



## SEPP 65 DESIGN STATEMENT

**Job Name:** 711 Hunter St, Newcastle West, NSW 2302

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File No 20623

Prepared for:

Hunter Street JV Unit Trust

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## OVERVIEW

This DA seeks development consent for the proposed mixed-use development at 711 Hunter St, Newcastle. The project is for the construction of a mixed-use precinct forming active ground and podium levels reaching 5 storeys of business and retail tenancies, with two tower forms for residential apartments reaching 26 storeys comprising of 258 apartments. The project is proposed to be developed in two stages with a shared services and car park entry strategy. The northern tower and podium will be developed as the first stage, providing all required servicing and access for the southern tower and the podium to connect to its final form and to create a unified approach across the two towers.

The development has undergone an Architectural Design Competition where three competitors put forward their designs in accordance with the brief. The Plus Architecture scheme was recommended by the Jury as the winning scheme in the competitive design process. The project has been defined through detailed development and consultant input and has gone through further review by the Design Jury. The comments received following the competition have since been addressed through further design development and incorporated in this DA submission.

We welcome the vision and commitment of St Hilliers to continue to rejuvenate this part of the Newcastle CBD, a city centre which is undergoing continuous transformation and will reshape the Hunter Street west precinct. Various recent proposals and projects have produced an exceptional outcome in terms of design, amenity and ground plane activation and experience, setting up an exceptional benchmark for future developments.

The vision for this site is to create a landmark building with a dynamic and engaging ground plane which will focus on the creative community. The process which has been inspired by Designing with Country has produced a beautiful, sculptural and crafted building which will contribute significantly to Newcastle. The proposal celebrates creativity, well-being, sustainability and diversity to enhance the sense of experience and captivate the minds which come to visit. The diverse character of the community, including artist, musicians and students as well as local residents and tourist will come to this area to take advantage of the dynamic character enriched by landscape and public art, as well as the diversity of business offering.

The residential product across Stage 1 and 2 will ensure there will be a range of choice when selecting a new home, each building having its own focus and character and amenities which includes views to the water, great solar access and private open space. The apartments are of a generous size and carefully consider the orientation in relation to aspect and the public domain. Living in this precinct is characterised by the rich and dynamic ground plane and adjacent public domain and park which provides a good variety of spaces connected through a larger urban corridor.

## **1. CONTEXT**

Located within the West End precinct of the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan, the site sits within an area noted as forming the western gateway to the city centre. The city centre currently is defined as the region extending along the southern shore of the Hunter River from Wickham to the west to Nobby's Head to the East. At a macro level the urban context of the city centre has undergone significant change in recent years with development particularly apparent in the East End Precinct centred around Honeysuckle Drive where multiple development proposals have been realised. Within the West End Precinct the urban context is beginning to undergo the same transformation with a number of developments already built and several either approved or in the process of being constructed.

As part of the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy a proposed shift of the commercial core is envisaged from Newcastle East to a new zone that encompasses the site and is centred around the Newcastle Interchange development within the Wickham precinct. As such the site occupies an important position with frontages to both King and Hunter St, two of the main streets that connect the current and emerging future core of the city.

The site occupies a strategic location in the Newcastle City Centre. The site is located within the western end of Newcastle peninsula framed by the river to the north and ocean to the southeast. Located at the western end of Hunter Street, connection through National Park Street to Kings Street and Birdwood Park. The peninsula has a strong topographical character which has been celebrated over the many years by both the original people occupying the land as well as through the history of post-colonial development. The site once sat on the riverbanks of the Hunter River which was occupied by the The Awabakal people who played a significant part in shaping the environment of their region.

The existing urban fabric which has established Newcastle following colonisation as it is known today is going through further transformation with the reimagining of the waterfront and now removed train rails and introduction of light rail. This move being part of the State Government's Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

(NURS). This strategy advocated a strategic shift of the commercial core of the City from Newcastle East to Newcastle West. The dynamic urban fabric is principally of commercial and residential use with well-established business and retail ground plane creating an active public domain. The various new developments across the peninsula have delivered a great mix of residential, retail and commercial development, with various buildings and uses and showcasing a good variety of architectural expression building on the rich heritage character of buildings. The new developments will greatly revitalize the existing area and provide a rich urban setting to contribute towards the overall vision for Newcastle.

