



URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATIVE GROUP MEETING

ITEM No. 6

Date of Panel Assessment:	16 November 2016
Address of Project:	89 Park Avenue, Kotara
Name of Project (if applicable):	Westfeld
DA Number or Pre-DA?	2016/00023
No. of Buildings:	1 building
No. of Units:	na
Declaration of Conflict of Interest:	none
Attendees:	<u>Applicant</u> Nicky Watson – Development Executive David Winley – Planner Architect Nicolas Thioulouse - Development leader Jay Di – Development Executive <u>Council</u> 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

This application has been reviewed at pre-DA stage on 21st September, 2016. The design has been further developed since that time and has responded to a number of the issues identified. Where relevant the recommendations/comments contained in the September report of the Panel are reiterated in italics.

Amendments since the previous UDCG:

Amendments to the proposed development since the previous UDCG meeting of 21 September 2016 include:

- Changes to the building materials applied to the external façade.
- Relocating the K-Mark auto from the southwest corner of the site with Cynthia Street to the north-west corner of the site adjacent to Lexington Parade, but within the existing building footprint so not impacting on the external appearance of the centre.

- Increasing the additional retail space from 5,855sqm to 6,295sqm.
- Increasing the additional car parking spaces on Level 3 from 189 to 197 spaces.
- Increasing the total car parking provided on-site from 3,119 to 3,133 spaces.

1. Context and Neighbourhood Character

The site is located on the corner of Park Avenue and Northcott Drive and extends to Lexington parade to the west and Cynthia Street to the south. The site has historically been a shopping centre surrounded by the residential suburb of Kotara. The centre has progressively grown over the years and attracted further retail development to the north across Park Avenue. The centre was originally surrounded by trees but with progressive additions to the centre the landscaping has been significantly reduced with the centre and associated car park now filling the site. The site is zoned B2 Local Centre.

2. Built Form and Scale

While the buildings exceed the height limit there has been an historic exceedance of this and the present proposal is consistent with a previously approved bowling alley DA and below the existing cinema box adjoining the extension. The overall development is also well within the allowable FSR for the site. The form of the extension is in keeping with the clean simple forms making up the existing development and is generally acceptable. The revised location for the K-Mart auto centre was considered to be an improvement to the exterior look of the centre as it allowed more vegetation to screen the centre on the Cynthia Street side.

3. Density

NA

4. Sustainability

With such a large car parking area on top of the building, thought could be given to shading cars. Whilst mindful of costs, this could be done by banks of solar panels, or fabric shade structures or shade trees in large pots. This would also improve the aesthetics of the large roof top parking area for nearby residents who look down on it. This was not addressed by the revised submission.

5. Landscape

The photo montages do not give a reasonable image of how the development will look in its future context in respect to the capacity for new, appropriately scaled landscape trees and street planting. The latter is severely impacted by overhead cables. The removal of the existing trees along Northcott Drive and around the existing Kmart Autobay will significantly impact on the view to the complex from Northcott Drive. The Panel recommended that the proponent's Arborist and engineers to review the proposal for removing these existing mature trees, as a retaining wall and level changes already exist, and therefore the tree roots are well constrained to allow further development. It is understood that the ground level is proposed to be lowered a further 1m or so at the base of the retaining wall, but this construction should be possible while still retaining the trees.

The progressive removal of the trees that once surrounded the centre combined with the internalization of the centre, has had an unfortunate visual impact. The corner feature on Park Avenue and Northcott Drive is filled with domestic scale plantings so as not to conceal the signage. The Panel felt that the ground level landscaping needed significant improvement with the provision of climbing frames to allow some greening of the vast expanses of blank walls. This may also be able to be done as the building steps in with narrow planter beds of climbers to soften the upper levels of blank walls. There are

many examples of greened buildings and internal shopping centres which are attractive additions to streetscapes and the Panel encourages the designers to consider enhancing Westfield in similar ways.

The revised images which were presented greatly improved the appearance of the centre with extensive timber-look screening of the building which will allow climbers to visually soften the blank walls. Higher level planting is still recommended in addition to this to visually soften the extensive blank walls which already exist around the cinema and roof top dining area.

There is one significant eucalypt tree near Cynthia Street which is very near the street boundary and which appears potentially capable of retention without adversely inhibiting the proposed layout. Consideration should be given to preserving at least this usefully scaled, 50 year old tree.

