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visual impact assessment

Modification to DA 521/2017
34-36 West Street, Forster NSW

project no. 13705.5

11th May 2020
rev.A

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Figure 1.0
Site photograph

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project no: 13705.5
date: 11.05.2021
site: 34-36 West Street, Forster NSW
client: Enyoc Pty Ltd
council: Midcoast Council

visual impact assessment

Lake, West and Middle Street, Forster.

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01 introduction

01.1. Preamble

Terras Landscape Architects have been engaged by Mal Kukas - Global Construction Corporation, to undertake a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) for a proposed new floor to Building A for the previously approved residential and commercial development prsently being constructed at 34-36 West Street, Forster.

This VIA is generally based on the methodology determined by Lake Macquarie Scenic Quality Guidelines although the use of the scenic units is not applicable here. This is an abbreviated assessment generally based on those VIA Guidelines. Field work was conducted on Monday 10th May 2021. Following a desktop analysis a visual assessment was undertaken from vantage points surrounding the site within the pre-dermined visual catchment area, (refer to Figure 6.0).

Figure 2.0
Site Location

01.2. Objectives

The objectives of this report are as follows:

- To identify and describe the existing visual/landscape environment and to evaluate its current qualities.
- To assess the proposal in contextual settings from selected viewpoints based on criteria described in the scenic quality guidelines.
- To determine the likely impacts development will have on the visual/landscape quality of the area and to determine compliance with the scenic quality guidelines.
- To propose methods, where possible, to reduce the scenic impact of the proposed development or methods to increase the existing scenic quality.

01.3. Methodology

The methodology applied to this study involved evaluating the visual environment pertaining to the site and using value judgements based on community responses to scenery as outlined in the Appendix A (Visual Quality Preference Table). The methodology also incorporates the requirements of the Scenic Quality Guidelines with reference to Scenic Quality Objectives and Scenic Management Zones & Strategies particularly when assessing likely impacts.

The assessment was undertaken in three stages as noted below:

1. A description of the existing visual environment.
2. Undertaking of a viewpoint analysis to viewing locations where viewer access is provided. Viewpoints are generally chosen that represent those locations where impacts will affect significant groups within the population (e.g. major roads, community halls, settlements etc. rather than individuals) and as noted in the scenic quality guidelines otherwise referred to as Significant features, Significant viewpoints and Significant ridgelines.
3. An assessment of visual impacts.
4. Summary of findings.

02 existing visual environment

02.1. Site Location and Description

02.1.1 Local Area Character

The site is located on within the southern extent of the Forster town centre.

The local landscape character is residential and commercial properties including single, two storey and multi storey buildings. The buildings surrounding the site consist buildong up to four storeys in height.

Forster is a coastal, beachside, lakeside town. The topography in the town centre is generally flat with a rise in land around the eastern beachfront area. Forster is known as a holiday and retirement location and the town centre includes many multi storey residential and apartment developments that are a significant visual vertical elements in the townscape. and a feature of the town centre. The skyline when viewed from many locations consists of these taller apartment buildings located around the city centre.

02.1.2 Site Character - Immediate Vicinity

The lot is located on an intersection to the southern extent of the town centre. The surrounding development includes holiday units to the east, a natural drainage corridor to the south and open foreshore land to the west incorporating the local police station. Several large trees are growing to the areas adjoining Middle Street to the south. The surrounding land form is flat.

See existing site plan below.

Figure 3 .0 Existing site plan - Local surrounds
Site and immediate surrounds.

Figure 4 .0 - Three dimensional appreciation of surrounding high rise development.

02.2. visual environment of the study area

Forster is a magnificent natural saltwater inlet with expansive views of the sandy waterway and nearby sandy coastal beaches. The low long bridge crossing is a feature of the area and the general feel of the area is that of a quite tourist and retirement town with busy summer visitation and holiday activities. The site is located just 200 metres east of the water river inlet. The existing vegetated waterway to the south provides a greenspace buffer and will soften the build density of the development.

A feature of Forster is the general flat ground level associated with a water inlet and town centre, residential areas. The land type surrounding the Forster/Tuncurry township includes extensive saltwater mangroves, tidal waterways, and extensive bushland vegetation. This means that much of the distant surrounding area has limited viewer access from distant locations to the west.

A large multi storey retirement development has been recently constructed further south of the site, [approximately 600 metere south of this site - 6 storeys plus]. This is significant as this extends the visual apperance of the high rise developments away from beachfront main town centre to the south of the town centre south of this site. Additionally the land immediately adjoining the site to the south has been zoned for high rise development up to 30m.

