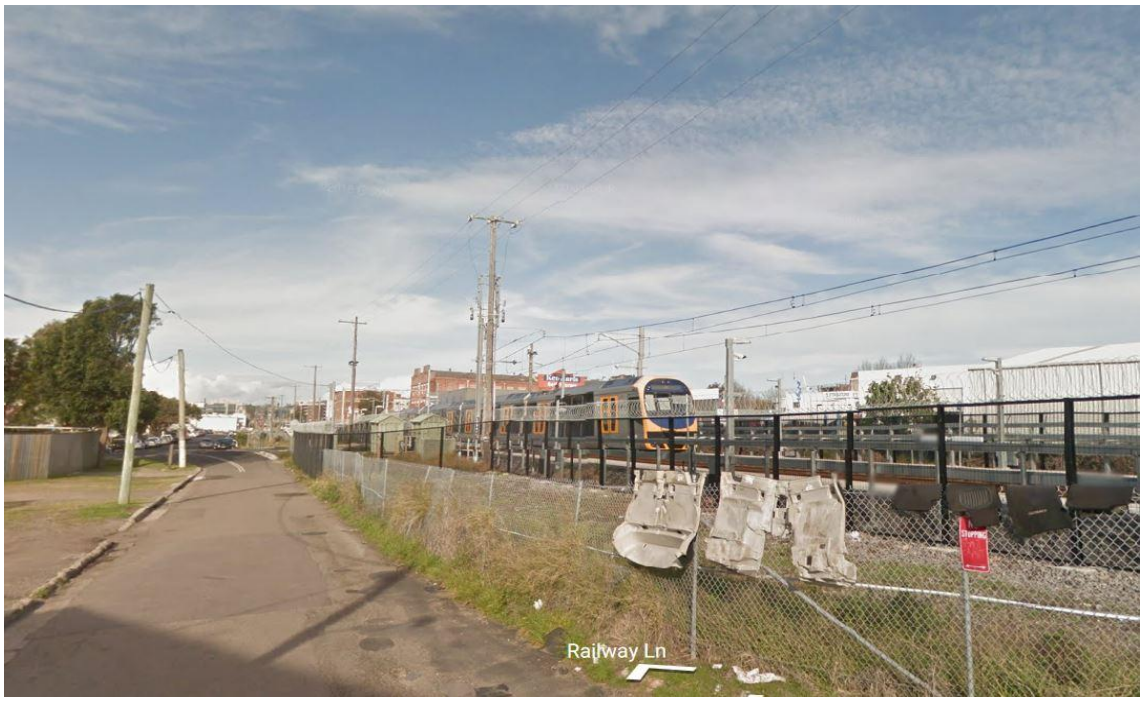


Figure 04: View existing Railway Corridor to the South of Railway Lane

To the south of the site across Railway Lane sits the Great Northern Rail Corridor which is currently undergoing significant redevelopment, incorporating the Wickham Railway interchange, a new light rail system and Bus Interchange.

