

NEWCASTLE GOLF CLUB
DEVELOPMENT URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL IMPACT STUDY

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PROPOSED SENIORS' LIVING DEVELOPMENT URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL IMPACT STUDY

PREPARED FOR PRINCIPLE LIVING
Project 22574, 08 DECEMBER 2023

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This Urban Design and Visual Impact Study has been commissioned by Principle Living Pty Ltd to review the proposal for a Senior Living development on Nelson Bay Road in the suburb of Fern Bay in the Port Stephens local government area.

The subject site forms part of the Newcastle Golf Club. Principle Living has entered into a joint venture agreement with the Golf Club to use surplus lands within the Golf Club for a Seniors' Living development.

The Urban Design and Visual Impact Study investigates the urban design characteristics of the site and its context in order to identify an appropriate urban design framework to guide development of the site and enable an assessment of the visual impact of the proposed development of the site.

Adherence to the urban design framework in the site planning, building configuration and architectural design of the proposed development will ensure that any potential visual impacts generated by the change in the built form character of the site that result from the proposed development are minimised.

The Urban Design and Visual Impact Study recognises that the site exhibits a number of opportunities for planning and design. Its gateway role at the southern entry into Port Stephens from the Newcastle LGA, its waterside location, local and locality views and the presence of existing residential activities and public transport services establish powerful synergies. These synergies have the potential to capitalise on the site's location and provide significant opportunities for the site to host a development outcome beyond that typically achievable in the development of more conventional sites and circumstances.

The visual character of the development proposed by Principle Living is correspondingly assessed against these opportunities. The conclusion is reached in this study that the proposal

meets and exceeds the urban design and visual impact criteria established by the urban design framework identified for the site, and can deliver a number of benefits to the community of Fern Bay, the amenity of residents, character of the suburb and the character of the southern part of the Port Stephens LGA.

Accordingly, the proposed development is supported on urban design and visual impact grounds.

1.2 The Development Site

The development site is located within the suburb of Fern Bay. A location plan is presented in **Figure 1**.

It comprises a portion of surplus land that will be excised from the Newcastle Golf Club. The excised site is 6.7 kilometres directly north of the Newcastle CBD and 8.2 kilometres directly south west of Newcastle Airport. The nearest centre is at Stockton, approximately 5 kilometres to the south.

1.3 Purpose of this Study

There has been an extensive iterative process to arrive at the current plans of the proposed development.

In particular, this urban design and visual impact study forms part of a two-step urban design process. The development master plan concept was first presented to the Urban Design Panel at Port Stephens Council on 12 August 2021. An amended proposal that accommodates the comments made by the Panel was subsequently presented on 9th September 2021. The current proposal and this study respond to the comments made by the Panel at that meeting.



> Figure 1: Site Location
(Map source: ESRI)

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The following comments from the Panel from both meetings are particularly:

"It is necessary to consider both the overall area of land – in this case the Newcastle Golf Club – as well as the surrounding areas outside the site. Any resulting design needs in the Panel's view, to be compatible both with both forms of surrounding areas. ...

"The revised Master Planning approach, which has been informed to a much greater degree by the surrounding landscape and context, offers a positive new direction to the overall layout of the proposal, which was welcomed by the Panel;"

"The proposal to retain a significant proportion of existing tree and shrub cover in areas of the subject site that are not proposed for development, is a particularly welcome revision;"

"The reduction in duplexes in favour of apartments has achieved a much more comfortable spatial relationship, and consequent apparent density;"

"... more appropriate emphasis given to the retention of existing on site vegetation, and a more generous spatial arrangement proposed that provides greater opportunity for integration of the development into the golf course landscape character and, significantly more opportunity for the provision of amenity;"

"The principles ... surrounding the provision of amenity, integration of the development with the existing landscape character, retention of habitat and significant trees and establishing a consistent landscape theme through material and planting are strongly supported by the Panel"

and finally in summary

"The revised master plan, informed as it has been by the primarily landscape context of the area, represents a significant step forward to the planning of this development. The Applicant and consultants are commended for this approach.

The purpose of this Urban Design and Visual Impact Study is to determine the development capability of the site in terms of a three dimensional building envelope and related urban design issues, and assess the visual impact of the responding architectural development concept for the site.

Specifically, the aims of the study are as follows:

1. To undertake a comprehensive urban design analysis of the site and its context;

2. To identify an appropriate urban design and visual framework for the future development of the site based on that analysis; and

3. To review the visual characteristics of the proposed development in terms of its achievement of the criteria embodied in the framework and assess its visual impacts in terms of the suitability and acceptability of the proposed development within the site.

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> View of Site in Golf Course

Matters that the Urban Design and Visual Impact Study addresses comprise:-

- places, buildings, streetscapes and landscapes with distinctive, recognised and unrecognised character;
- particularly special (or poor) views, vistas and landmarks that should be recognised and accommodated and / or capitalised upon in development;
- public streets and pathways - arterial routes, linkages and streets and the incorporation of access and transport issues (appropriate access/egress, consideration of traffic management issues, capitalising and incorporating public transport and provision for pedestrian movements and cycle routes);
- parks, squares and other outdoor spaces in the public domain;
- existing vegetation and landscapes, particularly areas special to the community;
- topography and landform;
- built form - spatial quality, building height, scale, bulk, appearance, materials etc in the context of the surrounding development;
- significant site edge and land use interface conditions; particularly areas that may be sensitive to new development, are underdeveloped and/or may be likely to be the focus of future development pressures;
- Safety and security, particularly areas perceived as unsafe and/or characterised by suffering poor casual surveillance or providing opportunities for personal concealment and
- Influential components of streetscape, major gateways, and skyline elements that should be adopted in the design outcome.

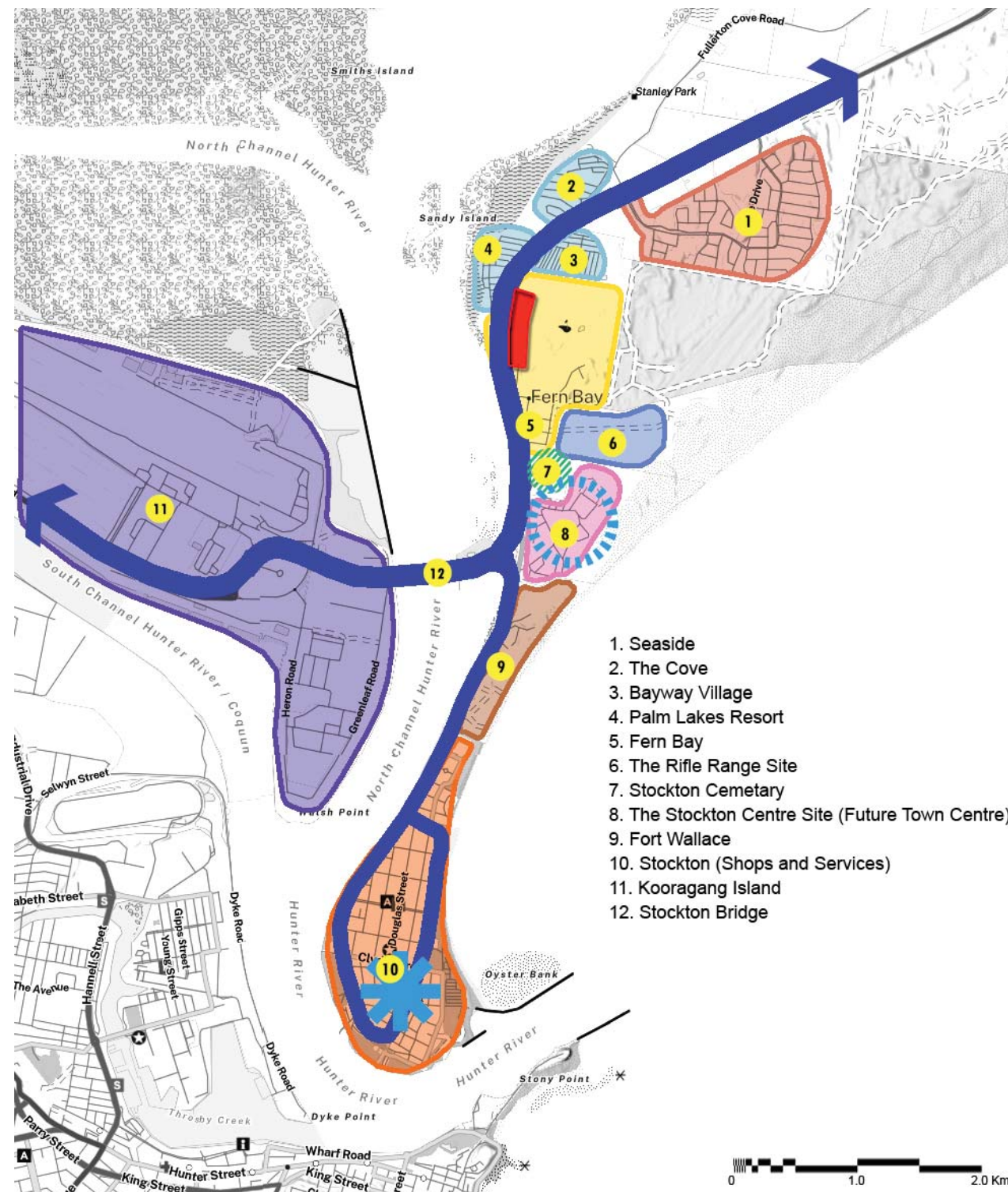
1.4 Study Structure

The Urban Design and Visual Impact Study comprises seven parts.

1. The first part of the study is the introduction. It describes the context in which the study has been prepared and an explanation of the background to the development proposal for the site.
2. In the second part of the study the site's locality is discussed and contextually analysed, and the urban design and visual characteristics and elements, and their influence on the scale and form of development, are identified.
3. The third part proceeds with the analysis at a more micro, i.e. local (site), level and identifies the opportunities and constraints of the key elements and characteristics within the site itself and its immediate surrounds, in terms of their role in influencing the scale and form of development.
4. The statutory and strategic planning context, in terms of any relevant urban design and visual matters, in which the development of the site must be considered is identified and analysed in Part Four of the Study.
5. Part Five of the study collates the opportunities and constraints with the site, its immediate surrounds and its physical and policy context and develops an urban design and visual framework that may guide development of the site, and against which the form and scale of possible development of the site can be assessed.
6. In the sixth part of the Study, the characteristics of the proposed development are analysed and assessed against the urban design and visual framework.
7. The seventh, final, part provides conclusions on any potential visual impacts of the proposal and makes recommendations to facilitate the achievement of a good urban design outcome for the site where necessary.