The development parcel occupies the entirety of the western edge of National Park Street, between King St and Hunter Street. The site is known as the 'Spotlight' site, reflective of the last significant use of the site. Comprising a total area of 4,724sq.m, the site has frontages to National Park Street, Hunter Street and King St.

The northern portion of the site is occupied by a two-storey building that is currently unoccupied. This portion of the site is of significance from a heritage perspective, having originally housed the Marcus Clark and Co Building, a department store chain that operated from this location from 1894 to 1966. The façade of the Marcus Clarke and Co building was then changed and masked when the site was taken over by Waltons Limited, another department store that operated till the late 1980's. The building and facade have changed multiple times over this period. The most significant of amendments undertaken by Waltons were the over-cladding of the original fabric which have been damaged in the process. In its most recent iteration, the building was occupied by a Spotlight store, and now Musos music shop. The southern portion of the site is occupied by a 3-storey structure which houses a public car park on the top two levels and a gym at ground level.

National Park Street is significant in that it forms the divide between two street grid/subdivision patterns that themselves are informed by the topography of Newcastle and how streets generally align themselves to the outline of the Hunter River. As a result of the confluence of differing street grids, the northeast corner of the site and the northern frontage generally occupies significant prominence within the streetscape, particularly when approached along Hunter St from the east.

The south-eastern boundary of the site is shared with the Army Drill Hall building, a single storey heritage listed item that sits as a detached building with parking curtilage on all sides. Birdwood Park, a wedge-shaped park that serves provide some landscape relief to King Street is located to the south of the Drill Hall building, in close proximity to the site.

## **2. SCALE**

The proposal consists of a twin tower development united by a continuous podium with a 5-storey expression. Both towers are designed to be 26 storeys and will act as prominent urban landmarks within the evolving local context. A five-storey podium scale equates to an approx. 20m street wall height. The street-wall height has been driven by the need to have a raised ground level of 3.2m AHD (approximately 1000mm above footpath level), the desire to have a 5.5m high ground floor and the accommodation of 4 podium levels at

3.2m each. The street wall height proposed is consistent with the approved development at One National Park St, which in itself is consistent with street wall height of the 'Verve' residences on King St. Along Hunter Street the podium scale street wall height is consistent with 723 Hunter St commercial podium development current under construction which will help to unify the overall composition along this street frontage. The podium scale towards the northeast corner of Hunter Street and National Park Street reduces in scale to 3 storeys to respond to the opposite heritage building which frame this intersection.

Along the southwest, the setback introduced within the podium along the entire boundary is shared with the drill hall to enhance the sense of curtilage. In addition to the general setback the podium is proposed to be further eroded at the south-western corner of the site by creating a series of steps to further assist in the transition of scale from the heritage Drill Hall to the proposed development. Towards national park street the podium is pulled back to create a central plaza space which provides visual relieve along the length of the street. The gesture creates a sense of generosity within the public domain which further helps to visually compose the towers elegantly on top the proposed podium.

The tower forms and setbacks provide a sense of relief over the podium and showcase the slender building forms as seen from the various view angles. The composition and scale transition to respond to the various contextual conditions expressed through the horizontal layering of the podium and towers creates an elegant and sculptural build form.

### **3. BUILT FORM**

The proposal has been carefully crafted to respond to its context, urban setting, and orientation to sun light. The two towers respond in form and orientation to both the need to maximize solar access to the apartments within as well as the communal and public open spaces. The orientation of the tower also recognizes the shift in the urban grid which occurs on this intersection, orientating the northern tower in alignment to the direction of Hunter Street to the east. The design vision for the site considered multiple layers of design interpretation which evolve around designing for country, heritage character, improving permeability and accessibility and the concept of drawing the landscape character of Birdwood Park from the south through the ground plane of the site. The proposed sculptural and eroded ground plane celebrates the sense of the journey and porosity to bring people together at the heart of the site. The interpretation of the sedimentation of the former riverbanks where salt and sweet water meet has been brought up into the building through the expression of layering creating a sculptural building composition and forms which present elegant and slender from various angles around the site. The fluent shapes forming the base of the building embrace the central plaza in generous gesture giving back to the public domain creating a place for gathering and community. The podium form connects effortlessly to the adjacent commercial building in height and scale and the northeast and southwest corners pull back in scale and form to create a contextual relationship to the adjacent heritage buildings. The building form, layered through its horizontal floor expression, various awnings and transition of the podium expression to the towers create a dynamic environment which will stand out as the western gateway of Newcastle.

