

URBAN DESIGN REVIEW PANEL Report



Meeting: UDRP – 25 November 2021

Date: Thursday 25 November 2021

Chair: Philip Pollard, Urban Design Review Panel

Attendees: Kerry Hunter, Urban Design Review Panel
Colin Brady, Urban Design Review Panel

Amy Ryan, Development Coordinator, City of Newcastle
Elle Durrant, Development Officer (Planning), City of Newcastle

AGENDA	Item	Description
	2	Matters for consideration
10:45am-11:45am [60 mins]	2.13	UD2021/00004.01 - DA2021/01530 854 Hunter Street Newcastle West Mixed Use Development – Shop Top Housing (356 Dwellings), Ground Floor Retail Premises, Commercial Premises and Basement.
11:45am-12:45pm [60 mins]	2.14	UD2021/01367 – MA2021/00450 854 Hunter Street Newcastle West Section 4.55(2) Modification to DA2018/01109 – Concept staged development commercial, residential and car parking – Changes to conditions of consent and proposed design changes. Attendees: Applicant: Melissa Thomas - Principal Planner - SLR Consulting Grace Moses - Project Planning - SLR Consulting Patrick Quinlan - Principal Planner - SLR Consulting Sean Kearney - Development Manager - DOMA Chris Farrington - Development Director - DOMA Simon Swaney - Managing Director - Bates Smart Bradley Dorn - Associate Director - Bates Smart Jill Woodley - Bates Smart Officer: Holly Hutchens Senior Development Officer (Planning), City of Newcastle

In the interest of providing open access to information to the public this referral will be made available on City of Newcastle's (CNs') Application Tracking system.

The content of this advice is intended to provide information for the Assessment Officer to consider in the determination of the relevant application. The Urban Design Review Panel (UDRP) is an advisory panel only and the advice provided by the panel is to inform the assessment process. It is not the purpose of the UDRP to have any role in the determination of development applications, nor are its recommendations binding on CN's determination of an application.

Scope

The following drawings / documents have been reviewed:

Plan No / Supporting Document	Prepared by	Reference/ date
Architectural Drawings (36 pages)	Bates Smart	22/10/2021
Landscape Drawings (36 pages)	Moir Landscape Architecture	19/08/2021
ADG Compliance Checklist (12 pages)	Bates Smart	Unknown
Design Competition Waiver (3 pages)	GA NSW	16/07/2018
Statement of Heritage Impact (96 pages)	EJE Heritage	September 2021

Background

Prior to lodgment of the current development application, the development proposal was previously reviewed by the then Urban Design Consultative Group at the meeting held 26 May 2021. Relevant extracts from the advice provided at that time has been reiterated below in italics, followed by comments on the current development proposal.

1. Context and Neighbourhood Character

26 May 2021

A mixed used development and the final stage of 'The Store' redevelopment, the proposal follows completion of a transport interchange, multi- story carpark, and separate office tower included in a masterplan for the overall site.

The current application provides for a four-level podium including ground floor retail, lobby areas, upper levels of commercial and storage space. Above the podium are paired towers housing residential, and roof top plant. A transitional level at the base of the apartments incorporates recreational areas linked to an extensive recreational area on the roof level of the existing carpark. The submission represents the final stage of design development prior to submission of a Development Application.

The site is within a setting of extensive urban renewal focused on the Newcastle Transport Interchange incorporating the new rail terminus and transfer point to light rail and bus services. The subject development provides the final stage of a masterplan accommodating transport interchange, multi storey carpark, separate office building, and the current proposed being the twin residential towers set above a four-level commercial podium.

These and other recent and approved developments about Newcastle West have introduced a dramatically changed character to the neighbourhood, previously of late 19th to mid- 20th Century retail, commercial, and light industrial buildings with small residential, enclaves particularly north of the rail line. Elements of the historic setting are retained in a number of contemporary developments adding to a complex visual setting. New works including those within the Master Plan demonstrate distinct individual forms and styles.

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Consideration of Country

- Whilst the Statement of Heritage Impact has a good introduction – it only briefly touches on the First Nations use of the site. The Panel recommends that the Applicant further consider Connecting with Country, with a view to an engagement informing an appropriate recognition, possibly by way of a public artwork.
- Much made about the current history of the site – but it is necessary to address how the project has meaningfully implemented Connection with Country.