03 the proposal

The existing site development under construction has been previously granted a approval. The project includes a mixed use development containing a range of uses including civic, community use, residential and tourist facilities. The approved building heights are 25.9m, 36.2m, 36 m, and 26-28.0m high.

The approved development is a significant large built form that is visible from various locations given the height of the approved development and the flat surrounding topography. The design incorporates three distinctly separate buildings and the elevations variously articulated, detailed and aligned to various angles, to assisit in visually breaking up the mass and to have a pleasing visually aesthetic for a built form.

Figure 5.0
Illustration of the approved development with the additional storey addition shown to Building A

The proposed revised approval application, the purpose of this assessment intents to increase the top floor height of Building A with a new storey increasing the finished height of the building at RL 29.1, a 3.2m height increase.

The proposed application to modify the approved consent includes several amendments and revisions **however this VIA assessment has been prepared to consider only the proposed additional storey for Building A incorporating three new penthouse suites, an increase of 3.2 metres over the approved height for Building A.** All other buildings [buildings B,C, D in the approved development [taller structures] are to remain as previously approved.

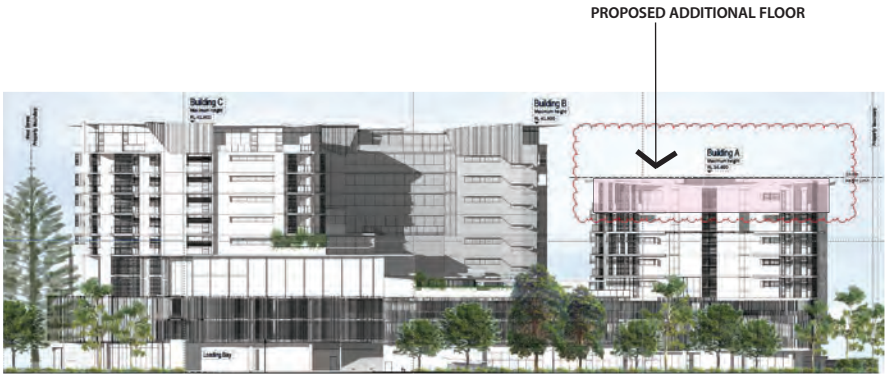

Figure 6.0
Southern Elevation showing the existing approved development, Buiding A on the RHS.
The proposed modification would add an additional single storey to the building [shown in pink].

04 viewpoint analysis

[Refer to separate worksheets].

This section of the scenic assessment considers the likely impact that the proposed additional floor level may have on the local visual environment. This has been done by identifying and selecting particular sites, referred to as viewpoints, site visit and determining what part of the development will visible from those viewpoints and the visual impact of that development proposal. The evaluation is based on the criteria detailed in the Appendices of this report.

The viewpoints, as shown on Figure 7.0 were selected on the basis of where the development would appear to be most prominent either based on degree of exposure or the number of people likely to be affected. Sites were further selected on the basis of significant features, significant viewpoints and significant ridgelines as nominated in the scenic quality guidelines. Generally, most consideration was given to how the proposed development would appear from urban and recreational areas around the town centre. Distant vantage points have been reviewed to assess the accumulative impact of the proposed modification to the approved development in the context of the existing visual condition and across the bridge from Tuncurry to the north.

Western areas of the site have been limited in the analysis as these are provide distant viewer access, however sitre photographs have been taken to visually assess the likely visual appearance from these locations. Viewer access from water based viewing locations is limited to recreational boats that can access these locations. The images were taken using a digital SLR camera with a focal length of 42mm approximating a standard 50mm for a conventional 35mm camera and equivalent to the human eye. The attached landscape format viewpoint worksheets provide asessment data for each viewpoint. The assessment criteria provides an objective analysis of the visual impacts.

06 viewpoint data sheets

06.1. VIEWPOINT ANALYSIS

This section of the VIA considers the likely impact that the proposed development may have on the local visual environment. This is achieved by selecting particular locations, referred to as viewpoints, conducting inspections and determining how the development will appear from these locations. Where accessible, areas within the study locality were visited to gain an appreciation of views and sight lines back to the subject site. This VIA assesses the existing visual amenity of the site and resultant visual impact of the proposed development.

Landscape assessment is concerned with changes to the physical landscape in terms of features/ elements that may give rise to changes in character. Visual appraisal is concerned with the changes that arise in the composition of available views as a result of changes to the landscape, people's responses to the changes and to the overall effects on visual amenity. Changes may result in adverse (negative) or beneficial (positive) effects.

The nature of landscape and visual assessment requires both objective analysis and subjective professional judgement. Accordingly, the following assessment is based on the best practice guidance listed above, information and data analysis techniques, uses subjective professional judgement.