#### **4. DENSITY**

Density refers to a building's floor space (or dwelling numbers) relative to the site. Appropriate densities respond to the context, environmental qualities and the availability of infrastructure, including social/community infrastructure and public transport. The Proposal is consistent with the planning controls in its height, density and building form to play its role in defining this important intersection with the Newcastle CBD. A mixed-use typology is proposed with business, retail, commercial and residential uses incorporated into the development. A total of 258 apartments have been proposed alongside 693.22 sqm. of business, retail and commercial space. The total GFA proposed is 13,829 sqm. with a resultant FSR of 5.5:1.

The proximity to transport infrastructure and local service and retail offerings provide a compelling opportunity for high density residential redevelopment at this site. Transit oriented developments (TODS) are defined as highly walkable, higher density precincts centred around a major transit hub. TOD precincts are the preferred model for both infill and new development strategies in Australia, due to their ability to achieve wider sustainability and economic benefits when compared to their suburban counterparts. The proposal has great proximity to public transport and within the podium also provides sufficient car parking consistent with the DCP requirements. Provisions for electrical charging stations, bike parking and EOT facilities ensure the building will be able to provide sustainable solutions to transport. The proposal provides an activated edge to both Hunter Street, National Park Street and Birdwood Park, but also gives back significant amounts of space at the ground plane to the public creating an environment which will be shared between the residents and wider community. The proposal has generous communal area provisions over the shared podium creating great shared amenity for its residents. The proposal carefully balances the achieved yield and area with the generosity of the ground plane to create an elegant proposal which will complement the dynamic character of this place and will ensure consistent activation to the precinct and the through site link from National Park Street to Birdwood Park proposed as part of this proposal.

#### **5. RESOURCE, ENERGY AND WATER EFFICIENCY**

Environmental sustainability is more important than ever as we increase density and impact our environment. We put a focus on developing buildings which are sensitive to social, economic and environmental factors. Our approach to ESD aims to create an environment which is healthy, comfortable, social and sustainable. The proposal will need to stand the test of time and be appropriate for a community in which socialization, nature, health and well-being are no longer a given. ESD strategies for projects inform projects design concepts and sustainability ambitions. As the global focus aims at the sustainable world and health our projects need to more than ever consider and promote essential aspects of providing a healthy and productive lifestyle, in which a community can be inspired, share and have fun. The building design and urban design infrastructure for the project embed the principles of sustainability. Given the effect to the global, state and local policy relating to amenity, climate change and biodiversity. The Proposal is targeting a 4-star Green Star Design.

Key design drivers are:

- Health & Wellbeing
- Social environment and inclusion
- Passive design principles & thermal comfort
- Energy
- Water

### *Health & Wellbeing*

The Proposal integrates the proposed uses with a carefully configured public realm, providing a shared central plaza, through site link and activation to promote a healthy and dynamic urban lifestyle supported by great business and retail space supporting the Newcastle community, its artists and creative industry. Well connected to public transport and amenity with further end-of-trip facilities and bike allocation in the ground plane promote both well-being and alternative transportation for commuting. Exercise stations, edible gardens and vegetable beds proposed on the podium promote wellbeing into occupant lifestyles. The building composition and orientation ensures that most of the apartments receive good solar access and aspect engaging with landscaped area or the existing streetscape and context. The plaza and communal areas are designed to receive good solar access protected from the noise of traffic, wind and engage with the proposed landscaped areas and visual connections to the Army Drill Hall and the Birdwood Park. The selection of materials, sufficient natural ventilation of apartments and good aspect and solar access ensures occupants maintain connected to the environment, nature and health.