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> Figure 2: Site Locality
(Map source: ESRI)

2.0 THE LOCALITY AND THE SITE'S URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This part of the Urban Design and Visual Impact Study identifies the urban design influences that the location of the site in Fern Bay within the broader Port Stephens Council and City of Newcastle areas may have on the urban form and scale of development that may eventuate within the site.

2.2 Locality Structure

A locality plan is presented in **Figure 2**. Fern Bay is an established compact village located on a coastal peninsula that neighbours the Hunter Wetlands National Park to the west (which forms part of the North Channel of the Hunter River) and Stockton Beach and the Pacific Ocean to the east.

Fern Bay is 6.7 kilometres directly north of the Newcastle CBD and 8.2 kilometres directly south west of Newcastle Airport at Williamstown. The nearest centre is at Stockton, approximately 5 kilometres to the south.

Fern Bay forms part of a corridor of residential development that extends north and south along the coastal peninsula in a sequence of settlements located along Nelson Bay Road and Fullerton Street.

To the west, on the opposite side of the Hunter River, is the Kooragang Industrial Area and Coal Terminal. It is connected to Fern Bay by the Stockton Bridge, an elevated road bridge that connects Cormorant Road with Nelson Bay Road.

The original township of Stockton at the southern tip of the Peninsula is the major settlement. It overlooks the Hunter River mouth and the southern extent of Stockton Beach. It exhibits a traditional grid street pattern and the prevailing built form and activities are low density, single or two storey detached dwellings on comparatively large lots with rear lane access.

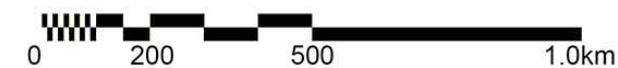
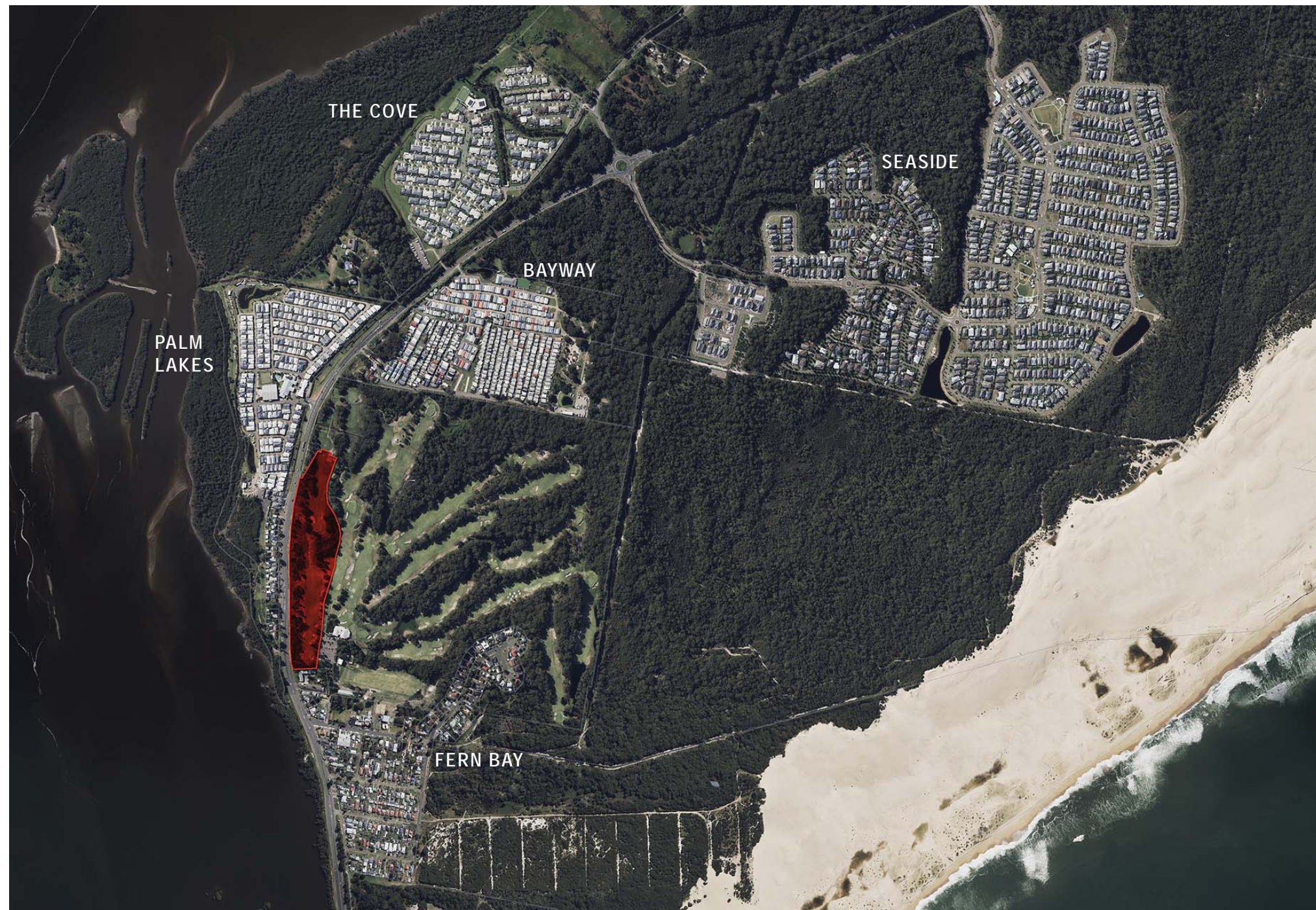
Stockton contains an IGA supermarket and wide range of speciality retail shops located on Mitchell Street (a traditional shopping "main street" at the heart of the village), two primary schools, a bowling club, pubs and RSL. There is a pedestrian ferry that provides convenient direct access to the Newcastle CBD. The village is surrounded by generous waterfront open spaces and beaches.

Immediately north of Stockton, between it and the site, are four institutional uses:

1. The former Stockton Military camp (Fort Wallace). It is now a publicly accessible heritage site. There is a proposal to develop part of the site for low density residential development;
2. The Stockton Centre, a recently closed (2020) disability residential care facility. The Centre is proposed in City of Newcastle strategic planning documents to be redeveloped for a major centre to serve the locality (refer to discussion in Part 4.2 below);
3. Stockton Cemetery. It is located on a comparatively high point on the peninsular but offers limited views of the locality; and
4. The Stockton Rifle Range. It also has heritage significance associated with Fort Wallace. It is proposed to be partly subdivided for low density residential development in the Port Stephens Council Development Control Plan.

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> Aerial View of Settlements in the Site's Locality
(source: Nearmaps)

Thus the surrounding area, in terms of land use, currently exhibits a mix of uses with the potential to evolve in the future into a vibrant mixed use neighbourhood anchored by a wide range of conveniently accessible services and facilities and offering a high level of residential amenity.

In close proximity to the site the coastal peninsula in particular is dominated by established and recent residential development capitalising on the residential amenity and views that the coastal location offers. These settlements comprise:

- Immediately adjoining the site to the south and west is the original village of Fern Bay. It also has a traditional grid type road character and comprises single and two storey dwellings, a motel, public school and community centre. A strip subdivision comprising detached dwellings extends along Nelson Bay Road adjoining the golf course and site;
- North and west of the site are three retirement villages: The "Palm Lakes Resort" to the west on the opposite side of Nelson Bay Road, The "Cove" immediately to the north of it on Fullerton Cove Road and "Bayway Village" immediately to the north of the golf course. All villages offer various medical and recreation facilities for residents. Accommodation comprises detached or duplex dwellings in landscaped grounds on small lots and are comparatively high density, albeit they exhibit a low scale built form; and
- Beyond the villages on Nelson Bay Road is "Seaside" a recent master planned subdivision extension to Fern Bay. Development comprises 822 conventional detached dwellings on individual lots. A Medical centre is located at the heart of the subdivision. A vehicle track that provides four-wheel drive access to Stockton Beach, with car park, is located to the south of the subdivision.

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> Figure 3: Views of Locality Built Form Character

2.3 Locality Built Form

The built form characteristics of the area are dictated predominantly by use and geographical location as illustrated in the views in Figure 3.

Of particular relevance to this Urban Design and Visual Impact Study are the following characteristics:

- The presence of a number of large industrial and port buildings located in a linear fashion along Cormorant Road and the harbourfront to the west of the site, the most prominent being the large structures within the Kooragang Coal Terminal and the Stockton Bridge. These structures are located at the gateway to Fern Bay and influence



> Streetscape Views along Cormorant Road (Top and Middle)
Typical Streetscape View Within Fern Bay (Bottom)

the setting of the suburb. The presence of the tall structures in this configuration provides a visual signpost to, and distinctive landmark of the presence of, Fern Bay from both within the Newcastle urban area to the south, but most importantly when viewed from the memorable approach to the suburb from the west, where Nelson Bay Road descends from the peak of Stockton Bridge to the coastal peninsula; and

- A series of discrete, low rise (2 storey) residential and retirement villages within the coastal strip which establish a low scale, (but not necessarily low density in the retirement villages), built form character.

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> Figure 4: Locality Landscape Character

2.4 Locality Landscape

One of the most memorable characteristics of Fern Bay is its landscape setting. This is presented in **Figure 4**. Visually the area is dominated by the Hunter River North Channel that prevails in most views and vistas to the west along the southern part of Nelson Bay Road, local roads and foreshore parks. It establishes a dominant waterfront backdrop to the suburb.



> Elevated (Not Publicly Accessible) Aerial Views Indicating Landscape Context. (1) Looking South (Top), (2) Looking North (Middle) and (3) Stockton Centre Pine Trees (Bottom). (Source of Images: Google Earth)

At the gateway to the locality from Stockton Bridge a dense concentration of tall mature Norfolk Island Pines in the Stockton Centre site add a powerful landmark tree canopy statement in the landscape.

Less influential is the Pacific Ocean coastline that bounds the peninsula to the east. This includes the visually stunning Stockton Beach and Sand Dunes (Worimi National Park). The southern end of the beach is only some 1.5 kilometres to the east. However due to minimal connectivity and lack of views the presence of the beach and dunes is not immediately discernible within Fern Bay (which is more westward oriented to the Hunter River).

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> Figure 5: Locality Landform and Views

2.5 Locality Landform and Views

The geology of the coastal peninsula is derived from its origins as series of Linear coastal sand dunes in the past. This dictates land form and views as demonstrated in **Figure 5**.

Generally the locality is low lying and the variation in height is minimal. The maximum height range commences at Mean High Water Mark (MHW) at the foreshore and beach edges, rising to 20 metre peaks in a series of north-south hilltops to the east along the beachfront.