2. Built Form and Scale

26 May 2021

The concept approved proposal for twin towers rising above a commercial/retail podium with both towers bearing on the upper level of the completed carpark has been maintained and refined in the developed design.

The relationship of the trapezoidal plan form towers has been altered by rotation of the east tower providing increased separation distances between opposing elevations and improved outlook.

The evolved design provides a four storey podium articulated with arched face brickwork with residential towers rising to level 29, the towers clad in alternating solid and glazed panels above the podium.

The top five residential floors to each tower have been chamfered to the south side of the west tower and north side of the east tower. Modification of the towers in plan form includes curving of corners and variation in outer wall lines between upper and lower floors. This modelling of the towers provides variation in the apparent height of the towers viewed from street level and mitigation of overall height and scale. The towers when complete will form the dominant and tallest element of the skyline, emphasizing the importance of their design being of high standard.

The panel considered the reallocation of FSR from the western tower to the eastern one provided a desirable differentiation in height, particularly when the buildings are viewed in profile from a distance.

Providing that the moderate additional height beyond the control does not cause adverse solar impacts on properties to the south, which is not anticipated, the benefit of the variation in height was supported. Likewise, the “chamfering” of the building forms both in plan and in elevation was supported, as was the rounding or the building corner forms.

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The Panel noted that the design presented was generally responsive to the previous advice from the UDRP. The previous recommendations have been addressed, in the main with a more than satisfactory response. The developed design is considered to be of a high standard.

The revision to the initial design's layout, which opens up the space between the towers at its northern end, and which reduces the linear lengths of the wall planes, is considered successful in producing a more attractive, less bulky urban form, and a better spatial relationship between the towers. Solar access to the dwellings is also improved by this move. As presented previously to the Panel, a minor variation to the recommended minimum ADG building separation (of 24m) between the towers, occurs at their very southern ends, but apartments and their balconies have been configured to avoid direct overlooking between dwellings, and this spatial arrangement was again supported.

The subject site is located within the Newcastle City Centre and the proposal will result in two buildings of 45 metres or higher above ground level, as such the provisions of Clause 7.4 apply, requiring a separation of 24m. As proposed in the original Stage 2 concept proposal, the adjoining commercial building also slightly exceeds 45m and therefore this clause applies to both buildings. The separation between the eastern tower and the commercial building facing Stewart Avenue is 19.6m, but the buildings are offset, and the resulting relationship between them is considered to be quite satisfactory, with no significant adverse impacts.

The façade composition has been progressed with a moderate projection at each level of the floor slab and with vertical blades inserted between the slabs. A slightly greater projection of the floor slab occurs at four floor intervals, which provides a larger scaled pattern to the façade. The vertical blades are arranged to respond to aspect (solid blades assisting with some shading and privacy where required).

Although the building exterior appears to be fully glazed, areas of insulated solid wall are provided where appropriate, with colour-backed glass and spandrel for bedrooms and areas where more privacy and less light are needed. The Panel noted that a means of cleaning the glazing should be identified, as the buildings are too tall to permit cleaning by abseil.

The Applicant advised that balconies are to be provided with clear glass to their balustrades, which will expose items stored or placed on balconies. Body Corporate regulations will need to address the appearance of items placed on balconies, as these items will be visible from the street and from other buildings in the area. One of the reasons for the Panel's preference not to have entirely glazed balustrades, is to allow a sense of security and to provide some privacy to people using the outdoor space. In accepting the decision to provide clear glass balustrades, the Panel recommended providing at least a low upstand at the base of the balustrade.

In respect to vehicles accessing the car park, it was noted that the current arrangement and signage is somewhat confusing at the vehicle entrances off Hunter Street. It would be easy for a driver turning in to select the wrong roadway. It was acknowledged that the car park use once the development is completed will revert to residents and regular commercial space users, and thus the general public will not frequently make use of the car park entry. It was none the less recommended that clearer signage be provided for drivers. The Applicant indicated that there is also proposed to be some traffic signalling modification that will assist in reducing this risk.