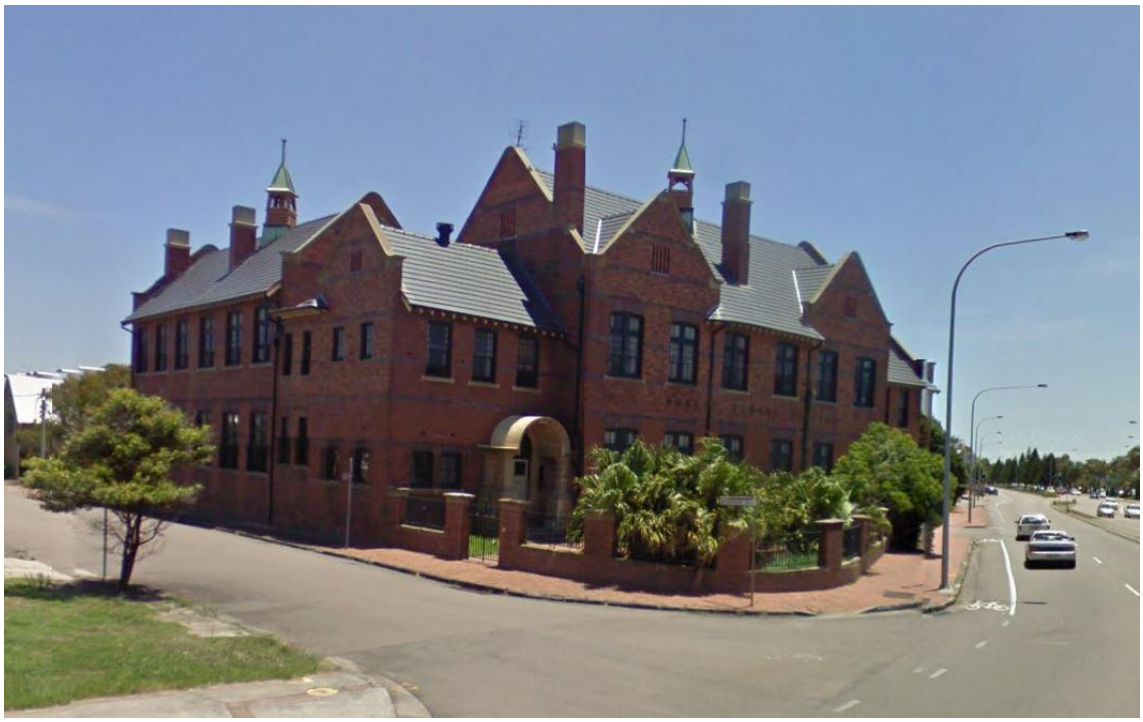


Figure 05: Former Wickham Public School building taken from Hannell St, a key historic building in the Wickham Area.