None of the hill tops offer publicly accessible views and there are no views of the locality. The most publicly accessible elevated part of the peninsula is at the Stockton Cemetery. However its maximum elevation is less than 10 metres and only offers views through trees to the Hunter River to the west and south.



> Views. (1) From Top Through to (5) Bottom

Thus the prevailing existing ground level is below 10 metres AHD and locality views are limited to low height views from foreshore areas and roads. The highest view of the locality can be obtained from the crown of the centre arch of Stockton bridge that has a height of 52 metres. Such views are fleeting if travelling by car. However pedestrian views are available from a central median footpath.

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3.0 SITE ANALYSIS

3.1 Site Description

The site proposed for the development forms part of the Newcastle Golf Club, currently accessible from Vardon Road. The development site comprises a portion of surplus land that will be excised from the golf course. An aerial photograph and site plan are presented in **Figures 6 and 7**.

The site is bound by Vardon Road to the south, and the fairways and greens of the Newcastle Golf to the east and north. It is located on the eastern side of Nelson Bay Road, which forms part of the major north south route that becomes Cormorant Road to the south (discussed in Part 2 above).

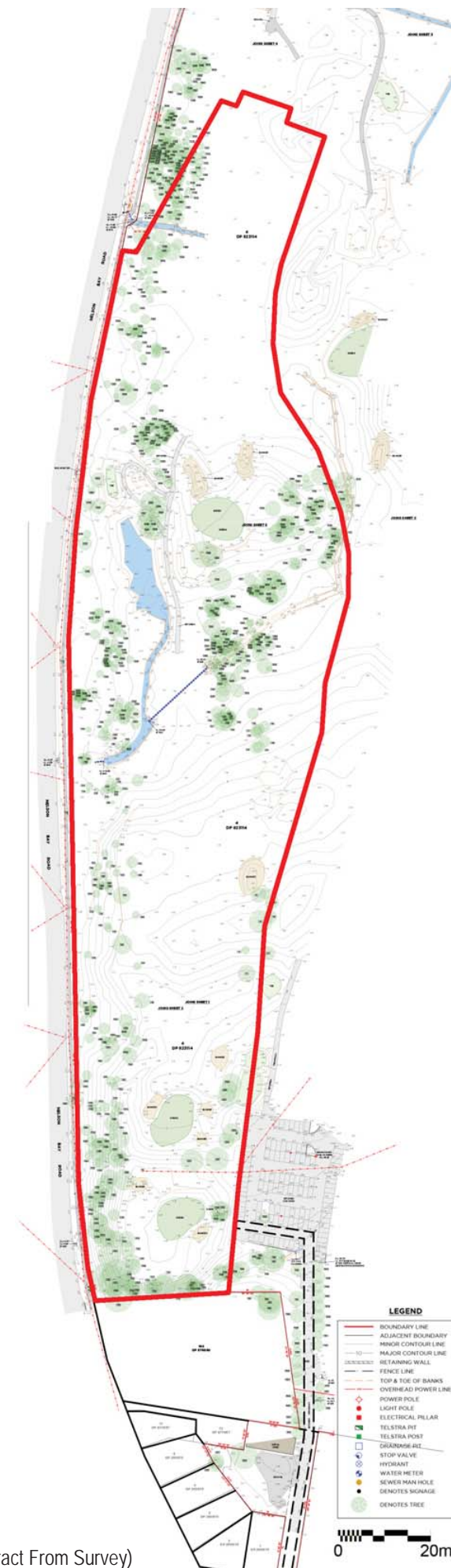
The site is generally flat. However it offers a comparatively elevated hill with a maximum height of 11 metres at its southern end.

The area of the excised site is 6.57 hectares and it is essentially rectangular in configuration in a north-south orientation. It has a frontage of approximately 560 metres to Nelson Bay Road.

Existing development within the site comprises some of the greens and fairway of the Newcastle Golf Club, which will be reconfigured to establish the development site. A plan of the proposed reconfiguration of the golf course is presented in **Figure 8** on the following page.

There are isolated and linear rows of trees and bushes within the site that follow the route of the fairways. Mature trees extend along the site frontage to Nelson Bay Road and generally obscure views into and out of the site from the road.

The site neighbours the Hunter Wetlands National Park to the west. However it's presence is only evident from filtered local views through trees at the elevated southern part of the site.



> Figures 6 and 7: Site Plan (Aerial Photograph and Extract From Survey)

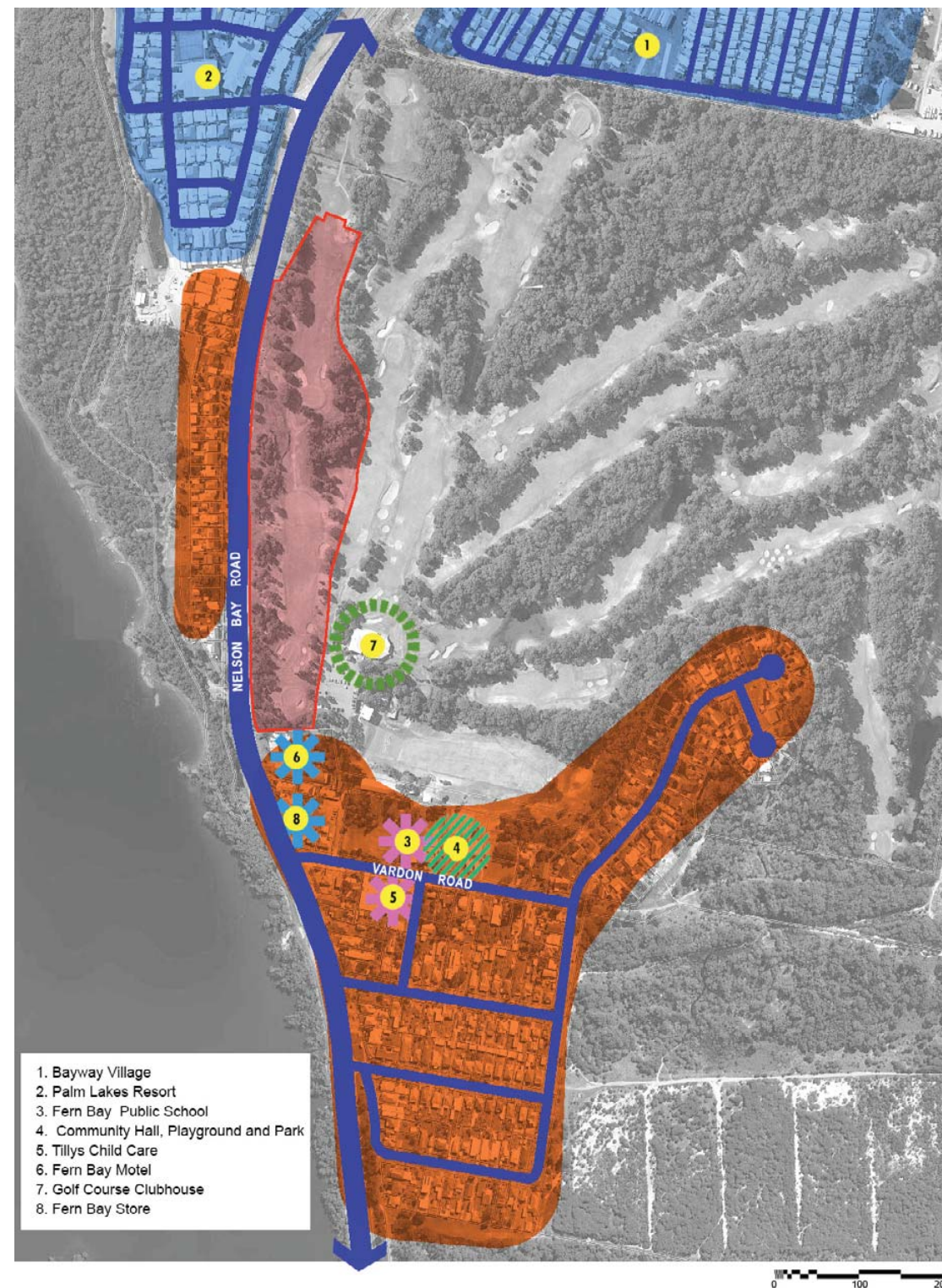


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> Figure 8: Proposed Golf Course Reconfiguration



> Figure 9: Surrounding Land Uses

3.2 Surrounding Land Uses

The site is surrounded by a mix of land uses. These are illustrated in **Figure 9** and comprise:

- A variety of low and medium density residential uses to the north, east and west of the site distinguished by:
 - The Palm Lakes Resort to the west of the site, which comprises a cluster of detached cottages and the Bayway Village to the north which comprises permanently occupied cabins / relocatable Homes; and
 - Low density established detached dwellings in comparatively large lots to the west and south of the site.
- The Golf Club itself, which is a renowned golf course of international standing. It offers community facilities, restaurant and bar;
- A small concentration of non-residential uses at the entry to the Golf Club at Vardon Road including motel, public primary school, recreation reserve, community hall, local store (The Fern Bay store) and a child care centre; and
- A significant linear public open space foreshore reserve immediately to the west adjoining Nelson Bay Road.

The presence of the non-residential and open space activities provides local amenity for any future occupants of the site.

Furthermore, the lack of residential uses with boundaries directly surrounding the site reduces the sensitivity of adjoining uses to environmental impacts such as shadow, privacy and the like, providing opportunities for consideration of significant building forms within the site.

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> Views of Built Form Character:
Top: Fern Bay Community Centre
Top Middle: Fern Bay Motel
Bottom Middle: Entry to Palm Lakes Resort
Bottom: Dwellings on Nelson Bay Road Opposite Site



> Views of Streetscape Character:
Top: Nelson Bay Road Looking South
Bottom: Vardon Road Looking East

3.3 Built Form Character

The character of the built form surrounding the site exhibits an established conventional low rise precinct where built form is significantly influenced by building use.

Generally buildings are no taller than 2 storeys in height. Detached dwellings to the west and south of the site are generally of well maintained, but aging, condition. They exhibit established attractive landscaping and are setback from the street. The commercial buildings exhibit a mix of styles and are comparatively simple commercial structures. Where they address Nelson Bay and Vardon Roads they offer active frontages to the street.

The Fern Bay Primary School includes a number of transportable buildings and addresses the street.

All buildings are of an age that it is not unreasonable to forecast that, as the buildings come to the end of their economic life, significant 'knock down and rebuild' activity could occur in the foreseeable future.

With such a variation in the character of the surrounding area, development of the site will need to be cognisant of the long term potential for change in the area, which can be a catalyst for the enhancement of the built form character along Nelson Bay Road.