The Panel noted and commended the pedestrian friendly and permeable ground plan – creating a landscaped plaza space at Coopers Lane which will lead pedestrians into the laneways. Also commended was the brickwork façade of the podium element, and the treatment of the treatment of the through site link that provides access to the commercial and residential lobby spaces.

3. Density

26 May 2021

Amendment to the height of the towers and the floor plan profiles have maintained a compliant FSR of 4.9:1 – As approved under the concept master plan DA2018/01107.01.

Height: The relocation of a floor from the west to the east tower has provided heights of West Tower RL 103.0 (99m) East Tower RL 108.55 (105m).

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The FSR of the proposal remains consistent with the approved concept master plan and is compliant with the control.

There are moderate height exceedances for the proposal, the greater of which is as a result of the desire, supported by the Panel, to relocate some space from the top of the western tower to the east. No increase in FSR resulted from this, but it provided a more satisfactory urban design outcome, thanks to the variation created between the towers appearance. No adverse impacts arise from the height exceedances, which have previously been supported.

4. Sustainability

26 May 2021

Not discussed in detail. Capacity for sustainable performance is enhanced by the extensive recreational area over the attached carpark enabling recycling of water and potential for solar electrical generation. The alternating pattern of panels proposed in elevations further serves to enhance thermal performance of the buildings.

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The main sustainability and amenity issue that the Panel sought further advice upon from the proponent, relates to the extent of glazing across the building facades, and likely solar heat loads resulting. The architects advised that the protruding floor slabs and strategically located vertical blades assist usefully in providing some shade on the façade. None the less, the Panel retains reservations in respect to the solar loads upon the residential buildings, and the extent of exposed glass. It was noted that the requirements of BASIX, being a multi-factored system, currently set a low bar in respect to thermal performance. It is crucial that glazing and window and door frames be of a standard that adequately ameliorates the extent of glazing, and that provides good levels of thermal comfort to the residences - without excessive need for air conditioning and the resultant energy demands. Frames should be thermally broken, and high performance glazing provided. In addition, careful consideration of appropriate indoor window shading and glare reduction should provide residents with a selection of appropriate window coverings that can reduce glare and provide some further internal insulation. The Panel was of the view that more extensive areas of solid, insulated external wall treatment in strategic locations would assist, without necessarily incurring any significant loss of panoramic views.

Long term maintenance has to be considered – particularly with all the screens proposed in front of the glazing – which will exist in a salty, corrosive environment. It is important to ensure that the materials are able to withstand the corrosive environment, and have a long functional life.

Solar PV generation panels – further consideration and refinement of these should be given to integrating solar panels with shade structures/ pergolas within the recreation area.

5. Landscape

26 May 2021

Not discussed in detail as the proposal is not as yet detailed. The podium recreation area above the carpark and the setback floors to the upper levels of the apartment towers provide opportunity for extensive planting. While active areas for the proposed tennis court, running track, and swimming pool offer future residents an outstanding range of communal activities, greater use of larger-scaled plantings and soft landscaping generally are warranted, given the very large area available for communal use.

Planting should be in generous soil volumes, on structure rather than containerized. The area should have a feeling of a predominately soft-landscaped setting, into which other built elements are inserted, rather than the plantings being isolated items within a hardscape.

While the use of some synthetic surfaces appears likely to be the most practical option for areas such as the tennis court and running track, this material has a limited life, and ultimately does introduce issues of plastics breaking down in UV light and small pieces of plastic finding their way into the harbour or ocean. Areas for casual recreation should be real turf over soil, rather than synthetics.

Maintenance of edge planting to apartments needs to be provided by the body corporate. Street trees to the Kiss and Ride Area (if permissible), Hunter Street and the eastern forecourt need to be provided and coordinated.

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Public space is a key to the success of this proposal. The plaza area created at ground level at the eastern end of the podium, adjacent to Coopers Lane, is a positive inclusion with an attractive deep-soil landscape approach.

The communal open space located on the roof of the car park and Interchange provides a very large recreational and relaxation area, with an attractive aspect, that is likely to be very

well utilised by residents. Because of structural constraints and the column spacing below, the location options for larger trees and deep planter beds has been constrained. The planter beds away from columns are quite shallow in their soil volumes, and will need more regular watering. It is likely soil will need to be changed more frequently than if volumes could have been more generous. Access is available for this task.