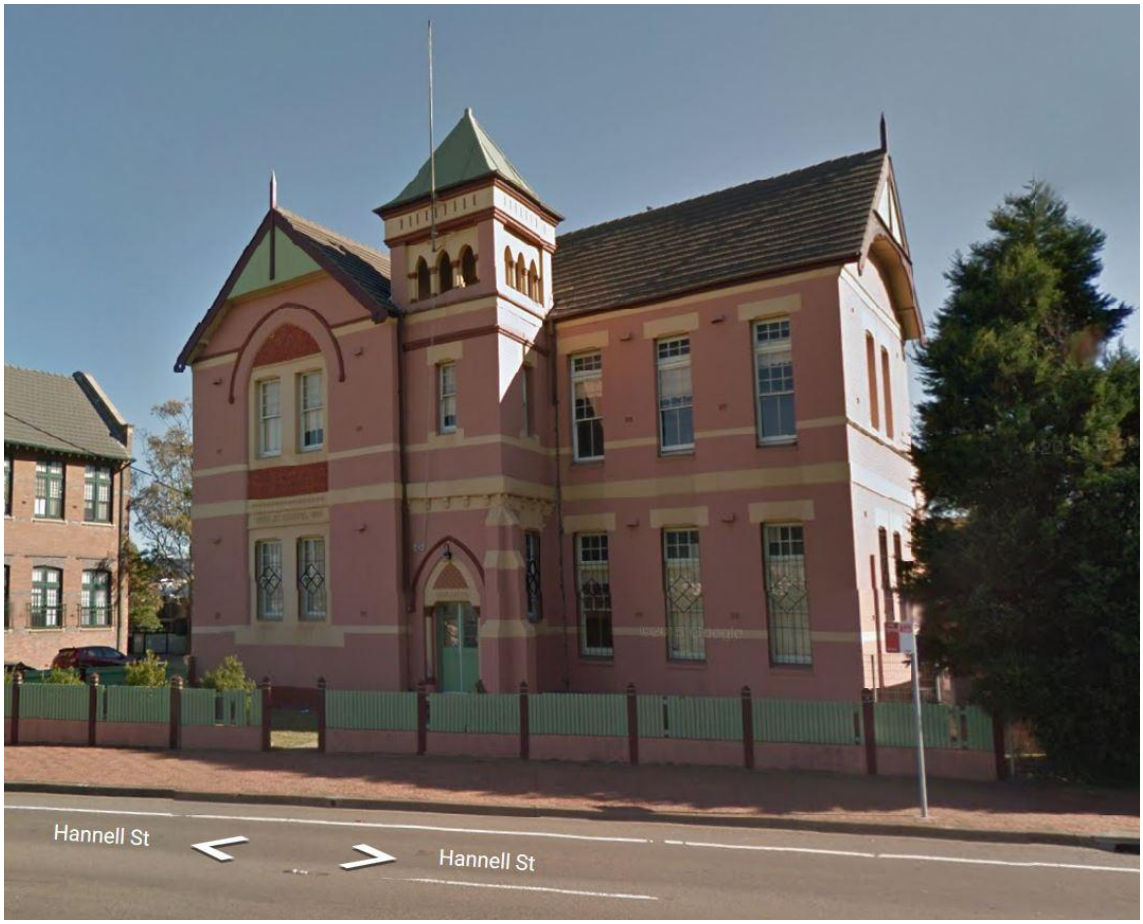


Figure 06: Former Wickham Infants School.

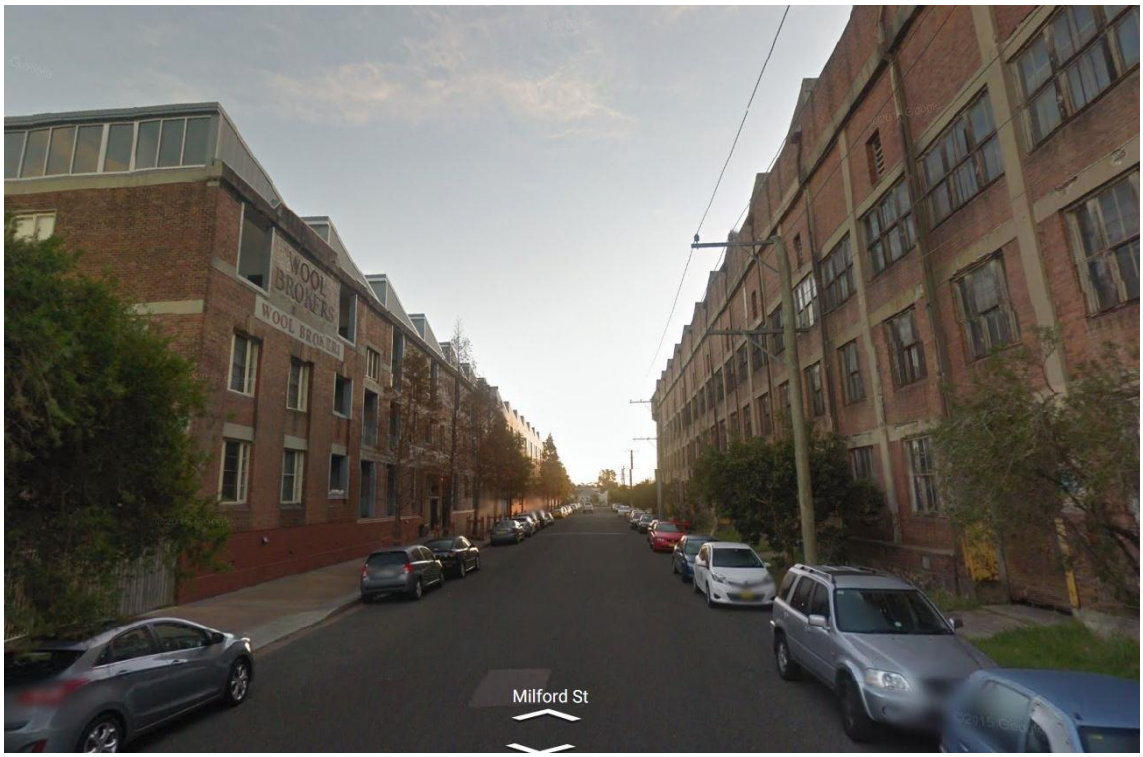


Figure 07: The former Wickham Woolstores, some of which have been converted to residential apartments.

