

# DESIGN EXCELLENCE ADVISORY PANEL RECOMMENDATION

City of Parramatta



**Address** Hoyts Roxy Theatre – 69 George Street, Parramatta  
**Date** 15<sup>th</sup> March 2018

## Application Summary

Application Number	DA/1008/2017
Assessing Officer	Brad Roeleven
Applicant/Proponent	Urbis
Architect and Registration Number	Erik Rudolfsson – RAAarchitects – Reg No: 6914 Joseph Alliker – RAAarchitects
Urban Designer	
Landscape Architect	
Planner	Sophy Purton - Urbis
Others in attendance	David Kindston – Owner Lynette Gurr – Urbis – Heritage

DEAP Members	Russell Olsson, Jon Johannsen, Oi Choong
Chair	Russell Olsson
Other Persons in attendance	Najeeb Kobeissi – Student Project Officer – City Architect Team Guy Pinkerton – Senior Urban Designer Deena Ridenour – Urban Design Specialist, City Transformation
Apologies	Kim Crestani – City Architect
Item No	2
DEAP Meeting Number	1

## General Information

The Parramatta Design Excellence Advisory Panel (the Panel) comments are provided to assist both the applicant in improving the design quality of the proposal, and the City of Parramatta council in its consideration of the application.

Comments are primarily based on the Panel's experience and understanding of 'best practice' in urban design, architecture and landscape qualities. The nine SEPP65 design principles were also considered by the Panel in discussion of the development application. These are: **Context and Neighbourhood Character, Scale and Built Form, Density, Sustainability, Landscape, Amenity, Safety, Housing Diversity and Social Interaction, and Aesthetics.**

The absence of a comment related to issues not raised herein does not necessarily imply that the Panel considers a particular matter has been satisfactorily resolved.

## Proposal

Concept Development Application for the restoration and refurbishment of the Roxy Theatre and associated forecourt and the construction of a commercial office tower above, of up to 33 storeys. The proposal is Nominated Integrated Development under the Heritage Act 1977 and the Water Management Act 2000. The application will be determined by the Sydney Central City Planning Panel.

## Panel Comments

The Design Excellence Advisory Panel makes the following comments in relation to the project:

This submission is a Concept DA. It is understood the applicant proposes that this application will precede a design competition, following which a detailed development application would then be lodged with Council.

Within that context, the purpose of this Design Excellence Advisory Panel review is to review this proposal and advise on the adequacy of the proposed built form and landscape design approach.

The Roxy Theatre is an iconic site in Parramatta and is listed on Schedule 5 of the Parramatta City Centre LEP 2011. It is understood that the Office of Environment and Heritage, and Council, will provide specialist advice in relation to the evaluation of heritage impacts. The Roxy Theatre site is on the corner of two major axes in Parramatta city centre. George Street is the original main city street, of 205 feet width, laid out between the Landing Place and Old Government House in the first town layout by Surveyor General Alt and Captain Phillip. A second cross axis on Horwood Place is to be reinforced with the future north-south Civic Link between Parramatta Square and the River Square.

It is noted that the proposed commercial tower behind The Roxy will be set back approximately aligning with the 205 feet building alignment that is in the Parramatta city centre DCP. The proposal is to retain the entry forecourt from George Street and a substantial part of the main building, including the facade and theatre interior. A high rise commercial building is proposed to the rear of the site, above and behind the main theatre auditorium. This is a complex design task, to retain the heritage significance of the existing heritage item, while adding a high rise commercial building and responding appropriately to the immediate and broader urban context.

The main issues are:

1. the formation of an appropriate building envelope and floor area (FSR) for the design competition
2. the physical curtilage of the heritage item
3. the structural design of the commercial tower to maintain and enhance the heritage item
4. The address of the new building to the Horwood Place Civic Link
5. the accommodation of the desired commercial program
6. the visual relationship between the commercial tower and the heritage item
7. the environmental impact of the commercial tower on the surrounding city

## 1. THE FORMATION OF AN APPROPRIATE BUILDING ENVELOPE AND FLOOR AREA (FSR) FOR THE DESIGN COMPETITION

The aim of this stage of the project is to create a building envelope that addresses these issues and can be used as the building envelope in the Design Competition Brief. The commercial tower designed by the competitors in the design competition will not be permitted to extend past the building envelope. It is essential therefore that the competitors have enough room within the building envelope to create a range of different, articulated and expressive design approaches. Therefore the building envelope must be larger than the floor area (FSR) stated in any Design Brief. The Apartment Design Guide gives a guide to the difference between a building envelope and the maximum floor area (FSR). The floor area is to occupy 80% of the volume of the building envelope. While that is for residential building and this proposal is a commercial building, it is an indicative guide to allowing sufficient space for different design approaches, articulation and expression by the design competitors.