The soil volumes need to be nominated in the documentation for the Development Application – to ensure the executed landscape work achieves the (constrained) soil volumes nominated. None the less, the area will be a very attractive one, which offers a high standard of communal space for residents.

Communal areas are also provided at the roof level of the two residential towers. These would benefit from a provision of some shade in the form of pergolas or limited areas that are roofed.

6. Amenity

26 May 2021

Issues raised by the panel are as follows:

- *At residential floors, the layout of narrow corridors at right angles to the lift entries is not a desirable option. The alternative of extending the latter directly to the external wall so that there is natural light in the lift corridor would be far preferable. A small seat could be providing adjacent to the window looking out to the view.*
- *Provision of uninterrupted awnings about street level to provide continuity of protection for pedestrians.*
- *Provision of wind protection to outer corner balconies and to the through passage at ground level.*
- *Signage to clarify/assist way finding from carpark and ground floor to residential lifts.*
- *The splayed and rotated relationship of the towers avoiding direct overlooking and giving a median separation of 24m is supported.*
- *Extent of overshadowing of adjacent sites by the rooftop plant level is to be demonstrated.*
- *Cleaning methodology for external glazing needs to be clarified.*
- *Balustrades to lower-level apartments need to be opaque.*
- *Waste disposal provisions need further clarification.*

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Exposure of Private Open Spaces to the wind condition:

In response to earlier Panel comments, balconies have been moved inboard from the corners of the tower floor plates – this left the corners free for internal living spaces which, in many locations, allow panoramic views.

Access to common spaces on the Level 05 landscaped communal area:

The lift lobby from the car park should be glazed and accessible from both sides, which would also enable it to open it up and provide visual connection between the residential lobby and the communal open space.

Cross Ventilation:

Some disappointment was noted that the minimum cross ventilation requirements of the ADG are not being achieved in terms of the proportion of apartments achieving cross ventilation.

- the Applicant acknowledged that they could replan the lower-level single aspect 1B apartments and adjacent 2 bedroom apartments to become 3 bedroom apartments

and this would achieve the natural ventilation requirements of the ADG. However these apartments are likely to be the more affordable in the market, and on balance this was considered to have been a better outcome, particularly given that the site conditions are conducive to breezes.

- All apartments will be provided with mechanical ventilation via a central plant system – which is strongly supported by the Panel. The volume of air extracted per hour in single aspect apartments should be set at a rate that assists in inducing cross ventilation in single aspect apartments. Centralised HVAC also means that no AC no compressor units will be placed on balconies.

Extent of glazing – thermal loads and management of glare:

As raised under the Sustainability heading, the Panel expressed concerns in respect to solar loads on glass, and the resulting thermal comfort considerations.

A related issue is that, there will need to be an integrated approach between fenestration design and window treatments for glare management and privacy. The Panel recommends incorporating internal window coverings in the fit-out – in particular considering the curved corners – to avoid visual clutter from future tenants installing differing window treatments, which would detract from the architectural expression.

7. Safety

26 May 2021

Security of the through site 'Brewery Lane' and the western interface of driveways and footways need further consideration. There appears to be an inevitable pedestrian desire path from the interchange towards the western-end vehicle ramps, and currently pedestrians can find themselves exiting on a narrow footpath which terminates before it reaches Hunter Street, creating a potentially hazardous situation.

Clarification of dual lines of swipe card entry and resolution of screening to Brewery Lane for access control and wind protection are required.

The issue of non-resident access from the car park to the Recreation level was raised, particularly the possibility of a non-resident "tailgating" a resident (with swipe card) in the ascending car park lifts to this level. A series of security access points are proposed from the open recreation area to the enclosed communal space, and again to the residential lift lobbies, which reduces risk in this respect. Residents entering the building from Ground level can also make use of the secure residential lobby areas at Ground level to directly access floors above.

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The Panel raised a question in respect to the ongoing management of the 'kiss and ride' area. Would it be a problem with drivers parking in the area for longer than needed for pick up and drop off? The Applicant noted that the area was already operating satisfactorily, and the completion of the development was not anticipated to change this.

8. Housing Diversity and Social interaction

26 May 2021

The activated ground floor areas and the extensive recreational area at the transfer level and carpark roof provide excellent opportunities for social interaction.