Figure 08: The Wickham Transport Interchange, currently under construction.

Figure 09: Proposed serviced apartment building in Hannell Street.

Figure 10: Apartment building in Throsby Street Wickham constructed in 2015.

Figure 11: Apartment building in Throsby Street Wickham currently under construction.

Figure 12: Approved development proposal for apartment building in Bishopgate Street Wickham.

Figure 13: Development proposal for apartment building in Charles Street Wickham.

Figure 14: Development proposal for apartment building in Wickham Street Wickham.

2.0 PRINCIPLE 2: SCALE

Good design provides an appropriate scale in terms of the bulk and height that suits the scale of the street and the surrounding buildings.

Establishing an appropriate scale requires a considered response to the scale of existing development. In precincts undergoing a transition, proposed bulk and height needs to achieve the scale identified for the desired future character of the area.

Wickham is currently in a transition period with the suburb developing as the western gateway to Newcastle's city centre, and future potentially its CBD. With increased height limits compared to surrounding suburbs, a future predominance of larger consolidated land holdings and high rise developments will become commonplace in the area.

Recent approvals in the area include buildings eight storeys and over and several applications have been lodged with Newcastle City Council for residential buildings of ten storeys with plant rooms above.

The proposal is in keeping with the future strategic vision for the area, rather than the current state. The proposed Railway Lane Development has a height of 27.7m, as measured from the street to the top of the building. (30.7m to top of proposed Plant Level). The proposed building will be one of the first larger buildings in this immediate area, but the location is seen to be appropriate for such a development, considering its transitional context and relationship to future transport infrastructure.

In terms of built scale, the building height is broken down in three levels; an underground basement, a 4 storey podium, a 4 story u-shaped upper part and above this a stepped-in top level. The fragmentation of the building program into these elements ensures that the building is not overwhelming in its scale when viewed from the street level or adjacent residences.

The basement levels of the building consist of a 2 storey car park with bicycle and motorcycle parking spaces and storage areas, with other services minimised on these levels because of flood planning controls. These levels obviously do not contribute to the visual scale of the building being located underground.

The ground level of the building consists of two commercial tenancies and 4 residential units (2 x 1 bed units, 2 x 2 bed units), and a large public courtyard with landscaping and architectural canopy. Whilst screened for security, the view beneath the podium through to this courtyard will be open from the street, ensuring the development does not create a "blank wall" effect to pedestrians and vehicles adjacent.

Three levels of residential development sit above the ground floor to form the podium. The podium height was determined by the street wall height nominated in the DCP, and is in fact a few metres lower than the maximum limit of 16m. The three residential podium levels each include1 Studio, 3 x 1 bed units, 17 x 2 Bed units.

Above the podium are 5 residential levels in a u-shaped floor plan layout, levels 4-7 each include 3 Studios, 3-4 x 1 bed units and 12 x 2 bed units per level. Level 8 includes 2 Studios, 4 x 1 bed units, 9 x 2 bed units per level. Level 4 also includes a communal relaxation room and large community garden in its south-east corner of the building.

3.0 PRINCIPLE 3: BUILT FORM

Good design provides an appropriate scale in terms of the bulk and height that suits the scale of the street and the surrounding buildings.

Establishing an appropriate scale requires a considered response to the scale of existing development. In precincts undergoing a transition, proposed bulk and height needs to achieve the scale identified for the desired future character of the area.

The building form was derived from the planning controls stated in the DCP resulting in a 4 storey podium with a setback to the levels above. Having the advantage of a relatively spacious site, no part of the proposal sits hard to the boundary. This allows the form of the building to sit comfortably around the middle of the site, with increased public space along its principal street front including landscape planting and a colonnade, and also a significant sized private courtyard separating the two residential towers.