3.4 Streetscape Character

The quality of streetscape character along surrounding streets is mixed. Views along Nelson Bay Road exhibit the characteristics of a traditional highway residential strip dominated by a mix of styles influenced by periodic heavy vehicle traffic. Vardon Road on the other hand exhibits a more subdued low density residential character. However it experiences higher traffic levels at times due to the presence of the primary school, the Golf Club and the child care centre, all of which attract traffic.

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> Figure 10: Local Views Into Site



> Views of Streetscape Character:
Top: Nelson Bay Road Looking South
Bottom: Vardon Road Looking East

3.5 Local Landform Views and Vistas

There are limited views into the site from adjoining development. The retirement villages are oriented away from the site, whilst a lack of development to the east ensures that any future development will have negligible visual impact upon these aspects. However, east facing detached dwellings addressing the site on Nelson Bay Road experience direct looking into the site. (Refer to Figure 10).

Due to the presence of the Hunter River and Stockton Beach the site has potential high quality, elevated views out of the site which offer a high level of amenity for future uses within the site.

3.6 Landscape Character

The landscape character of the immediate area is dominated by the presence of the vegetation and established trees visible in the golf course, the Hunter Wetlands and surrounding open spaces, which offer significant greenery within the streetscape (Refer to Figure 10).

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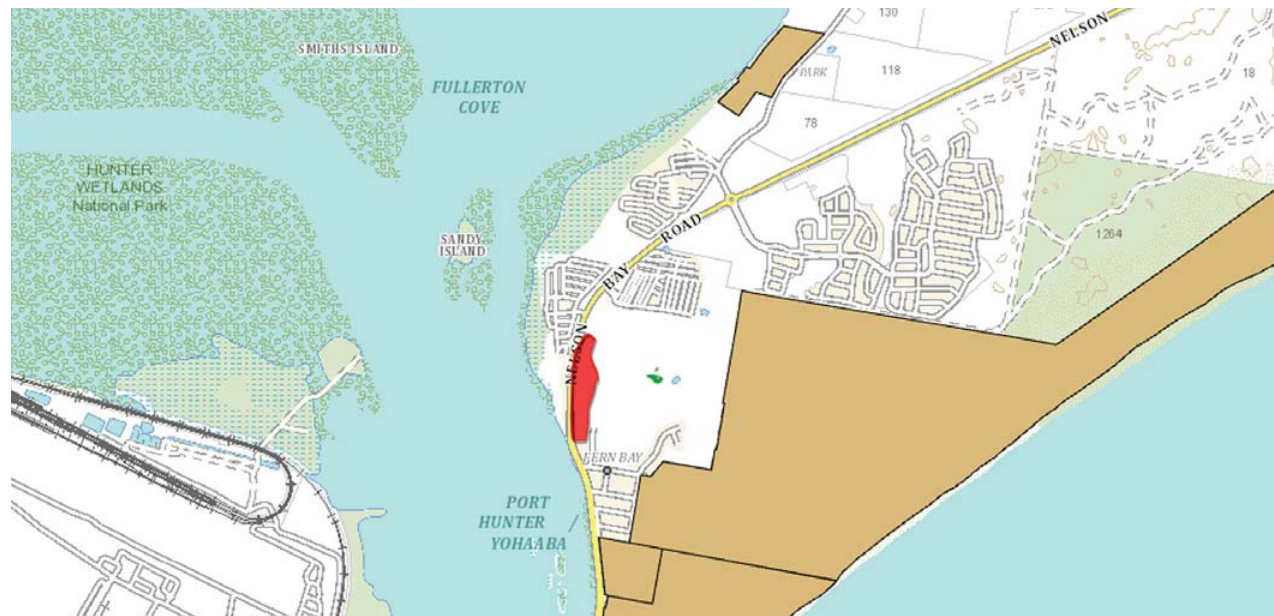
3.7 Climate, Sun and Shadow

The site experiences a coastal climate and being close to water enjoys access to local breezes. The north-south rectilinear configuration of the site facilitates solar access into the site.

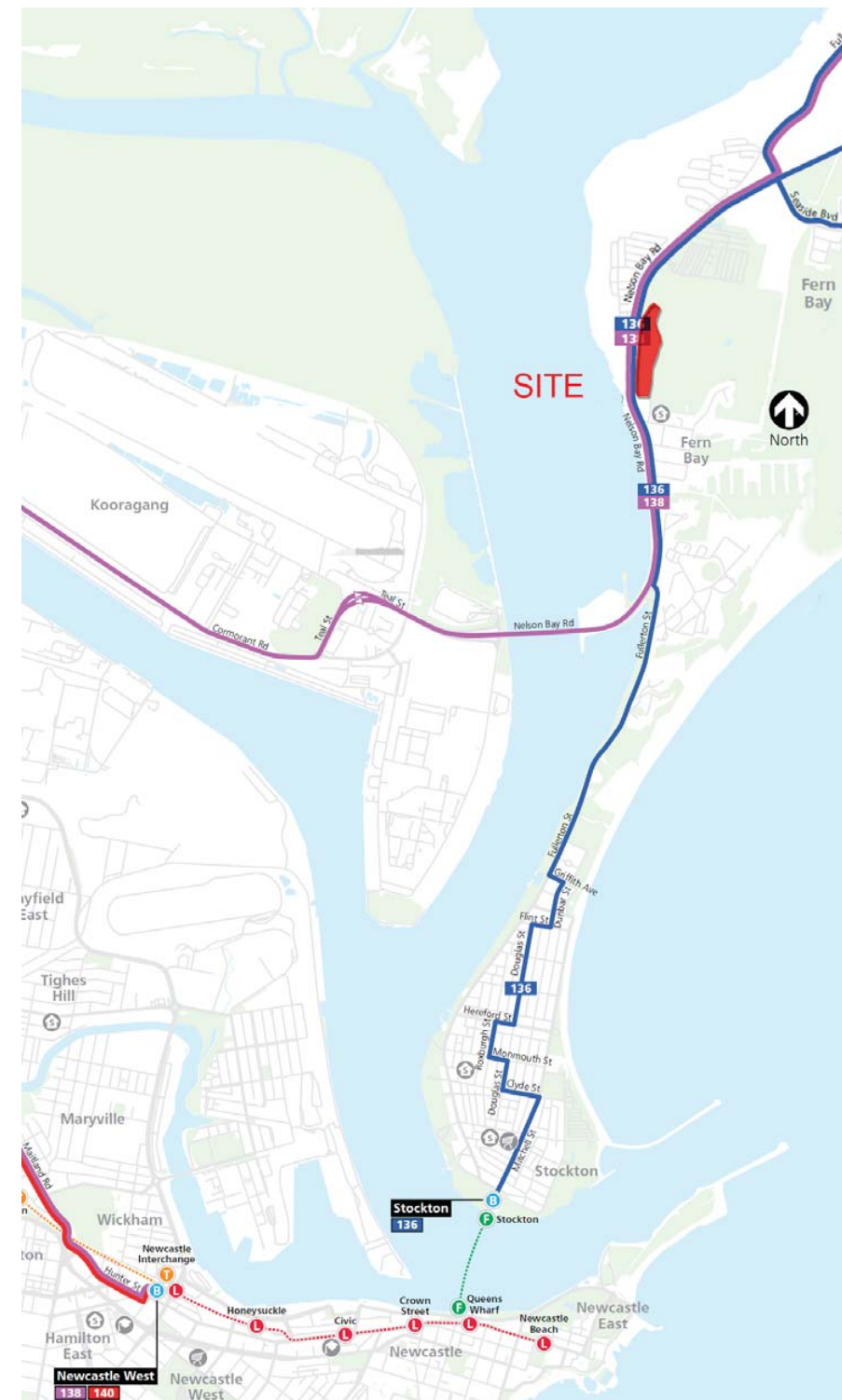
Potential shadow impact on neighbouring sites is reduced by the extensive road frontages and wide road reserves that bound the site. Furthermore the lack of any immediately adjoining land uses, which could be considered sensitive to shadow impact, (particularly to the south and west), further reduce any potential shadow impact that may be generated by redevelopment of the site.

3.8 Heritage

There are no recognised heritage buildings or conservation areas located in close proximity to the site. The Worimi National Park and Stockton Beach (The Worimi Conservation Lands) to the east of the Golf Course have recognised heritage significance (refer to Figure 11).



> Figure 11: Heritage Close to Site
(Source: NSW Planning Portal)



> Figure 12: Public Transport Adjoining Site
(Source: CDC)

3.9 Transport and Access

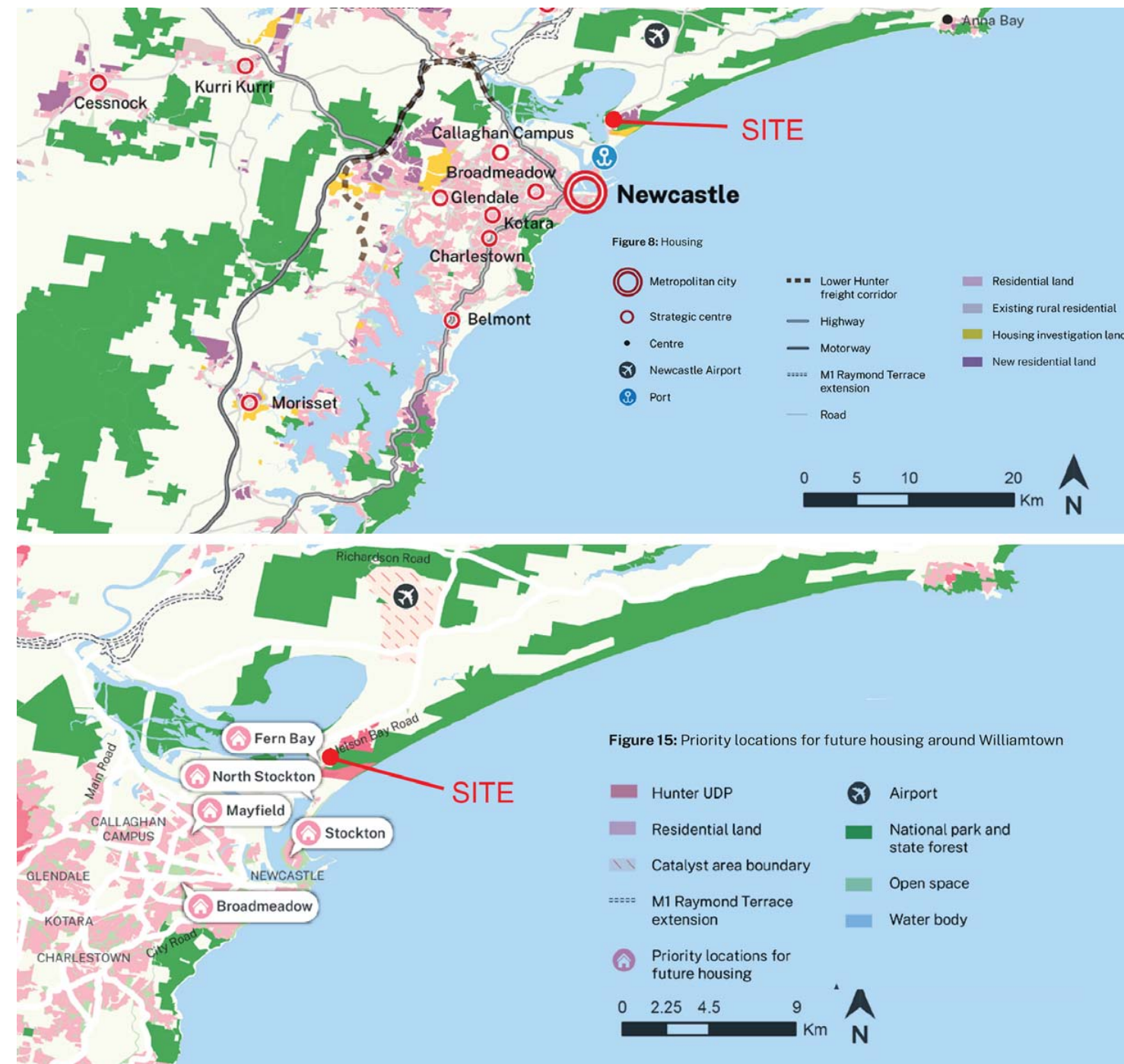
The site enjoys frontage to Nelson Bay Road. The road is a major transport route in the Newcastle's road network providing convenient access to the City Centre and Port. Currently there is no direct access into the site off the road. However there are a number of driveways and access points to the existing residential development on the western side of the road.