6. Amenity

The proposal potentially improves the amenity of the public inside the development but fails to improve the amenity for people arriving on foot to the centre or for people passing by. Indeed, it removes one of the better pedestrian accesses to the centre, which although it traverses an open car park, is less circuitous and confused than other pedestrian entries. The centre focuses almost exclusively on the public arriving at the centre by car. While it is appreciated that this is the most common method of transport, there is reasonable foot traffic, mostly associated with pedestrians arriving by public transport or walking from the adjacent Homemakers Centre. The opportunity for making a real improvement to the visitor arrival experience should be embraced as part of this development stage, rather than the situation being made even less attractive than it is currently.

This has been considered in the revised design with, some visual presence assigned to the pedestrian entrance off Northcott Drive to the centre, with improved signage and timber-look screening to make the entrance more attractive. However the pedestrian path remains through the carpark, which is far from ideal aesthetically and functionally. The pathway could be emphasized more when inside the carpark. For example there could be additional lighting, or a dropped ceiling both which would highlight the location of the pedestrian walkway through the carpark and assist pedestrians to locate the walkway.

The amenity of shopfronts facing into the carpark was questioned, as the proposal will at ground level “bury” these retail spaces even further from natural light and ventilation because of the extension of the enclosed car park.

Some suggestions on improving this area were mentioned but no detail drawings were shown to give detail as to what was proposed. Some visual screening between the walkway outside the retail tenancies facing the car park, and the roadway /carpark is considered to be a minimal requirement.

7. Safety

Improved wayfinding and pedestrian pathways without the necessity to traverse through the carpark to the mall, would improve safety around the site.

While the revised information presented showed improved wayfinding and more emphasis on pedestrian pathways, the Panel also suggested that in future renovations/additions to the centre, the design brief should include an extension

of the mall to the street at a point along Park Avenue, to provide a visible entry connection to the street and provide the ability to enter the centre without the need to transverse a carpark.

8. Housing Diversity and Social Interaction

NA

9. Aesthetics

While the Panel acknowledged the considerable effort by the proponent to improve the aesthetics for the public when they are inside the development, the panel felt that insufficient attention was being given to the exterior of the centre. The Proponent noted the simple box like structures enclosing the additional retail space were in keeping with the existing structures already there. The panel accepts that a logical approach to this addition can be a continuance of the forms that have preceded it and the warm grey metal cladding does become quite recessive in certain weather, however, the addition is still going to be viewed as simply a metal box on top of a carpark. Much more should have been done with the exterior view of this facility, particularly as the higher this development gets the more surrounding areas see it.

The Panel was pleased to see that an alternate material to the metal sheeting was now proposed. The Equitone product still provided the warm grey tones to tie in with the rest of the centre, but it provided a more attractive appearance, more in keeping with the quality finishes inside the centre.

Some greening of areas to soften the mass and blandness of the development would improve the overall appearance.

More greening of the exterior of the centre was proposed.

Amendments Required to Achieve Design Quality

The group considers the following aspects of the proposal should be the subject of design development.

- Improve the pedestrian pathways through the carpark to access the shopping mall.
- Reconsider the retail areas which will as proposed face directly to the enclosed car-park
- Include more attractive and direct pedestrian access from the Park Avenue drop-off for pedestrians, in any forthcoming development proposal for future stages.

Summary Recommendation

While the revised design and information presented to the Panel shows a positive improvement, the Panel would like the proponents to continue to develop this centre with not just well designed internal spaces, but also with consideration of the importance of the image the centre presents to the street as well.

While most shoppers travel by car to Westfield Kotara, some do walk, arrive by bus, taxi or are “dropped off” from private vehicles on Northcott Drive and Park Avenue, and the transition from street to retail area should be safe, aesthetically pleasing, and direct. Because of the denser residential zonings in areas nearby the Centre encouraging unit and townhouse development, in the future the proportion of people accessing the centre

from the public streets will further increase. Furthermore, residents in the hundreds of houses on the surrounding hills around Westfield have views across to it, so the external appearance of the centre has a significant impact and deserves to be done well.

The issues raised above should be resolved to the satisfaction of Council before the design is approved. If considered desirable by Council any proposed amendments could be referred back to the Panel for further review.