

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATIVE GROUP – MINUTES

ITEM No: 2

Date of Panel Assessment: 29 July 2020
Address of Project: 625 Hunter Street Newcastle West
DA No: 2020/00621
UDCG No: 2020/00009
No. of Buildings: 1
No. of Units: 38 apartments
12 x 1bed loft & 26 studio apartments

Declaration of Conflict of Interest: Nil

Attendees:

Applicant:

John Mavros - Owner
Aris Zafirellis - Owner
Nicholas Dowman - BKA Architecture
John Baker - BKA Architecture
Rhiannon McDermott - BKA Architecture
Allison Burrows - BKA Architecture

Council:

Elle Durrant - Development Officer
William Toose - Principle Planner
Isabelle Rowlatt - Development Officer (Heritage)
America Pati - Senior Business Support Officer

This report addresses the nine Design Quality Principles set out in the Apartment Design Guide (2015) under State Environmental Planning Policy No.65. It is also an appropriate format for applications which do not include residential flats.

Background Summary

This is the first consideration of a proposal for this site by the Group.

The Site is currently zoned B4 Mixed Use according to the Newcastle Local Environmental Plan 2012 (NLEP 2012). The façade of the building also contributes to the general heritage character of the Newcastle City Centre Heritage Conservation Area. The surrounding locality, including the Site, is within a B4 Mixed Use zone that extends along Hunter and King Street. This borders the Commercial Core surrounding Newcastle Interchange and the Honeysuckle precinct. The area is predominantly characterised by commercial uses, with occasional residential uses above ground level. The Site is near a range of services and public transport options, including the Honeysuckle Light Rail stop (150m), Market Town (250m) and the University of Newcastle City Campus and Civic precinct (600m)

Whilst the design generally is of excellent quality, there are concerns in relation to the planform and its relationship to future development on adjoining sites in Hunter Street.

1. Context and Neighbourhood Character

The subject site located to the southern side of Hunter Street Newcastle West is occupied by the shell of what appears an early Inter War mixed use building retaining a notable Classical Revival street elevation of rendered masonry and painted face brick. The site is enclosed by later commercial /retail buildings to both sides and rear.

The site sits within a location of urban renewal. Much of the underutilized retail/commercial building stock from the late 19th and early to mid- 20th Century now being progressively replaced or adapted.

2. Built Form and Scale

The proposal combines retention of the existing street facade as a screen to a new mixed-use building of 15 levels comprising; a single basement level housing services and storage areas; ground floor lobby, café and landscaped courts; and thirteen levels of residential accommodation. The building is proposed as a central service core with linkways recessed from side boundaries accessing paired studio apartments to the north [street] elevation and to two-level loft apartments to the southern [rear] elevation. The top (13th) floor combines an extensive communal area at the rear with two studio apartments at the street front elevation.

The building is set back from the rear boundary enabling external decks to rear apartments. The building rises substantially above existing buildings in the immediate streetscape. Elongated side elevations are articulated with recesses between apartments and the central lift core, generating the impression of slender linked towers rather than a slab-sided building. Recesses either side of the lift core are extensively landscaped.

Open balconies to the rear and front elevations progressively realign from west to east with location up the building. The gradual spiral pattern visually relieves the repetition of cantilevered decks on the slender tower.

Whilst supporting retention of the street facade, its structural stability in the form indicated is questioned. Acknowledging the deteriorated fabric of the existing building it is recommended that it be linked to activated accessible areas extending from the main frontage of the new building.

The Group raised concerns about how the proposed design could integrate with the neighbouring sites, yet still retain acceptable amenity in the apartments if for example commercial development was to be built hard against common boundaries. If alternatively, future development on the adjoining sites were to be primarily residential, the proposed small setbacks from the common boundaries would result in separation distances between the bedrooms and potentially similar rooms in such development(s) being unacceptable. Whilst acknowledging this as a common issue in deep, narrow historic subdivisions the Group maintains the need for site amalgamation as the recommended response to SEPP65 guidelines covering separation distances.