The proposal is closest to the boundary at two points on its northern boundary, and one point on its east boundary, all of which are adjacent to the blank rear walls of the neighbouring building, and hence are not likely to be felt as overbearing to these properties.

As the building steps from the podium level to the upper levels, the setbacks increase to a minimum of 9m from adjacent sites, amounting to the building decreasing in bulk as it becomes higher. The built form of the building begins with a more solid, linear "plinth" in the podium, then stretches upward in a materially lighter form, whose facades are broken down vertically with changes of colour and materials, and the use of dissecting architectural blades. The horizontality of the podium sets up a unifying streetscape feature for future adjacent development, where the upper levels make best use of the site to access light, air and views for residences within.

4.0 PRINCIPLE 4: DENSITY

Good design has a density appropriate for a site and its context, in terms of floor space yields (or number of units or residents).

Appropriate densities are sustainable and consistent with the existing density in an area or, in precincts undergoing a transition, are consistent with the stated desired future density. Sustainable densities respond to the regional context, availability of infrastructure, public transport, community facilities and environmental quality.

The site, with an area of 4,556sq.m has an allowable FSR of 4:1, and the proposed development maintains compliance with this control, with a total GFA of 14,767sq.m and an FSR of 3.24:1. As described previously, this density is achieved without the building's footprint enveloping the entire site, but rather leaving comfortably large open areas at lower levels, which contribute to the public pedestrian streetscape as well as allowing generous open space at ground level for users of the building.

The building includes a mixed range of residences, including 110 two bedroom apartments, 30 one bedroom apartments and 17 studio apartments. This breakdown of residences allows varied levels of affordability for the Newcastle marketplace, potentially catering for student rentals, first home buyers, investment buyers, and family owners. The addition of two commercial lots on the ground floor allows diversity and activity at the street level, and is appropriate in a location so close to the future transport interchange.

The proposed building is located approx. 350m from the proposed Wickham Transport Interchange giving the future residents great access to public transport & community facilities, and increased density in such a location is known to be a desire of local and state governments.

5.0 PRINCIPLE 5: RESOURCE, ENERGY & WATER EFFICIENCY

Good design makes efficient use of natural resources, energy and water throughout its full life cycle, including construction.

Sustainability is integral to the design process. Aspects include demolition of existing structures, recycling of materials, selection of appropriate and sustainable materials, adaptability and reuse of buildings, layouts and built form, passive solar design principles, efficient appliances and mechanical services, soil zones for vegetation and reuse of water.

The existing building on the site is a single storey warehouse & is constructed of readily recyclable materials including steel, concrete, aluminium & glass. The applicant will make every effort to ensure that demolition contractors achieve recycling targets for the waste removed from the site as per Council guidelines.

The proposed building will exceed minimum BASIX requirements & exceeds the rule of thumb standards for both natural ventilation & solar access, primarily as a result of the use of the thin towers and increased setbacks for the residential podium. The building will contain energy & water efficient fittings & appliances, and encourages the use of alternative means of transport to the car, both with its inclusion of plentiful bicycle storage racks and its close proximity to the Wickham Transport Interchange,

6.0 PRINCIPLE 6: LANDSCAPE

Good design recognises that together landscape and buildings operate as an integrated and sustainable system, resulting in greater aesthetic quality and amenity for both occupants and the adjoining public domain.

Landscape design builds on the existing site's natural and cultural features in responsible and creative ways. It enhances the development's natural environmental performance by co-ordinating water and soil management, solar access, micro-climate, tree canopy and habitat values. It contributes to the positive image and contextual fit of development through respect for streetscape and neighbourhood character, or desired future character.

Landscape design should optimise useability, privacy and social opportunity, equitable access and respect for neighbours' amenity, and provide for practical establishment and long term management.

The proposal includes landscaped spaces at the ground, top of podium and plant level, ensuring that residents at all levels of the building have close access to a green breakout space.

At the ground level, the railway lane setback incorporates street tree planting in between visitor and loading bay parking, with public artworks and canopies highlighting the residential entrance to the courtyard at the centre of the development.