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Liveable Housing Design – 20% silver living is proposed however, the Panel recommend incorporating apartments which are constructed as platinum level. The Panel noted and supported the Applicant's intended strategy that encourages the upfront offer in marketing for variations to the apartments in respect to accessibility.

Silver Level is considered more broadly as a minimal provision.

The subject site provides immediate access to all the benefits of the West End services, activities, entertainment, eating, and transport. New housing supply needs to accommodate more apartments that cater for far more flexible, equitable, high amenity housing in great locations.

Platinum Level Liveable Housing Design is a constructed outcome that increases housing choices.

It is not a fully accessible housing type and so appeals to a wider market, it has minimal additional construction costs because it is built as the original construction where efficiencies are maximised. Cost of construction can increase tenfold where post-construction adaption is relied upon. Research has found the conversion of adaptable apartment types (AS4299), therefore rarely occurs because of the significant post-adaptive construction costs and overall disruption to residents. Liveable Housing Platinum Level has the advantage of being less onerous than fully accessible housing, while providing significantly more flexibility for future residents.

Well located housing should be maximising opportunities for housing choice in apartment typologies. The Panel recommends converting a minimum of 10% of Silver Level apartments to Platinum Level which will be better aligned with Newcastle's demographics identified in its LSPS and Housing Strategy.

9. Aesthetics

26 May 2021

The Panel generally supports the aesthetic resolution of the overall form. The treatment of the podium exterior brick cladding is supported subject to inclusion of brick-on-edge detailing about the arches and use of projecting brickwork or similar articulation for the 'off register' panels indicated on the elevations.

The parapet to the podium should be strongly emphasized by detailed design and articulation, so that the towers will be less visually assertive from street level views.

The varied treatment of solid to glazed panels to the towers responding to orientation is supported and should be detailed in further design development.

The amended treatment of the plant room enclosures continuing the pattern of external cladding from the lower floors is supported as an alternate to conventional metal cladding of plant areas.

The Panel supports subdued grey/brown brick work to the podium rather than deep or strong reds which would compromise the integrity of the carpark form and oxidized steel cladding.

Signage policy and guidelines are to be provided.

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The Panel noted the urban response and overall aesthetic approach to the development was well-considered. The solidity of the base of the building anchors the development at street level and is a legible, modern reference to the former historic Store building on the site.

The extent of glass utilised on the facades of the residential towers has been successfully offset visually, by the expressed slabs and vertical blades. The variation of the towers' heights

and the reversed setbacks of upper floors, as well as a subtle variation between the treatment of the expressed blades and floor slabs, were also successful in terms of introducing variation between the two tower elements while maintaining strong similarities. The more prominent banding every fourth floor, with a finer treatment to the intermediate floors is also successful in providing a larger grain that assists in views to the buildings from a greater distance.

Recommendations in respect to aesthetics generally go to ensuring that elements such as a site signage strategy are fully integrated in the architectural design– for the commercial components and also for the residential. Building identification, way finding, and commercial signage should all be located.

Recommendation:

The Panel considers that the design proposal has responded to its earlier recommendations, which has further refined an already strong design. Addressing of the suggestions identified under the headings above is encouraged, and will improve upon an excellent design.

Ongoing support is expressed by the Panel for the relatively minor amendments that have occurred to the Concept Master Plan that was approved as part of the Stage 2 DA. These modifications are in many instances in response to DRP recommendations, and include the moderate height increases of the residential towers (without any FSR increase) and the opening up of the northern end of the space between them. The separation between the eastern tower and the commercial building facing Stewart Avenue is reduced, but the buildings are offset, and the resulting relationship between them is considered satisfactory.

The Panel noted its support for the modifications that are proposed to the Concept Master Plan during design development and noted no issues of concern in respect to the proposed Modification.

Further investigation is warranted of any potential amenity and thermal comfort impacts of the residential buildings, arising from the extent of glazing, and a clear demonstration of a high level of thermal comfort being achieved without excessive reliance upon air conditioning. This, and action in response to the above relatively minor matters, should be achieved to the satisfaction of Council's Assessing Officers.

Assuming this, the Panel is strongly supportive of the proposal and is of the view that the completed development will make a very positive contribution to the area. The proposal is considered to demonstrate Excellent Design Quality.