Bus based public transport services are conveniently available to the site from Nelson Bay Road. Bus stops are located on both sides of the road directly adjoining the site and are served by services routes 130, 131, 136 and 138. These are presented in the route map in Figure 12.

There is a formalised pedestrian network surrounding the site comprising pathways on the east side of Nelson Bay Road adjoining the site. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, in terms of pedestrian movement, there is also some, but not major, pedestrian activity on the foreshore open spaces.

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> Figure 13: Extract of Hunter Regional Plan 2041 (Source: DPE)

4.0 THE POLICY CONTEXT

Development within the subject site is subject to a number of relevant controls, strategies and guiding policies. They provide urban design guidance on the form and scale of buildings within the development site.

4.1 NSW State Government

The following NSW State Government Controls and Guidelines apply:-

- Hunter Regional Plan 2041; and
- State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) Housing 2021; and

Hunter Regional Plan 2041

The Plan identifies priority housing areas for locations within 30 minutes of the Williamstown Special Activation Precinct (SAP). Fern Bay is considered one of those locations as noted in the extract of the plan in **Figure 13**. The Plan notes "New housing is being provided within 30 minutes of Williamtown at Thornton and Newcastle City Centre, however, more will be needed" (p.97).

State Environmental Planning Policy – (Housing) 2021

Due to the nature of the proposed development in the site, State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing) 2021 is applicable and presents the following design principles for consideration:

The aims of the SEPP are to encourage the provision of housing (including residential care facilities) that will:

- increase the supply and diversity of residences that meet the needs of seniors or people with a disability, and
- make efficient use of existing infrastructure and services, and
- be of good design.

Division 2 – ‘Design principles’ presents the following design guidance:

“31. *Neighbourhood amenity and streetscape*

The proposed development should:

- (a) *recognise the operational, functional and economic requirements of residential care facilities, which typically require a different building shape from other residential accommodation, and*
- (b) *recognise the desirable elements of—*
 - (i) *the location's current character, or*
 - (ii) *for precincts undergoing a transition—the future character of the location so new buildings contributes to the quality and identity of the area, and*
- (c) *complement heritage conservation areas and heritage items in the area, and*
- (d) *maintain reasonable neighbourhood amenity and appropriate residential character by—*
 - i) *providing building setbacks to reduce bulk and overshadowing, and*
 - ii) *using building form and siting that relates to the site's land form, and*
 - iii) *adopting building heights at the street frontage that are compatible in scale with adjacent buildings, and*
 - iv) *considering, where buildings are located on the boundary, the impact of the boundary walls on neighbours, and*
- (e) *set back the front building on the site generally in line with the existing building line, and*
- (f) *include plants reasonably similar to other plants in the street, and*
- (g) *retain, wherever reasonable, major existing trees, and*
- (h) *be designed so that no building is constructed in a riparian zone.*

Visual and acoustic privacy

The proposed development should consider the visual and acoustic privacy of adjacent neighbours by:

- (a) *using appropriate site planning, including considering the location and design of windows and balconies, the use of screening devices and landscaping, and*
- (b) *ensuring acceptable noise levels in bedrooms of new dwellings by locating them away from driveways, parking areas and paths*

Solar access and design for climate

The proposed development should:

....

- (b) *involve site planning, dwelling design and landscaping that reduces energy use and makes the best practicable use of natural ventilation solar heating and lighting by locating the windows of living and dining areas in a northerly direction.*

Crime prevention

The proposed development should:

- (a) *be designed in accordance with environmental design principles relating to crime prevention;*
- (b) *provide personal property security for residents and visitors;*
- (c) *encourage crime prevention by:*
 - i) *site planning that allows observation of the approaches to a dwelling entry from inside each dwelling and general observation of public areas, driveways and streets from a dwelling that adjoins the area, driveway or street, and*
 - ii) *providing shared entries, if required, that serve a small number of dwellings and that are able to be locked, and*
 - iii) *providing dwellings designed to allow residents to see who approaches their dwellings without the need to open the front door.*

Accessibility

The proposed development should:

- (a) *have obvious and safe pedestrian links from the site that provide access to public transport services or local facilities, and*
- (b) *provide attractive, yet safe, environments for pedestrians and motorists with convenient access and parking for residents and visitors.*

4.2 Fern Bay and North Stockton Strategy April 2020

The Strategy is a joint venture between Port Stephens and Newcastle City Councils to guide future development of the locality, which is partly located in each Council area. (The site is located just inside the boundary of the Port Stephens Council area).

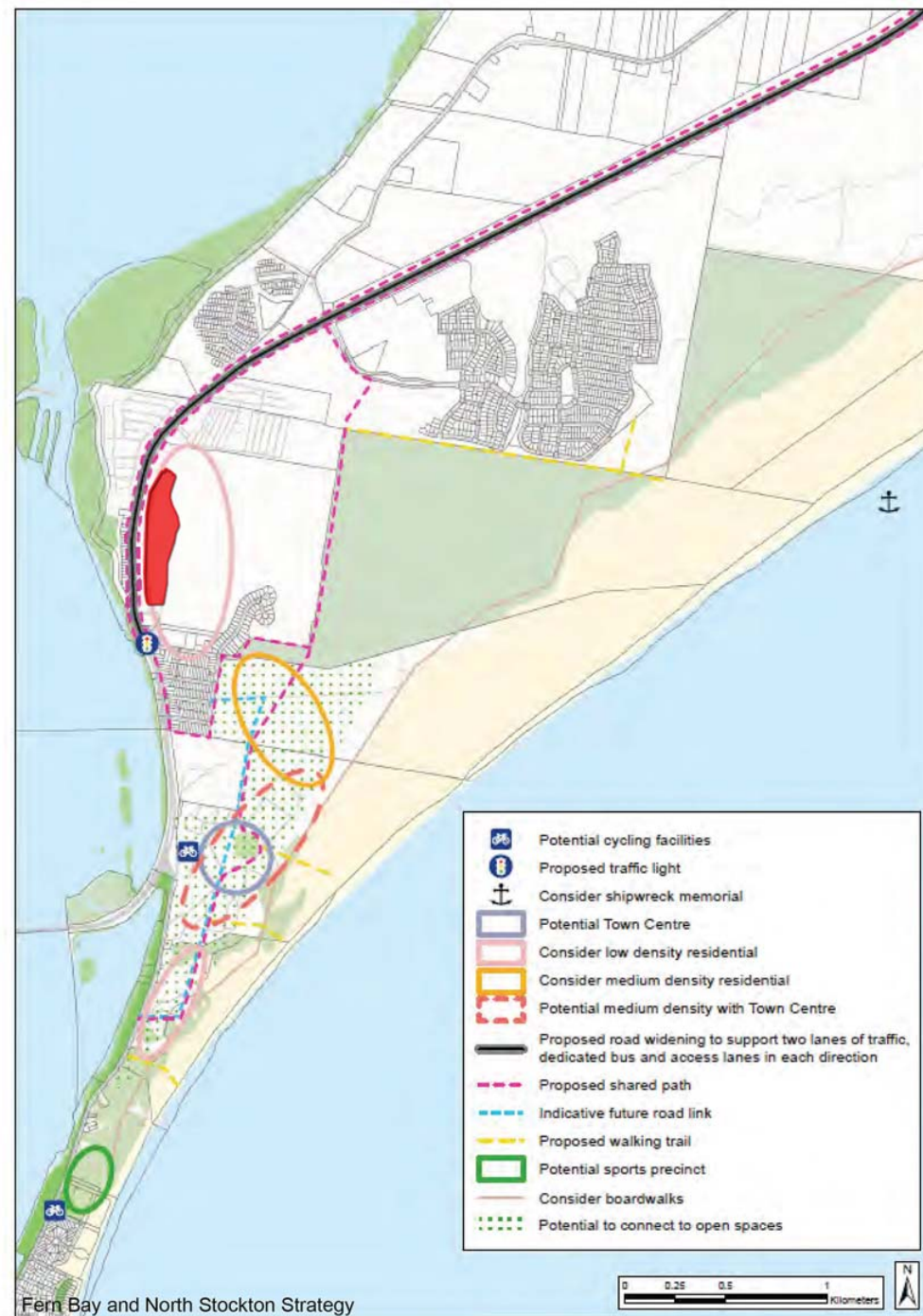
The purpose of the strategy is to guide future development and ensure sufficient community infrastructure is provided for the growing community. It identifies opportunities for Fern Bay and North Stockton to create a pedestrian focused place which offers housing diversity, a mixed-use town centre, connected open spaces and community facilities.