Photography for the photomontages was undertaken by Terras Landscape Architects using a Nikon Coolpix compact digital camera set at 50mm focal length. Some of the viewpoints include a panoramic view to assist in appreciation of the location.

The commecement of construction provides a useful visual reference for thios assessment as a yellow tower crane is on sire and provides a good visual marker.

06.2. VISUAL QUALITY

The visual quality of an area is essentially an assessment of how viewers may respond to designated scenery. Scenes of high visual quality are those that are valued by a community for the enjoyment and improved amenity that they can create. Conversely, scenes of low visual quality are of little scenic value to the community with a preference that they be changed and improved, often through the introduction of landscape treatments (e.g. screen planting).

As visual quality relates to aesthetics, its assessment tries to anticipate subjective responses. There is evidence to suggest that certain landscapes are continually preferred over others with preferences related to the presence or absence of certain elements.

The rating of visual quality of this study has been based on the following generally accepted conclusions arising from scientific research (DOP, 1988).

- Visual quality increases as relative relief and topographic ruggedness increases.
- Visual quality increases as vegetation pattern variations increase.
- Visual quality increases due to the presence of natural and/or agricultural landscapes.
- Visual quality increases owing to the presence of waterforms (without becoming common) and related to water quality and associated activity.
- Visual quality increases with increases in land use compatibility.

VISUAL QUALITY REFERENCE TABLE			
Element	Low	Medium	High
Landform/Relief			
Contrast	Flat terrain dominant. Ridgelines not often seen.	Undulating terrain dominant. Little contrast or ruggedness. Ridgelines prominent in only half or less of landscape unit.	High hills in foreground and middleground. Presence of cliffs, rocks and other geological features. High relief (e.g. steep slopes rising from water or plain). Ridgelines prominent in most of landscape unit.
Vegetation			
Diversity and Changing Patterns	One or two vegetation types present in foreground. Uniformity along skyline.	Patterning in only one or two areas. 3 or 4 vegetation types in foreground. Few emergent or feature trees.	High degree of patterning in vegetation. 4 or more distinct vegetation types. Emergent trees prominent and distinctive to region. Stands of specimen or accent vegetation (e.g. palms, pines, etc).
Naturalness			
Correct Balance	Dominance of development within many parts of a landscape unit.	Some evidence of development, but not dominant. Traditional built character. Development in background and / or partially concealed.	Absence of development or minimal disturbance within landscape unit. Presence of parkland or other open space including beach, lakeside, etc.
Water			
Presence, Extent & Character	Little or no view of water. Water in background without prominence. Presence of polluted water or stagnant water.	Moderate extent of water. Presence of calm water. No islands, channels meandering water. Intermittent streams, lakes, rivers, etc.	Dominance of water in foreground and middleground. Presence of flowing water, turbulence and permanent water. Intricate shapes and river edges.
Development			
Form & Identity	Presence of commercial and industrial structures. Presence of large scale development (e.g.: mining, infrastructure, etc). Residential development.	Presence of established residential development. Small scale industrial etc in middle ground. Presence of sports and recreation facilities.	Presence of rural structures (e.g. farm buildings, fences, etc). Heritage buildings and other structures apparent. Isolated domestic scale structures.

06.3. VIEWER ACCESS

This considers the relative number and type of viewers, the viewer distance, the viewing duration and view context. The rationale is that if the number of people who would potentially see portions of the proposal is high, then the visual impact would be medium-high, compared to when a large number of people would have the same view.

06.4. VISUAL SENSITIVITY

This is the estimate of the significance that a change will have on a landscape and to those viewing it. For example, a significant change that is not frequently seen may result in a low visual sensitivity although its impact on a landscape may be high.

The assessment of visual sensitivity is based on a number of variables such as: the number of people affected; viewer location including distance from the source; the surrounding land use and degree of change. Variables may also include viewer position, i.e. inferior, where the viewer's station is below the horizontal axis as characterised by looking up (least preferred), neutral, where the viewer sight line is generally along the horizontal axis, and, superior, where the viewer sight line is above the horizontal axis as characterised by looking down to an object (most preferred). Generally the following principles apply:

- Visual sensitivity decreases as the viewer distance increases. This occurs as changes to the scenic environment must be assessed over a broader viewshed which is comprised of a greater number of competing elements.

- Visual sensitivity decreases as the viewing time decreases.

- Visual sensitivity can also be related to viewer activity (e.g. a person viewing an affected site while engaged in recreational activities will be more strongly affected by change than someone passing a scene in a car travelling.