### *Social Environment and Inclusion*

The Proposal promotes the concept of inclusion and social gathering. Human connectivity, communication and shared experience is a key aspect of learning and creating community. The ground plane facilitates this environment through strategic planning of pedestrian entry, movements, accessibility, deliberate moments of rest and greenery, all to encourage natural engagement between people living there and the wider community. The visual connectivity between spaces and position of the two residential lobbies in relation to the plaza will create a sense of awareness and natural engagement between both the occupants of the building and the wider community. The forecourt plaza encourages flexibility and variety of uses which will contribute to the beating heart of the Newcastle creative community. The podium roof gardens provide for a variety of programmed uses within the communal offering which includes sports and yoga areas, BBQ areas, community gardens, kitchens and dining areas, but also spaces to meditate and relax while appreciating the distant views.

### *Passive Design & Thermal Comfort*

Passive design strategies are fundamental to a sustainable buildings design. Apartment units and the proposed façade skin needs to consider both the visual amenity and transparency while ensuring shading and thermal comfort. Window positioning and operability in relation the proposed apartment is essential to

provide both a functionality and comfort. Insulated walls and exposed thermal mass will together keep the apartments at stable internal temperature, while operable windows enable passive cooling. The careful consideration of the proposed built form and urban framing of external areas, communal gardens and balconies ensure that these spaces are usable and comfortable. The balance between sun, shade, and protection from rain, wind and noise ensure the proposed space will create comfort for the community. The landscape design plays a key role in further enhancing these principles.

### *Energy*

An energy efficient building should consider ways to reduce the need for energy as a starting point. A key consideration in this is the façade design which controls the further need to deal with cooling, heating, light and air. The façade should be responsive to the uses and the needs of its occupants. The facade is designed to control solar gains while maintaining a comfortable internal environment. Window areas are carefully designed to minimise solar gain while maintaining views to the external environment and daylight. Naturally ventilated rooms, corridors and communal areas using cross ventilation will reduce need for AC. The relatively small floorplates of the towers ensure a high percentage of cross ventilation. Each typical tower lobby has direct access to daylight, reducing the need for artificial lighting and operable windows provide for natural ventilation of the lobbies. The development includes the potential to generate, store, and use power by including PV panels on the tower roofs to be used in the car park for vehicle charging stations and common area lighting.

### *Water*

Water is essential to life and its security is of the essence. The design is water sensitive, and this will be a key consideration to the design of the communal podium areas and public realm landscape, which require substantial amounts of water for irrigation. Careful consideration of how to reuse water across the development will provide efficiencies combined with careful plant selection throughout the development. The project will use water-smart strategies to reduce potable water consumption through efficient fixtures.

## **6. LANDSCAPE**

This proposal carefully integrates architecture and landscaping into a sympathetic balance in which the landscape expression helps to carve and define the built form. The architecture of space is intertwined with landscaped expression, punctuated and extruded to compose an environment that is open and programmed. Pedestrians are able to move through the landscaped ground plane with ease and the proposal aims to draw the adjacent Birdwood Park character into the ground plane. The most exciting expression is the way the podium peels away to frame a generous public plaza at the heart of the development animated by trees, landscape planters and a animated by water feature and public art. As the development has no basement car parking the entire plaza provides for deep soil allowing generous tree species to grow filling the space.

The plaza connects to the raised ground plane to overcome flooding through a series of generous steps and ramps which maximize accessibility while providing casual seating opportunities and flexibility in use. Hard, fixed and formal elements are deliberately avoided to mitigate impacts of the level changes and to support the commercial environment. The various business and retail tenancies will support the activation around the plaza to create a buzzing place supported by informal landscape through pots and planters, as well as public art. Combined with the proposed street trees along National Park Street the interface with this street will draw people in and welcome the community to the site.

The circulation through the middle of the site towards Birdwood Park past the Army Drill hall is supported by layers of landscape to help provide clarity and protection to the access to the car park along the back. From the park the landscape is drawn up over the edges of the podium level onto the communal garden areas over the podium. There is a clear delineation between the private gardens and communal areas which provide for a variety of uses and spaces, carefully considering privacy and solar access. A variety of community spaces spill out into the terraces, with, such as bush tucker edible gardens, vegetable gardens, gym stations and circuits, BBQ areas, pet friendly spaces and seating areas. Lawns and open spaces promote both active and passive uses while promoting community building.