The western edge of the site, abutting the neighbouring vacant lot, is landscaped with dense shrubs and canopy trees, discouraging public entry to the non-trafficable area, and creating a visual buffer between the site and its neighbour for the commercial tenancy at ground level. The rear area of the western commercial tenancy has access to natural lighting and ventilation by looking through this green zone.

In the centre courtyard of the development, a raised landscape platform inhabits the core of the space, with trees and an architectural roof canopy providing shade and protection from overlooking from the apartments above. Acting as the central meeting space for the "community" of the railway lane apartments, this courtyard includes picnic tables and a children playground to encourage interaction between residents and activation of the space. Both ground floor commercial areas have views inward to this area, allowing the opportunity for better natural lighting and ventilation, as well as a pleasant outlook and passive surveillance of the space. An architectural screen is proposed for the northern boundary of the site adjacent to the park, to shield the view of the rear wall of buildings adjacent, and tall landscape planting is located in front of this to soften the boundaries appearance from ground level.

On the eastern side of the ground level, a central landscape "break-out" space is located adjacent to the eastern commercial tenancy, allowing the possibility for an outdoor component to the business (as a dining area or similar for example). Landscaped planters divide this breakout space from the adjacent car park ramp, and a private landscaped courtyard to the residence in the north-east corner of the ground level.

At the podium level a large outdoor courtyard is included in the south-east corner adjacent to the proposed community room, including canopy trees, covered and opens picnic tables, and planter beds.

At the Plant Level a community roof terrace is included on their southern side, which will afford views across Wickham, Newcastle Harbour towards the CBD, Nobbys Head and Fort Scratchley. The terraces are loosely demarcated into five seating areas allowing multiple groups to inhabit the space simultaneously whilst maintaining privacy. The terraces feature picnic tables covered with open pergolas, surfaces broken down between paving and synthetic grass, and planter beds to achieve a green surrounding. The architectural blade walls that rise vertically up the side of the towers rise above the balustrade on the roof terrace, framing the views to create a striking outlook.

7.0 PRINCIPLE 7: AMENITY

Good design provides amenity through the physical, spatial and environmental quality of a development.

Optimising amenity requires appropriate room dimensions and shapes, access to sunlight, natural ventilation, visual and acoustic privacy, storage, indoor and outdoor space, efficient layouts and service areas, outlook and ease of access for all age groups and degrees of mobility.

The Railway Lane Apartment building meets the guidelines in SEPP 65 for solar access, cross ventilation, and single aspect South facing apartments.

There are no significantly tall buildings existing or proposed in the immediate vicinity of the building, so no privacy issues are currently apparent, and the design of the proposal either achieves or exceeds the minimum setback requirements of the DCP so that future high-rise development adjacent to the site will not cause privacy concerns.

The proximity of the building to the railway interchange, railway line, and several busy traffic intersections to its south does imply that the acoustic treatment of the facades (particularly the south facade) will need to be carefully considered. Careful detailing and acoustic analysis will be undertaking at documentation stage to ensure that living and bedroom areas within the building achieve the required standards for acoustic privacy.

Open space complies with SEPP 65 Guidelines. Balconies exceed min depth with many being >2.0m in depth. All terraces are approx. a min of 10% of the unit area, with larger landscaped courtyards available for public use as described in landscaping.

Great amenity is achieved in the development purely because of it location, close to the transport interchange, the Wickham foreshore and marina, local parks, cafes, and within walking distance of the city CBD and Honeysuckle restaurant precinct.

8.0 PRINCIPLE 8: SAFETY & SECURITY

Good design optimises safety and security, both internal to the development and for the public domain.

This is achieved by maximising overlooking of public and communal spaces while maintaining internal privacy, avoiding dark and non-visible areas, maximising activity on streets, providing clear, safe access points, providing quality public spaces that cater for desired recreational uses, providing lighting appropriate to the location and desired activities, and clear definition between public and private spaces.