The Strategy is guided by six goals, of which the following are relevant:

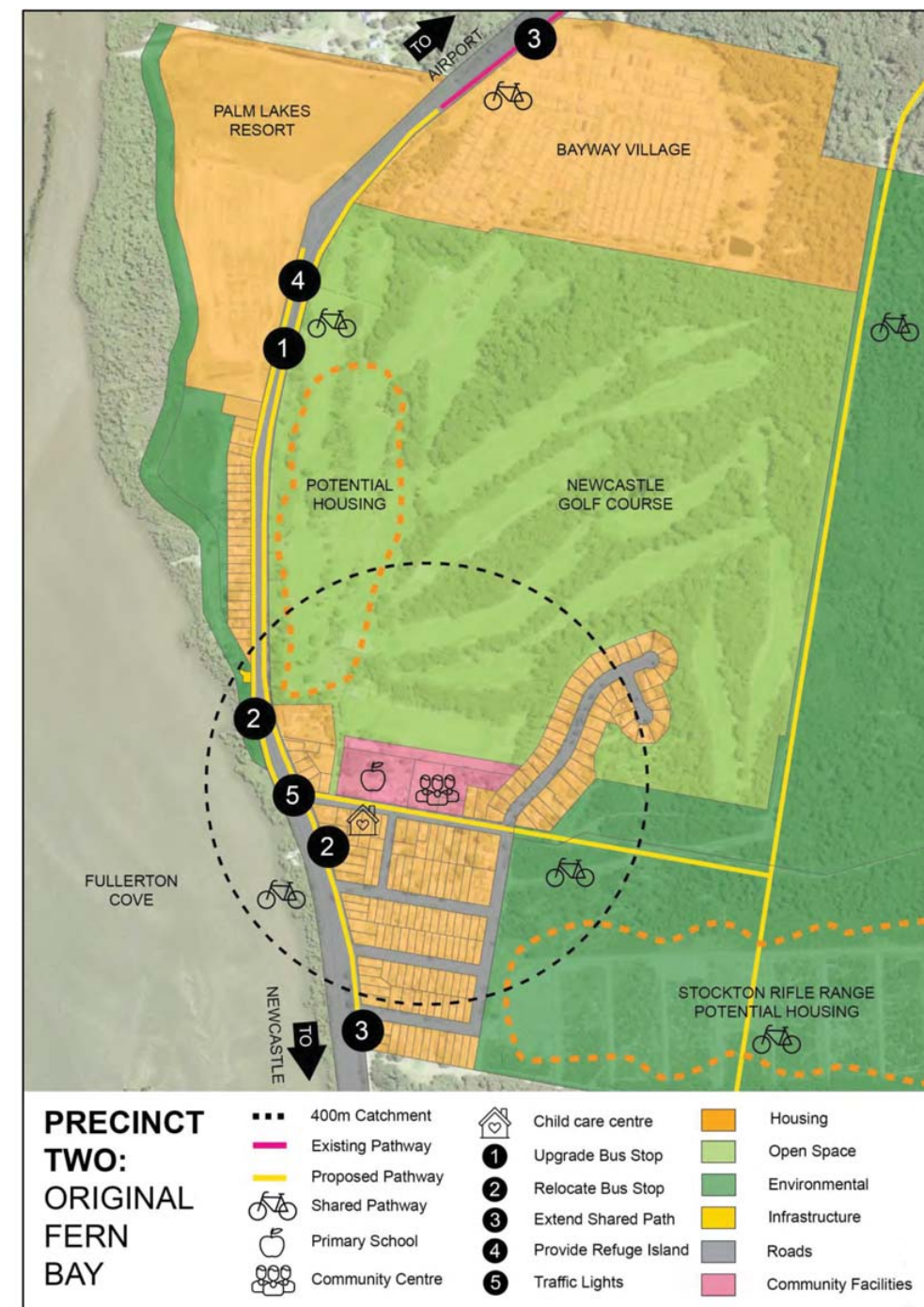
- *establish a conveniently located mixed-use town centre connected by technology, transport, housing, tourism and great public places.*
- *grow a resilient coastal community with access to liveable and diverse housing.*
- *improve access to useable open spaces and well-designed community facilities to support daily activity and healthy lifestyles.*
- *prioritise safe and convenient travel by walking, cycling and use of public transport and duplicate Nelson Bay Road for its full length from Stockton to Newcastle Airport to support regional journeys.*

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> Figure 14: Fern Bay and North Stockton Strategy Plan



> Figure 15: "Original Fern Bay" Precinct 2 Plan

The Strategy map is reproduced in **Figure 14**. It identifies the following:

- Consideration of low density housing in that part of the Golf Course within which the site is located;
- Consideration of medium density residential development to the south east of the site at the rifle range site;
- A potential new mixed use, low to medium residential density town centre in the Stockton Centre site;
- An extensive shared path network and walking trails through the area;
- A new north-south road connecting Fern Bay to the new Town Centre;
- Potential traffic lights at the Vardon and Nelson Bay Roads intersections;
- Investigation of opportunities for an extended ferry route with a terminal at North Stockton.

The site is located in Precinct No. 2 "Original Fern Bay." The Precinct Plan is reproduced in **Figure 15** and the Strategy notes the following specific actions:

- Provide housing with greater densities closer to the proposed mixed-use town centre; and
- Improve public transport infrastructure (bus stops and footpaths) on Nelson Bay Road.

In summary:

1. The site is approximately 1.0 kilometre south of the proposed centre at the Stockton Centre and while this is not a convenient walking distance the future centre will be accessible to the site via the multiple bus routes on Nelson Bay Road;
2. Public transport infrastructure adjoining the site is intended to be upgraded; and
3. The Strategy supports residential development within the site. However it is silent on why low density residential use is the preferred density. Given the amenity and convenient access to services the site enjoys, there are opportunities to explore different forms of environmentally compatible housing.

5.0 THE URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 Opportunities

From a review of the physical context of the site in terms of its location within the City of Port Stephens, Newcastle City, the coastal peninsula, and of the site itself in terms of neighbouring uses and development, a number of urban design opportunities are apparent.

There is the opportunity for the site to accommodate buildings with a greater height and density than that which prevail in the locality. This opportunity is afforded by the collective consideration of the following matters:

1. The presence of the river, foreshore and parkland to the west of the site, which may reinforce the visual significance of the development site and surrounding area as a signpost for the visual commencement of urban activity and development in the locality;
2. The presence of waterfront parkland, good public transport access, local recreation facilities and local convenience retail facilities, which establish a high level of amenity within the locality;
3. The opportunity for development within the site to enjoy attractive views across the foreshore, which generates the potential for a high level of residential amenity at upper levels;
4. The presence of established pedestrian paths around the site that ensures development will not restrict public access through the area;
5. The presence of other tall structures and tall pine trees along the coast, particularly to the west at Kooragang Island and at the entry to the Peninsula, which ensure that tall development within the site would not be unique and would not be unreasonably visually prominent with the townscape skyline;
6. The opportunity to reinforce the gateway role of the site in indicating arrival in the Port Stephens LGA. The building envelope can reinforce the landmark status of the south west corner of the development site by way of a concentration of building mass and/or provision of architectural features or design elements, which accentuates the presence of the development at the southern corner;
7. The presence of the Hunter River, which is the most striking visually prominent element within the landscape and which correspondingly, reduces the visual impact of tall buildings on the coastal peninsula;
8. The absence of any major view corridors to or across the site from view points and activities in the locality;
9. The presence of local view corridors along Nelson Bay Road with attendant potential streetscape visual impact considerations that can be addressed by generous building setbacks from the road that can preserve existing trees at the site boundary and provide for generous landscaping at ground level;
10. The presence of Nelson Bay Road that:
 - i) Provides new opportunities for access into the site without impacting on traffic volumes, amenity and streetscape character of Vardon Road;
 - ii) Enables comprehensive public pedestrian within ground floor external areas;
 - iii) Provides convenient access to public transport.
11. The north-south orientation of the site with good separation to the west and south from neighbouring dwellings and no development to the east that can:
 - i) Receive good solar access from the north that, coupled with the rectangular configuration of the site, allows for good solar penetration into the site;
 - ii) Ensure that any future buildings can maintain the existing residential setback pattern and consistency with the building street alignment that prevails in Nelson Bay Road;
 - iii) Allow building heights across the site that respect adjoining sensitive residential uses in terms of minimising environmental impact by way of solar access, overshadowing, privacy and visual impact on the streetscape;
 - iv) Preserve view corridors within streetscapes and to adjoining parklands and public places; and
 - v) provide deep soil opportunities for the planting of significant street trees in boundary setbacks.

The question arises as to what the most appropriate building height would be. Appropriately designed tall buildings can enhance the environment by preserving the landscape/ townscape or by contrasting with it. However, consideration is also required of their immediate environmental impacts on streetscape, solar access and surrounding amenity.

The development of the site provides the opportunity to reinforce the image, attractiveness and memorability of the southern entrance into the Port Stephens LGA through the promotion of high quality, architectural design that capitalizes on its high profile gateway status and that contributes to the City's character and image. The prominence of the site provides the opportunity to establish a landmark design statement in building design.

5.2 Constraints

From a review of the context of the site in terms of its location within the City of Port Stephens, Newcastle City, the coastal peninsula, and of the site itself in terms of neighbouring uses and development, the following urban design constraints are apparent: -

- The presence of a high density residential building on the site will require consideration of acoustic impacts in terms of the location of building form and scale along the western boundary of the development site adjoining Nelson Bay Road to ensure that residential amenity within the site is protected; and
- The location of the site in close proximity to the Fern Bay Primary School will require attention to localised impacts by way of construction traffic noise and minimising long term traffic volume increases.