The permissible FSR in the LEP is 11.5 : 1 if a design competition is held. To achieve this yield, the building envelope is to be substantially larger than the floor area (FSR) contained within it. The current proposal does not have sufficient difference between the building envelope and the floor area (FSR) contained within it. The commercial tower is not sufficiently set back from the main façade of the heritage item. The Panel notes that a greater setback and more space in the envelope can be created by any or all of the following :

- Increasing the tower setback behind the main façade of the theatre
- increasing the height of the tower - but only if solar access to key areas of the public domain can be achieved
- amending the current commercial tower footprint
- reducing the floor area (FSR) of the proposal.

It is recommended that the shadow impacts on Lancer Barracks and Parramatta Square are assessed and Council planning officers consulted to determine an acceptable building height.

It is recommended that 3 dimensional building envelope testing is made for increasing the tower setback above level 5. A number of the setbacks should be tested at different levels. This is particularly important along the Horwood Place Civic Link where the proposal implies that the entire 33 storey façade to the west elevation continues unrelieved down to ground level.

The first objective of building envelope testing is to minimize the visual impact on the heritage item when viewed from George Street and the corner of Horwood Place, by setting back the tower further from the main theatre façade. The second objective is to create an envelope that is sufficiently large to allow space for competitors to create a range of design responses.

It is recommended that the Applicant test building envelope options and return to the Panel with these options. The applicant should prepare :

1. A building envelope study that includes future potential envelopes on adjacent sites, and how the proposed envelope would interface with future development of those sites, in particular the George Street site to the east. Options should include a tower set back from the eastern side boundary and a zero lot line option.

2. Building envelope options for the commercial tower that include :

- options for different setbacks from the main theatre façade to the tower. These setbacks should be greater in the lower tower levels, to provide a recessive backdrop for the heritage parapet. Different setback distances and heights of changed setbacks should be tested. Sloping envelope planes should be avoided where there may be negative environmental consequences.
- options for the ground level interface with Horwood Place Civic Link. The current proposal implies that the entire 33 storey façade of the west elevation continues unrelieved down to ground level, except for the lower structural transfer elements of the tower. Possibly a more sympathetic approach for this critical transfer could utilise the side setback to offer alternatives in transition from a podium framework to tower structure above with appropriately considered setbacks. An important consideration in assessing these options will be that they do not compromise the integrity of the heritage item.

The Applicant should also provide precedents of similar projects that demonstrate:

- additions of towers above and behind heritage items
- ground level conditions for pedestrians in other streets and/or squares, in relation to the ground level of Horwood Place Civic Link.

## 2. THE PHYSICAL CURTILAGE OF THE HERITAGE ITEM

The heritage item is located within the lot that it occupies, with approximately 3m between the eastern and western lot boundaries and the walls of the main theatre auditorium. This provides some scope for separating the heritage item from any future structure, which would clearly delineate the new from the old, one design approach to resolving the relationship between the heritage item and any addition.

It is desirable that as much of the built fabric of the existing heritage item is retained in any new design for the concept DA, and this be stated as an objective in any Design Brief.

### 3. THE STRUCTURAL DESIGN OF THE COMMERCIAL TOWER

The proposed tower is relatively large and in very close proximity to the heritage item, creating the potential for the fabric of the heritage item to be physically impacted by the new structure. This may lead to excessive loss of existing side walls and footings, and possibly structural instability of those parts of the item that are meant to be retained. It is essential that a structural engineer undertake an analysis of the structural issues and that structural information be an important part of the concept DA and any Design Brief. An anticipated pre-construction dilapidation report should clearly reference the hierarchy of heritage elements, and the degree of exposure that they may have to damage during the building process.

### 4. THE ADDRESS TO HORWOOD PLACE CIVIC LINK

The proposal contains tower entry lobbies, cafes, shops and a loading dock at the rear of the site. The proposal as drawn must be considered as indicative only, as it will not necessarily be the same as the outcome of any design competition. However, there are basic functional requirements that need to be tested and resolved as part of the concept DA and for any subsequent Design Brief. These include :

- The need to liaise with Council and the designers of the Civic Link to achieve the best interface for activation and spatial sequencing
- Consideration for vehicles crossing the Horwood Place Civic Link, and how electronic bollards together with specific loading and unloading times could avoid conflicts with peak pedestrian flows.
- The ability of trucks of certain sizes to access the loading dock from the surrounding streets and for the loading dock and goods delivery systems to function internally within the building
- On site waste management
- The number and types of lifts. Any Design Brief must specify this, in consultation with lift engineers
- Fire egress requirements

These functional requirements are demanding on a site of these limited dimensions. At the same time as meeting these requirements, an attractive and active ground floor interface with the Horwood Place Civic Link is highly desirable. It is essential that these elements are therefore addressed in the Concept DA.

