



URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATIVE GROUP MEETING

ITEM No. 2

Date of Panel Assessment:	15 February 2017
Address of Project:	643 Hunter Street Newcastle
Name of Project (if applicable):	The Empire
DA Number	DA2016/00042
No. of Buildings:	One
No. of Units:	128
Declaration of Conflict of Interest:	Glen Spicer
Attendees:	<u>Applicant</u> Barney Collins Matt de Witt Ray Bowen <u>Council</u> Melissa Thomas Murray Blackburn Smith Dean Wooding

This report addresses the nine Design Quality Principles set out in the Apartment Design Guide (2015) under State Environmental Planning Policy No.65. It is also an appropriate format for applications which do not include residential flats.

Background Summary

The Urban Design Consultative Group (UDCG) considered a Pre-DA submission for this project in June 2016 and a DA in October 2016. Previous UCDG reports on this project have been supportive in principle, but have raised concerns in respect of: podium height, natural cross ventilation, safety considerations, landscaping and street entry. Several of these factors have improved in subsequent stages, but some concerns remain, and especially those relating to the podium or street-wall height.

The present report focuses on outstanding issues (those which have not been resolved) and only some limited sections of the previous report are included to provide context for the recommendation.

1. Context and Neighbourhood Character

The site is located on the south western corner of Steel and Hunter Streets, and includes the site of the now demolished, historic Empire Hotel. Opposite the site on the northern side of Hunter Street is a large, relatively recent fast food outlet that occupies the former site of the Palais. On the north eastern corner of Hunter Street is the Hunter New England Health facility, which is also a relatively recent building. Excavation in this general area in the past has uncovered Aboriginal artifacts and it might be expected that similar artifacts will be uncovered during any excavation of the subject site. The local area is also rich in post-colonial social history, being the former site of one of the oldest hotels in the state.

The locality is currently under redevelopment, with substantial residential towers being constructed in nearby districts. The significance of the present proposal is that it will provide a precedent for many of the new developments being considered for this immediate vicinity, and as such its level of compliance with the DCP must be carefully considered.

2. Built Form and Scale

The proposal is for a 14 storey tower with a seven storey podium. The building has 128 apartments, ground floor commercial space and 136 car parking spaces. The proposal is within the maximum height controls for the area in the DCP.

The ongoing issue for this design has been street wall height, which the DCP prescribes as a maximum of 16m. A 16m street wall height would be close to the height of several nearby historic buildings and facades and as such, it should generally be enforced.

The revised proposal is for a street wall which is around 16m high, before stepping in (alternating between approx. 0.3m and 3.0m) at the fifth floor, where it raises another 3m in height. Thus the total street wall height is approx. 19m, although the top level of this has a stepped profile (and a material expression) which means the perception of an overall height is reduced. At the least the apartment at the western end of the podium adjoining the neighbouring property - which does not comply with the height control - should be set back by approximately 2 metres from the common boundary for its full depth.

The UDCG's preference is, as previously stated, to see a 16m street wall (ie. no fifth floor) at the edges of the site, but to allow the additional floor at the corner of the site, where it would provide appropriate emphasis at the corner. of the urban fabric.

3. Density

No further comment.

4. Sustainability

No further comment.

5. Landscape

A revised landscape plan has been provided which responds to previous comments from the UDCG.

6. Amenity

The two previous UDCG reports asked for additional details about natural light and cross ventilation in the design. Now that these have been provided it is clear that the design does not achieve the required 60% natural cross ventilation. The proposed level appears to be between 30% and 40%. The UDCG considers this level is not a desirable precedent but could be accepted for four reasons: (i) the social program and potential benefit of the design, (ii) the presence of two major common open spaces, (iii) the presence of natural light and ventilation in lift lobbies, (iv) the relatively shallow units, and their exposure to wind above the lower levels.

Ensure that some form of continuous canopy around the corner entry zone provides good weather protection for pedestrians

7. Safety

No further comment.

8. Housing Diversity and Social Interaction

There is a sufficient mix of apartment types to accommodate residents (24 studios, 33 one-bedroom, 68 two bedroom and 3 three-bedroom units). The social aspirations of the development remain laudable, although it would have been preferable for the scheme to have been developed in accordance with the affordable housing SEPP.

9. Aesthetics

In respect of the materials/colours proposed, consider the use of a warmer palette of materials/colours for the 16m high street wall zone, and especially the sections fronting the car park. The objective should be for the podium levels above the 16 metres height control to be visual unassertive, and for that reason the almost black colour of the non-compliant level as illustrated in the 'Revised issue for DA' should be a more neutral tone. Note also the recommended setback in Built Form and Scale above.

Summary Recommendation

The UDCGs strong preference remains for a 16m high street wall to the edges of the site, which could increase at the corner to around 19m. This would be the ideal solution in terms of urban form, and it would not create a precedent for adjacent or nearby developments to exceed the 16m height.

Notwithstanding this comment, it is noted that the present scheme has: (i) a five storey primary podium which is 16m high, (ii) then a variable setback to the sixth storey, taking the total podium height to around 19m and (iii) a façade expression which emphasises the 16m section. This combination at least partially answers the UDCGs concerns but should be further refined as recommended above.

The applicant is supported subject to the detailed design of the podium and street awning at the corner being resolved as recommended above to the satisfaction of Council.