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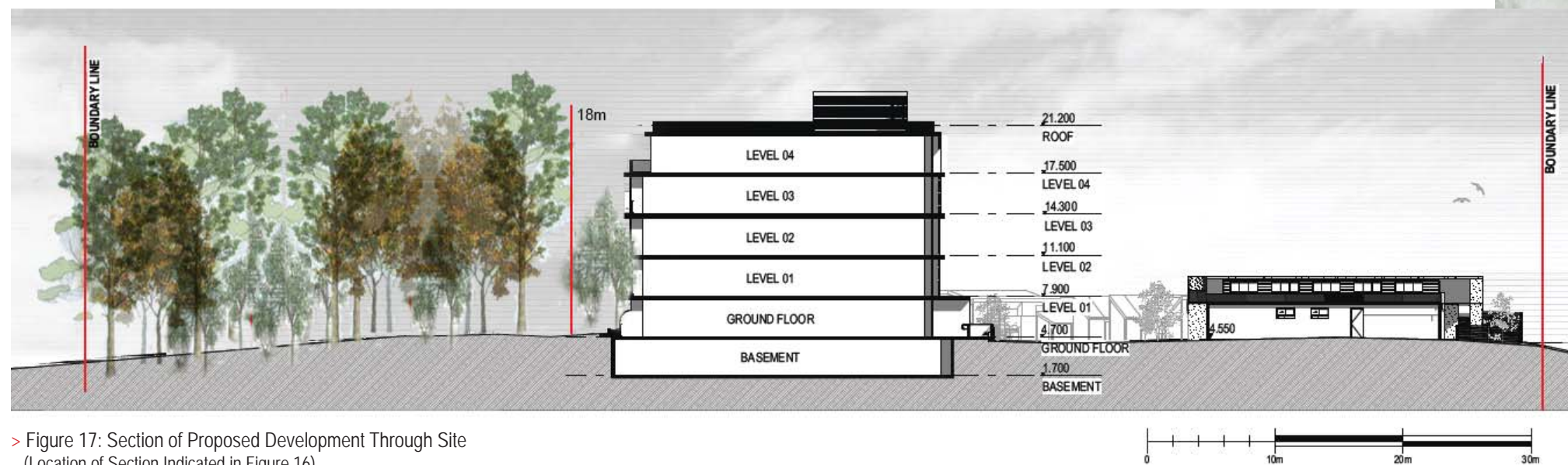
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6.0 THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

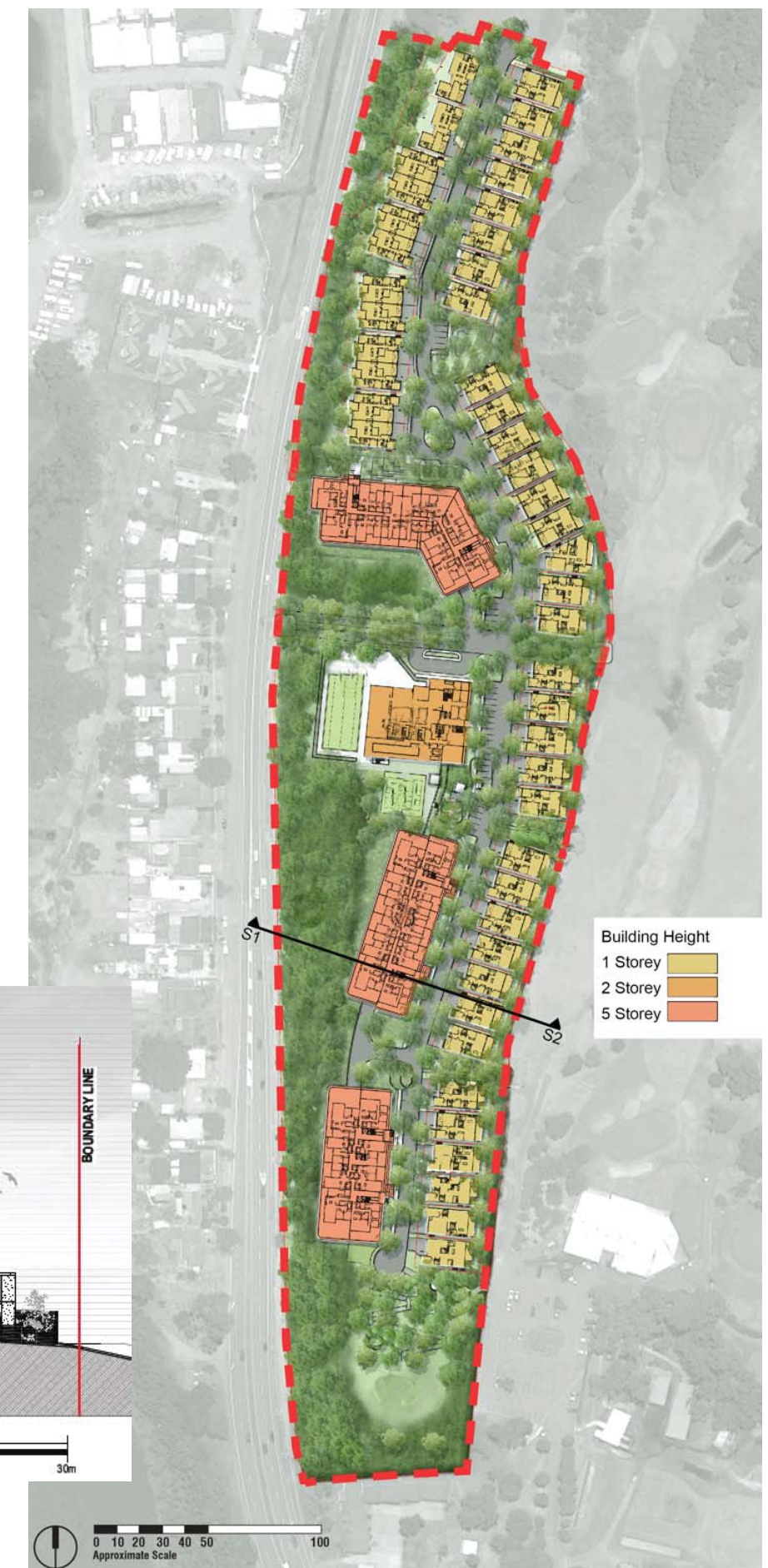
6.1 Summary of Significant Elements

Relevant elements of the proposed development are summarised below and presented in:

- Figure 16 (Master Plan with Building Heights);
- Figure 17 (Section);
- Figure 18 (Artists Impressions of Internal Site Character); and
- Figures 19 (Photomontage views from Nelson Bay Road).



> Figure 17: Section of Proposed Development Through Site
(Location of Section Indicated in Figure 16)



> Figure 16: Master Plan with Building Heights
(S1-S2 indicates location of Section in Figure 17)

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Of relevance to this assessment:

- Site planning establishes a series of three unconnected five storey buildings setback from the western boundary to Nelson Bay Road in the southern half of the site. They will have a maximum height of approximately 18 metres;
- Architectural floor and facade planning introduces significant articulation in plan and elevation by way of deep balconies projecting / recessive features and prominent building spandrels that introduce a pattern of voids at each level;
- The depth of the landscaped setback of the buildings to Nelson Bay Road ranges from 15 metres at the closest point to 55 metres. The setback area retains the existing trees along the site frontage to the Road;
- The landscape plan proposes a mix of tree species indigenous to the area in the setback area that will supplement the existing trees on site. This mix includes tall canopy trees ranging from 10 metres to 40 metres in height. The crown of the canopy will exceed the maximum height of the five storey buildings in places;
- A series of single storey attached cottages setback from the western boundary to Nelson Bay Road in the north west part of the site;
- A row of single storey detached cottages extending along the eastern boundary of the site;
- An internal landscaped access road with an intersection to Nelson Bay Road that ensures no potential additional traffic on Vardon Road;
- A landscape park at the elevated southern part of the site. It will minimise views to the southernmost 5 storey building for northbound travelers along Nelson Bay Road; and
- The architectural design adopts a muted and sympathetic pallet of materials and colours that suit the character of the area. The dominant visual elements of the building (the sandstone cladding on the walls, copper coloured façade panels, concrete spandrels and the timber looking soffits, screens and other building elements) mimic and take as cues the colours within the townscape and landscape.



> Figure 18: Images of Development Character
(Source EJE)

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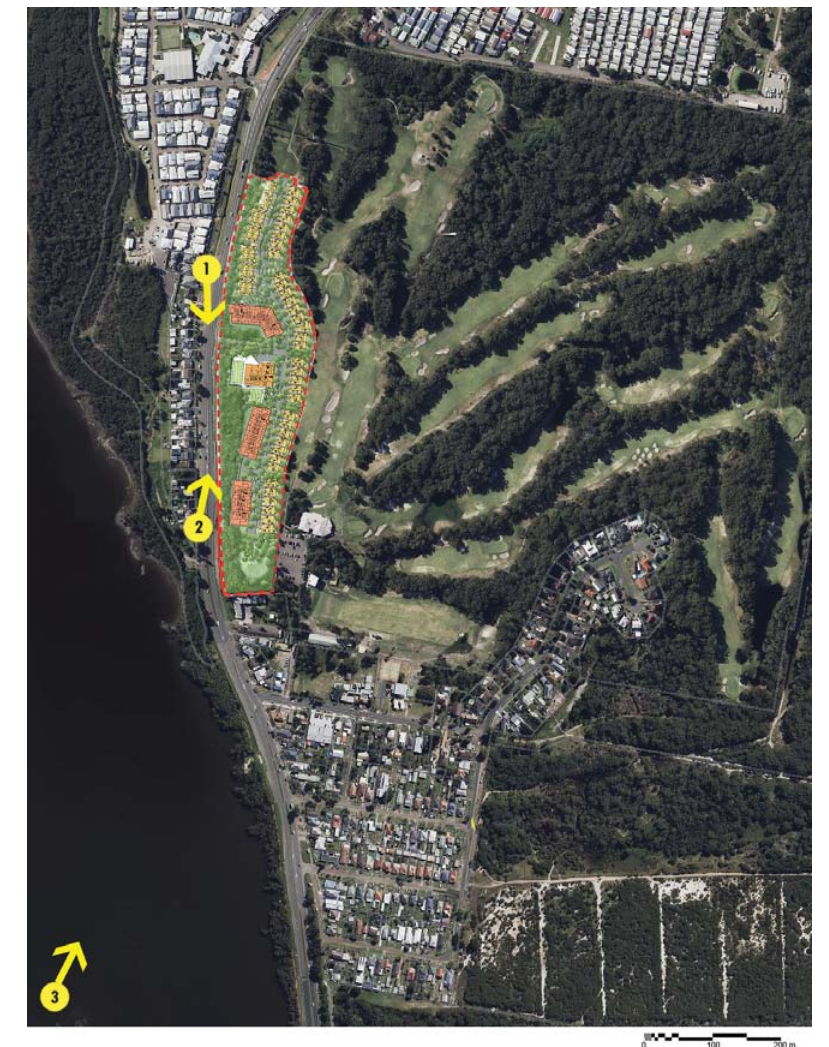


> Figure 19: "Before and After" Photomontage Views of Development from Key View Points (Source EJE)

(1) South along Nelson Bay Road (Top Left Image)

(2) North Along Nelson Bay Road (Bottom Left Image)

(3) North East from Stockton Bridge (Bottom Right Image)



7.0 VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

7.1 Methodology

The assessment in this report adopts an approach based on the following documents:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2002) (GLVIA) produced jointly by the UK Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA); and
- The guidelines and methodology in the Transport for NSW EIA Practice Note EIA – NO4, August 2020.

They are recognised as the established guidance on best practice in carrying out landscape/townscape and visual impact assessment of proposed developments.

A clear distinction is required between impacts on townscape / landscape character impacts and visual impacts, which are separate, yet related, as follows:

- Townscape impacts relate to the effects of a proposal in terms of changes in the physical fabric and other characteristics of the townscape (referred to as 'townscape receptor') and its resulting character and quality; while
- Visual impacts relate solely to changes in available views of the townscape from people (e.g. residents, visitors, etc - referred to as 'visual receptors' or 'viewers'), and the effects of those changes on the amenity they experience.