### 5. THE ACCOMMODATION OF THE DESIRED COMMERCIAL PROGRAMME, INCLUDING EVENT SPACE

The proposal contains an Event Space which is located above the Theatre and set back from the Theatre main facade. The applicant considers this to be an important component of the proposal. If this function is to be part of the scheme, it is important that its location on the site does not unduly impact on the visual curtilage of the heritage item when viewed from George Street and the corner of Horwood Place and George Street. The mezzanine of the Event Space has the potential for the greatest visual impact as it is at a visible level above the main facade of the Theatre. It is important that the concept DA and any Design Brief does not specify the location of the mezzanine level, with the current L-shaped layout, so that design competitors have the opportunity to resolve the design of these critical lower levels of the tower with a range of approaches.

The proposed Garden Deck behind the main Theatre facade creates an incongruous juxtaposition of large canopy trees above the heritage facade, which has no historical precedent. An outdoor terrace is appropriate, however a different landscape design is recommended and should preferably complement a recessive backdrop to the façade as noted below.

The commercial office space is to be functional, however it is recommended that the office floorplate sizes may vary at different levels of the tower. It will be necessary for the design competition competitors to be given some latitude to create floorplates of different sizes in response to the urban/built form challenges and commercial needs.

The Forecourt and the attendant café/restaurants are to be sympathetically restored.

## 6. THE VISUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HERITAGE ITEM AND THE COMMERCIAL TOWER

The proposal has a minimal setback of approximately 14m from the front facade of the main theatre building. In addition, the tower has a sloping envelope which is set back at its highest point approximately 9m from the theatre facade. This built form is excessively overbearing on the heritage item due to its outward sloping form and close proximity to the item.

The concept DA and any Design Brief should emphasise the importance of having adequate tower setbacks, appropriate built form, materials and colours, particularly in the lower tower levels in relation to the heritage item where there must be sufficient spatial separation to ensure the visual integrity of original Roxy built form can be maintained. It will be critical for key viewpoints to be assessed along George St and the Horwood Place Civic Link to demonstrate this.


## 7. THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE TOWER ON THE SURROUNDING CITY

Environmental impacts include wind impacts and shadow impacts. The concept DA and any Design Brief must minimise wind downdrafts on the public space in Horwood Place Civic Link and on any upper level terrace associated with the development.

A primary measure of environmental impact in the city centre development controls is shadow impact. This applies to Lancer Barracks and parts of the Parramatta Square between 12 noon and 2pm on 22nd June. It is noted that Parramatta LEP 2011, Clause 7.4 sun access (2) states that “this clause applies if the consent authority considers that development that is the subject of a DA is likely to cause excessive overshadowing of the public space”.

The control in Parramatta DCP is for solar access between 12 noon and 2pm. The proposal complies with this control, however additional building height for the commercial tower may also comply, but this must be tested taking into account shadows of existing and approved buildings in the relevant areas. This may be necessary to accommodate some offsets for GFA lost due to achieving adequate setbacks to the heritage item.

## Panel Recommendation

Selected Recommendation	Description	Action
Green	The Parramatta Design Excellence Advisory Panel (The Panel) supports the proposal in its current form. The Panel advises this is a well-considered and presented scheme and that the architectural, urban design and landscape quality is of a high standard.	Only minor changes required as noted and provided these changes are incorporated and presented to the City Architect the Panel does not need to review this application again.
Amber	The Parramatta Design Excellence Advisory Panel (The Panel) generally supports the proposal in its current form with caveats that require further consideration.  The Panel advises that this is a reasonably well considered and presented scheme and that the architectural, urban design and landscape quality are of a reasonable standard	Once the applicant and design team have addressed the issues outlined, the panel looks forward to reviewing the next iteration
Red 	The Parramatta Design Excellence Advisory Panel (The Panel) does not support the proposal in its current form. The Panel advises that there are a number of significant issues with the proposal.	The Panel recommends that the applicant/proponent contact the Council to discuss.