3. Density

The development has an FSR of 0.36:1 the Development utilising the 20% increase in maximum FSR as per the SEPP ARH. The building height is compliant with Council Height Controls.

4. Sustainability

The proposed development provides 100% compliance with cross ventilation and achieves solar access requirements to 27 of the apartments [70% of the total].

Bathrooms to loft apartments should have ventilation and have natural light through the return walls from the side boundaries.

Bathrooms to level 13 Studios should have natural light and ventilation through the roof.

5. Landscape

Planting including vertical garden elements to the side and outer face of the lift core will require regular maintenance. Safe, practical access to all proposed soft landscape is crucial, and should be considered at DA stage. Rationalisation of planting to the central core area would reduce the maintenance costs in a building identified as responding to affordable housing.

Automated watering needs to be supplied to all planting beds and planters.

The proposed BBQ area to the rear ground floor court needs to be further developed to remove smoke and odour impact on apartments above.

The linear plan of the ground floor rear courtyard should consider a wider area at the rear providing an additional usable communal area replacing the point seating platforms along the central walkway. The latter could be located within the footprint of the building above – which would provide some weather protection.

6. Amenity

The amenity of the linkway from the lift core to apartments in terms of privacy and weatherproofing is of concern.

Separation distances from the linkways to adjoining sites do not comply with ADG requirements. The Group recommends investigation of alternate forms of enclosure to the linkways in the form of obscure glazing or similar, providing visual and acoustic amenity to future developments to the east and west.

Privacy to bedroom windows adjacent to the linkways should also be improved in accordance with the above recommendation.

Privacy screening to sides of the rooftop communal area requires further development.

Living areas to lofts and studio apartments should include a dining area.

The provision of a single lift would impact on occupant's amenity in the event of services shutdowns and interruptions to service, particularly during delivery/removal of occupants' furnishings.

The absence of any car-parking or service parking bay is considered a significant limitation to the amenity of the building. Whilst located near the Light Rail route, city amenities and civic buildings, the absence of parking is considered to limit appeal of the apartments to essential workers likely to seek affordable housing and typically reliant on a vehicle for out of hours transport. Whilst supportive of measures to reduce vehicular traffic in this area, and recognizing that provision of parking on this narrow site would be difficult, this in combination with the fact that there is a bus stop immediately in front of the site which would make loading/unloading of goods, furniture etc problematic, raise concerns which will need to be assessed by Council.

7. Safety

Not discussed but subject to operating hours of the street front café appears satisfactory

8. Housing Diversity and Social Interaction

The Group questioned the viability of such a large number of studio and one-bedroom apartments in view of the recent excess of these in the Newcastle market.

The limitation of housing diversity to studios and one-bedroom apartments caters for a limited spectrum of the affordable housing demand in Newcastle.

The large roof top communal area provides a good opportunity for social interaction, as does the attractive communal space at ground floor level.

Wind shielding of the roof-top area should be provided to enhance its amenity.

9. Aesthetics

Subject to recommendations for treatment of the retained facade the Group supports the aesthetic treatment of the development.

Details of restoration works to the retained facade should be provided in conjunction with provision of usable floor space behind the façade.

Details of the street awning and awning interface with adjacent sites should be provided.

Methods of stabilizing the retained boundary walls of the existing structure should be provided.

Amendments Required to Achieve Design Quality

The Group acknowledges the restricted nature of the site but is concerned that the current design, despite exhibiting a high quality in other respects, does not provide the ability to retain acceptable amenity in apartments should, for example commercial development be constructed hard against the boundary of any adjacent site. Amalgamation with an adjacent site would appear to be the only option to resolve issues generated by the lack of

site parking and resolution of potential amenity issues arising from future development on adjoining sites.

Summary Recommendation

The issues raised above may need to be resolved by site amalgamation. In its current form, although appreciating the otherwise high quality of the design, the Group is unable to support the application.