## **7. AMENITY**

Good design provides amenity through the physical, spatial and environmental quality of a development. It includes considering aspects of accessibility, sunlight, ventilation, visual and acoustic privacy, the size and configuration of rooms and spaces. This project is designed with consideration of the market expectations of Newcastle. The apartments are designed above the minimum area requirements of the Apartment Design Guide with sufficient space both internally as well as externally to support the lifestyle of Newcastle residents.

The towers are relatively compact which limits the amount of apartments per level improving aspects such as solar access, cross ventilation and shared aspect. The buildings have been designed to take full advantage of the view aspect of both the river to the north and the ocean to the southeast. The ability to look out and capture the view while standing in the lift lobby will improve the quality of space and promote interaction with the building community. Natural light and opportunity for natural ventilation further improve the quality of the space creating a healthy and breathable building.

The building offers multiple communal gathering spaces. The main landscaped communal areas over the podium promote lifestyle and well-being supported by great shared facilities, both internal as well as external. The internal community room can be used for social gatherings, supported by communal kitchens, dining and lounge areas. Externally, well protected terraces supported by a variety of community spaces such as bush tucker edible gardens, vegetable gardens, gym stations and circuits, BBQ areas, pet friendly spaces and seating areas, providing further opportunity for gathering. The landscape proposal supports a variety of spaces for active and passive use to provide variety for its residents.



## **8. SAFETY AND SECURITY**

The proposed ground plane considers its engagement with the wider public domain and surroundings. It is designed to let the public flow through the heart of the site, acting as a connector from the adjacent southern park to the urban fabric to the north. The perimeter of the ground plane is activated by business and retail uses and the central plaza has a sense of generosity which feel like a plaza extending from the public footpath. Both building lobbies are designed to engage with this space further activating the space and creating a sense of shared ownership and passive surveillance. The residents and business and retail tenants will play a role in continuously monitoring the ongoing activities along these frontages and plaza. It encourages a real sense of community which will activate the plaza and will create a sense of ownership and shared responsibility.

The plaza and through site link will be monitored by the public cutting through these linkages and further CCTV cameras if required.

## **9. SOCIAL DIMENSIONS AND HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

The proposal responds to the housing needs for the future Newcastle. The apartments mix and sizing reflects the need for generally larger apartments with a sense of flexibility. The building configuration is compact and efficient in its layouts but focusses on great amenity for its occupants. The project has a clear vision in creating a sense of community gathering, not only on the ground plane, but also in the individual building lobbies to encourage social interaction between residents with the relatively small floorplates. The generous communal areas through out the building contribute to this. The two residential lobbies spill out into the heart of the ground floor central plaza for the residential of the two residential towers to meet and further engage with the wider community of Newcastle.

## **10. AESTHETICS**

The sculpted and elegant nature of the project are a response to the context and history of the site. The building aesthetics material selection have developed to embrace the design principles and conversation around Designing with Country as it reflects on its historic site context of the riverbank character. The built form and materiality conceptualizes the sedimentation and tonality of the former sandy riverbanks, sculpting a carving through the building as a result of the movement of water, wind and people. The ground plane environment is defined by the sandy tones in the ground floor paving carrying through in the retail façades using light coloured brick into the soffits of the ground plane. The soffit expression draws people through the space and provides further public art opportunities in the form of lighting and in various places within the ground plane. The overall space feels sculpted and layered supported by the generous landscaping and public art and activity which animates the space.

The horizontal layering extends up into the podium drawing the eye up to the towers which extend above. The podium levels are screened by warm metal blades which respond to the various conditions and uses behind. They create a harmonious pattern reflecting the warm earthy tones of the rocky outcrops which once

settled in the environment. The sweeping lines of the podium transition into the tower forms which express the horizontal character throughout the proposal creating a sense of consistency in the architectural language. The towers have a clear expression of orientation with generous balconies facing the views. Warm bronze metal banding wrapping the edges of the levels carry the character of the podium into the towers. The patterning of perforated metal bronze-coloured screens along the western façade of the towers assist with the required solar protection and help to transition to the more solid façades as the tower get closer to the commercial building the to the north-west.

The elegance and sculptural quality of the building form combined with its response to the context, history and clarity in expression create a unique development which will help to mark the western end of Newcastle from an Urban Design point of view. The generosity and contribution to the public domain at the ground plane will encourage engagement with the wider community and help built and contribute to the shared vision for this area in Newcastle.



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