As described in *Landscaping* previously, the proposal centres around a generous public courtyard, which is passively surveiled by apartments above and the adjacent commercial areas, but also achieves an element of privacy with the use of trees and canopy roofs. The courtyard is visible from the street but securely enclosed, preventing unauthorised access but allowing visual connection. Secure car parking is provided under the building, with its entry ramp having a clear an unobstructed footpath crossing at Railway Lane. Secure residential foyers are located for each of the tower buildings, which will include CCTV surveillance and electronic entry systems for security.

9.0 PRINCIPLE 9: SOCIAL DIMENSIONS & HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Good design responds to the social context and needs of the local community in terms of lifestyles, affordability, and access to social facilities.

New developments should optimise the provision of housing to suit the social mix and needs in the neighbourhood or, in the case of precincts undergoing transition, provide for the desired future community.

New developments should address housing affordability by optimising the provision of economic housing choices and providing a mix of housing types to cater for different budgets and housing needs.

The proposed building design predominantly features 2 bedroom, 2 bathroom units with the main bedroom having an ensuite. The current market has proven that this is the most sought after unit type in the Newcastle City Centre through previous apartment buildings we have designed. This allows for a first home owner to have the option of renting out the second bedroom/bathroom to help pay the mortgage repayments. It also attracts investors as they can rent out the units to two separate tenants with both having their own bathroom. This makes buying/renting an affordable option for the younger client market.

There are also 30 one bedroom units and 17 studio apartments included in the development, which helps provide accommodation for students or young people entering the property market or needing rental accommodation close to the city centre, or Newcastle University campuses.

A communal relaxation room & outdoor area have been provided on the south east corner of level 4. The community room is 55m² with an external courtyard of 218m². This facility, along with the ground level central courtyard and a roof terrace will encourage social interaction between residents & allow for internal & external activities and community meetings.

The units in this development will appeal to people wanting to live & work in the city centre, university students who will be attending the new University of Newcastle NeWSpace Campus, & people wanting to be close to Honeysuckle restaurants, the harbour or the proposed transport interchange. Workers commuting frequently by train to Maitland, the central coast or Sydney will also desire to live in the location because of proximity to the train station.

The proposed height & density is in keeping with Newcastle City Council's vision for the West End District & is compatible with the aims of the site's zoning.

10.0 PRINCIPLE 10: AESTHETICS

Quality aesthetics require the appropriate composition of building elements, textures, materials and colours and reflect the use, internal design and structure of the development. Aesthetics should respond to the environment and context, particularly to desirable elements of the existing streetscape or, in precincts undergoing transition, contribute to the desired future character of the area.

As the precinct is undergoing transition, the aesthetics are in keeping with the desired future character of the area. The proposed street wall height will relate to future surrounding development while the ground level commercial tenancies help to activate the streetscape and provide services to local residents.