Townscape / landscape and visual impacts do not necessarily coincide, and impacts can be beneficial as well as adverse.

The various features in the townscape / landscape make up:

1. its character,
2. its visual quality,
3. its sensitivity and
4. Its absorption capability

Five steps have been adopted in the assessment:

1. Identify Key Visibility and Viewpoints;
2. Identify townscape / landscape visual character and quality;
3. Identify townscape and visual sensitivity; and
4. Identify the magnitude of Change; and
5. Identify the Impact

7.2 Visibility and ViewPoints

Visibility and viewpoints are identified and discussed in Parts 2.5 (Locality) and 3.5 (Site) above. In summary:

- Generally the locality is low lying and the variation in height is minimal. Elevated viewpoints are limited to the 20 metre high peaks in a series of north-south hilltops to the east of the site along the beachfront. These are not publicly accessible
- None of the hill tops offer publicly accessible views and there are no views of the locality. The most publicly accessible elevated part of the peninsula is at the Stockton Cemetery. However its maximum elevation is less than 10 metres and views only occur through trees to the Hunter River to the west and south.
- Locality views are limited to low height views from foreshore areas and roads. The highest view of the locality can be obtained from the crown of the centre arch of Stockton bridge that has a height of 52 metres. Such views are fleeting if travelling by car. However pedestrian views are available from a central median footpath;
- Nelson Bay Road (a major road in the locality's movement network) particularly where it crosses the river, means that the site enjoys high visibility and significant views into the site from passing traffic; and

- There are limited views into the site from adjoining development. However, east facing detached dwellings addressing the site on Nelson Bay Road experience direct looking into the site across the road.

7.3 Townscape / landscape Visual Character and Quality

Townscape / landscape visual character is identified and discussed in Parts 2 (Locality) and 3 (Site) above.

Visual quality is evaluated by identifying the *vividness*, *intactness* and *unity* present in the views and vistas of the townscape and landscape.

Vividness is the visual power or memorability of townscape components as they combine in distinctive visual patterns. The site's vividness can be identified as its distinct treed streetscape, dense green canopy, and prevailing single and two storey dwellings on large lots with a mix of architectural styles and a low provision of site landscaping.

Intactness is the visual integrity of the natural and man-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. Due to the dominant presence of the tree canopy and street trees and the influence of the landscape setting dominated by the Hunter River North Channel there is a dominant green waterfront backdrop to the suburb.

Given these elements, Fern Bay exhibits high visual quality, and its visual integrity is intact. While there is a mix of building styles and heights their visual presence is subservient and their contribution to the area's visual quality minimal. Where views to potentially prominent elements are available, (such as to the large industrial and port buildings located in a linear fashion along Cormorant Road and the harbour front to the west of the site), the elements do not dominate, or influence the townscape's visual quality, or erode its intactness.

Unity is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the townscape and landscape considered as a whole. It frequently attests to the careful design of individual components in the townscape. As noted above, the townscape exhibits a mix of building uses, styles / eras and heights, which in themselves display some commonality and unity in specific areas. However, little unity is present at a locality wide scale, when assessed against this spatial framework of the site as a whole.

Overall, despite the mix of building and structure styles, forms, uses and heights, the townscape exhibits high visual quality due to the vividness and intactness of the visually dominant tree canopy of the site and the locality's waterfront location. These characteristics unify the disparate elements within the townscape.

7.4 Townscape / landscape Visual Sensitivity

The sensitivity of the townscape / landscape is the estimate of the significance that a change will have on its character and quality (discussed above), and to those viewing it (the viewers).

Best practice guidance recognises that a townscape and landscape with a high sensitivity does not automatically mean that it has a low capacity for change. Rather, capacity is a question of the interaction between the sensitivity of the townscape and landscape, the type and amount of change and the way that the townscape and landscape is valued by the viewer.

There are two elements in determining visual sensitivity: viewer sensitivity; and viewer exposure.

Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity is defined as:

- the viewers' concern for visual quality; and
- The viewers' response to change in the visual resources that make up the view.

Viewer concerns and responses to the proposed development are not known at this time.

Viewer Exposure

Viewer exposure is typically assessed by measuring the number of viewers potentially exposed to the proposed change, type of viewer activity, the duration of their view, the speed at which the viewer moves, and the position of the viewer. High and extended viewer exposure heightens the importance of managing the visual effects of a project.

Due to the comparatively flat terrain within the locality, views of the site are limited and primarily experienced from:

1. Nelson Bay Road behind the tree line directly adjoining the site;
2. Distant from the elevated Stockton Bridge; and
3. Across Nelson Bay Road from neighbouring buildings.

Nelson Bay Road accommodates regional scale traffic volumes and negligible pedestrian movements. Viewer exposure to the site is limited to immediate, transitory views from the road / footpath realised through openings between site boundary trees.

Stockton Bridge is elevated. While the numbers of potential car occupants who have the opportunity to view the site are high, views are fleeting, experienced at high speed and are realised from a significant distance.

Views from neighbouring buildings are primarily available to residents and visitors. Views are generally obstructed by trees that line the site and passing traffic.

In summary, extensive and memorable viewer exposure to the site is low and obtained from Nelson Bay Road adjoining the site.

7.5 Magnitude of Change

The magnitude of impact on the townscape or viewer depends upon the nature and scale of the development.

As noted in the discussions above:

- Building heights will range from 1 to 5 storeys. The 5 storey height will only be present in three buildings that are setback between 15 and 55 metres from the Nelson Bay Road frontage and 100 metres from the southern boundary;
- The adoption of a variety of building heights and separation between building blocks establish a good relationship with the neighbouring golf course and Nelson Bay Road streetscape;
- Development siting and building orientation provides opportunities for view corridors within the streetscape and to the adjoining golf course. The perimeter block form maximises views to and across the site;
- Buildings exhibit significant articulation that, coupled with an appropriate adoption of materials and colours, soften their appearance and can generate development with good visual presentation;
- The proposed development seeks to preserve the significant trees present within the site frontage to Nelson Bay Road and provide supplementary tree planning and landscaping at ground level to improve site presentation;
- Building form, massing and scale ensure that the proposed development enjoys a harmonious relationship with the landscape character of the locality, particularly its tree canopy;
- Building height will be lower than the tree canopy as it establishes itself over time;

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Magnitude of Change	Receptor	Criterion
Low	Townscape	A small change in components of the townscape.
	Visual	Viewers affected by minor changes in views, or visible for a short duration, at an oblique angle, or which blends to an extent with the existing view.
Moderate	Townscape	Moderate changes in townscape components.
	Visual	Viewers affected by moderate changes in views, or visible for a moderate duration, at a slight angle, or which is in contrast with the existing view.
High	Townscape	A notable change in townscape characteristics over an extensive area.
	Visual	Viewers affected by major changes in view, or visible for a long duration, facing the change, or which is in stark contrast with the existing view.

> Figure 20: Definitions of Magnitude of Change

Magnitude Sensitivity	Low Magnitude of Townscape or Visual Change	Moderate Magnitude of Townscape or Visual Change	High Magnitude of Townscape or Visual Change
Low Townscape or Viewer Sensitivity	None	Slight	Slight/Moderate
Moderate Townscape or Viewer Sensitivity	Slight	Moderate	Moderate/Substantial
High Townscape or Viewer Sensitivity	Slight/Moderate	Moderate/Substantial	Substantial

> Figure 21: Definitions of Impact

- The visual presentation of proposed scale of the development in the site will be subservient to the prevailing visually dominant elements that comprise the large expanse of waterfront and the green frontage of the site to the road; and
- The proposed building scale is not considered to generate any visual, privacy or shadow impacts on adjoining development, or other potential impacts by way of increased traffic on local roads. Rather, by replacing part of the existing Golf course with a new 'state-of-the-art' facility exhibiting good architectural design, the proposed development is considered to enhance neighbourhood amenity and character.

In summary, the proposed height and massing of the development preserves the landscape quality of street and foreshore lands. Buildings are setback from the street and exhibit heights that are not intrusive within the immediate visual curtilage. Further afield the height of the proposed development is subservient to the prevailing landscape character of the Hunter River and is not visually intrusive.

The proposed development will not obscure any significant views from public places. Rather, the proposed development capitalises on its gateway role into the southern part of Port Stephens, and particularly views across the site from Nelson Bay Road, by providing a building that is distinctive and exhibits a high standard of architectural design.

Thus the magnitude of change will be low.

7.6 Assessment of Impact

The magnitude of impact of the change is described as being low, moderate or high. Accepted Definitions of Magnitude of Impact are presented in the table in **Figure 20**.

In the previous discussion, it can be observed that the proposed development will result in:

- A low magnitude of change in the landscape;
- A small positive change to the townscape; and
- Low magnitude of visual change, being "*viewers affected by minor changes in views, or visible for a short duration, at an oblique angle, or which blends to an extent with the existing view.*"

This is marked in **Figure 20**.

Impact significance is determined by cross-referencing the sensitivity of the landscape or viewer, with the magnitude of change expected as a result of the development. Thus a substantial impact will usually occur where both sensitivity of the landscape or viewer and the magnitude of the impact are high. Impact significance is described as being substantial, moderate, slight or none. Importantly, impacts can be further described as being beneficial/positive as well as adverse/negative. Accepted Definitions of Significance of Impact are presented in the table in **Figure 21**.

From the previous discussion, it can be concluded that the magnitude in impact will be "*None*." This is marked in **Figure 21**.

Subsequently, in light of these conclusions, this assessment has demonstrated that there will be negligible and acceptable visual impact.

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8.0 CONCLUSION

This Urban Design and Visual Impact Study has demonstrated that the site of the proposed development within the Newcastle Golf Club enjoys significant urban design opportunities. They can facilitate a scale and form of development on the site that can realise new seniors' accommodation and associated facilities within the site distinguished by high amenity generated by the presence of the foreshore, parklands, future local retail and commercial activities, good public transport and the Golf Club.

Similarly there are few urban design constraints which may impede development of the site to the scale and form proposed.

Collation of the findings of the site and context analysis presented in the study has established an Urban Design and visual impact framework for the development of the site by which the proposed development can be assessed against visual impact, environmental impact and other urban design considerations.

The assessment concludes that the development approach that is proposed effectively responds to the Urban Design Framework. It will provide a sensitive and positive visual contribution to the Nelson Bay Road streetscape, Fern Bay Townscape and the foreshore landscape as well as capitalising on the opportunity of establishing a landmark development that can enhance the Port Stephens's skyline and legibility at its southern entry.



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