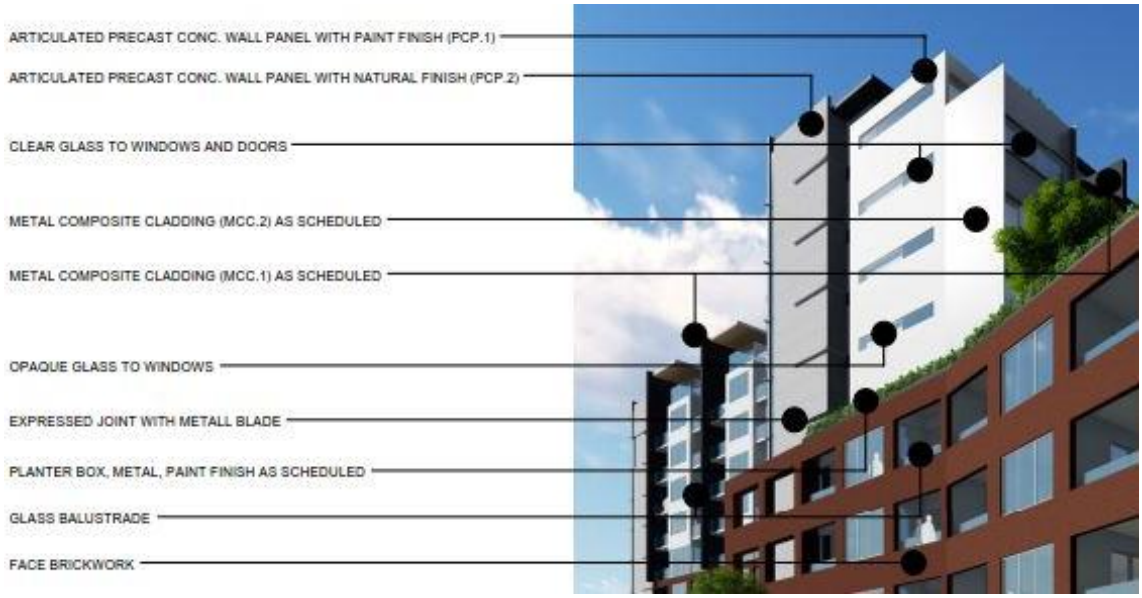
With the proposed Transport Interchange located within close proximity to the proposed development, pedestrian access to the site would be via Railway Lane. The setback of the building adjacent to Railway lane and the open nature of the podium at ground level help to clearly define the entrances to the residential, commercial and courtyard areas of the building, and public art and landscaping are incorporated to further develop the aesthetic of the streetscape.

The podium achieves permeability at ground level, with openings through to the central courtyard and glass shopfront windows allowing views through to the east and west side landscaped areas. This permeability provides comfort and aesthetical appeal at the pedestrian scale. Works of public art provided throughout the ground level courtyard and building entry also help to personalise the space and provide public interest in the development.

The brick podium above however becomes weighty and more massive in appearance, with its more monolithic face brick facade. This architectural device is used to represent solidity and balance beneath the more slender towers above. The horizontality of the brick podium links the building to the transport corridor adjacent, as the podium subtly references the linear representation of a train carriage along its south facade, and also nods to the heritage of the Wickham area, which has a historic of monolithic brick warehouse structures of around the height of the podium.

The upper levels rise more delicately above the heavy podium, and their materiality reflects this change in design. Smooth precast concrete and metal composite cladding take the place of bricks as the facade material, and the tower edge become articulated across its face so as to appear as the opposite of the podium, light and airy rather than massive and heavy. Thin architectural blades climb the full height of the building to reinforce the verticality of the scheme, projecting beyond the top of the roof plant and terrace so as to “feather” the top of the building against the sky background.

The south-west corner of the east wing uses an architectural feature column to provide interest in the facade, rising from ground level right through to the roof level. It will draw the eye skywards and reinforce the pivotal point of the building corner.


ARTICULATED PRECAST CONC. WALL PANEL WITH PAINT FINISH (PCP.1)
ARTICULATED PRECAST CONC. WALL PANEL WITH NATURAL FINISH (PCP.2)
CLEAR GLASS TO WINDOWS AND DOORS
METAL COMPOSITE CLADDING (MCC.2) AS SCHEDULED
METAL COMPOSITE CLADDING (MCC.1) AS SCHEDULED
OPAQUE GLASS TO WINDOWS
EXPRESSED JOINT WITH METALL BLADE
PLANTER BOX, METAL, PAINT FINISH AS SCHEDULED
GLASS BALUSTRADE
FACE BRICKWORK

11.0 CONCLUSION

The proposed Railway Lane apartment development is a groundbreaking project for the Wickham area, providing desirable density in a key location for the city, while achieving design excellence in its aesthetics and space planning.

The proposal is generous in its proportion of open space, landscaped area, and street front activation, and will prove to be a high quality addition to the built environment of Wickham and Newcastle in general.

The project will become a landmark building for those entering the city via train, and will provide commuters, students and families with an efficient and desirable residence in close proximity to many existing and proposed community assets.

On this basis, we therefore trust the Urban Design Consultative Group would endorse the design & provide appropriate recommendations to be addressed in the Development Application documentation.

BARNEY COLLINS
Director
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