VISUAL SENSITIVITY TABLE

	Distance Zones		
Land Use	Foreground (0-1km)	Middleground (1-6km)	Background (>6km)
Residential: Rural or Urban*	High Sensitivity	High Sensitivity	Moderate Sensitivity
Tourist or Passive Recreation*	High Sensitivity	High Sensitivity	Moderate Sensitivity
Major Travel Corridors	Moderate Sensitivity	Moderate Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity
Tourist Roads	High Sensitivity	Moderate Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity
Minor Roads*	Moderate Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity
Agricultural Areas	Moderate Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity
Industrial Areas*	Low Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity

06.5. VISUAL EFFECT

Visual effect is the interaction between a proposal and the existing visual environment. It is often expressed as the level of visual contrast of the proposal against its setting or background in which it is viewed.

This is particularly important should any proposed development extend above the skyline unless, once again, there are particular circumstances that may influence viewer perception and/or visual impact.

Low visual effect occurs when a proposal blends in with its existing viewed landscape due to a high level of integration of one or several of the following: form, shape, pattern, line, texture or colour. It can also result from the use of effective screening often using a combination of landform and landscaping.

Moderate visual effect results where a proposal noticeably contrasts with its viewed landscape, however, there has been some degree of integration (e.g. good siting principles employed, retention of significant existing vegetation, provision of screen landscaping, careful colour selection and/or appropriately scaled development.)

High visual effect results when a proposal presents itself with high visual contrast to its viewed landscape with little or no integration and/or screening.

It should be noted that a high visual effect does not necessarily equate with a reduction in scenic quality. It is the combination of both visual sensitivity and visual effect that results in visual impact.

The following table illustrates how visual effect and visual sensitivity levels combine to produce varying degrees of visual impact.

06.6. VISUAL IMPACT

Visual impact is the assessment of changes in the appearance of the landscape as the result of some intervention typically man-induced, to the visual quality of an area having regard to visual sensitivity and visual effect and the other attributes that these elements embody as discussed above.

Visual impact may be positive (i.e. beneficial or an improvement) or negative (i.e. adverse or a detraction). When visual impacts are negative, the loss of visual quality needs to be determined and when they are found to be undesirable or unacceptable, then mitigation measures need to be formulated with the aim of reducing the impact to within, at least acceptable limits.

The following table illustrates how visual effect and visual sensitivity levels combine to produce varying degrees of visual impact. The project assessment summary is marked in red.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER & VISUAL IMPACT GRADING MATRIX

		Visual Effect Levels			
		High	Moderate	Low	Negligible
Visual Sensitivity Levels	High	High Impact	High Impact	Moderate Impact	Negligible Impact
	Moderate	High Impact	Moderate Impact	Low Impact	Negligible Impact
	Low	Moderate Impact	Low Impact	Low Impact	Negligible Impact
	Negligible	Negligible Impact	Negligible Impact	Negligible Impact	Negligible Impact

07 impact assessment

Any development will result in a modification of the landscape character. It is acknowledged that this occurs, the scenic management objectives provide guidelines to manage development.

The proposed amendments propose an additional floor to building A as part of a group of buildings of a consistent design character. The proposal of the new floor raises the overall height of the building slighty, around 3.0m. The development maintains the height of the other three buildings.

Using the above assessment criteria provides an assessment methodology to determine scenic value and the chnages to that scenic value. The worksheets at the end of this report provide an assessment from the various vantage points identified around the local area. The assessment from the worksheets is as follows:

VIEWER ACCESS: **MEDIUM-HIGH**
[Can be seen by many people but often from a distance or adjoining streetscape form and trees partially screen views to the site.]
VISUAL QUALITY: **LOW**
[The existing development of adjoining high rise has significant impact on the local character as a modified built environment].
VISUAL SENSITIVITY: **LOW**
[Once built the building is consistent with the existing town centre character with scattered high rise residential and will not have a significant change to the charatcer of the area. The additional fllor level will not change the visual sensitivity.]
VISUAL IMPACT: **LOW**
Summary of the above criteria - see worksheets viewpoints.

08 conclusions

This visual assessment has been prepared to adress the lilely visual impact for a modification to the approved DA for the site to add an additional floor level to Building A only.

The assessment therefore considers that the the approved high rise building for the site will have a significant change to the local visual character once that building is constructed and that this additional floor is sonsidered in light of the approved proposal.

The approved high rise development for 34-36 West Street Forster is located close to the the main town centre area where a number of existing high rise residential buildings have been previously built and are clearly visible from many locations within and outside of the town centre. These existing high rise buildings are approximatley 10-11 storeys high and establish the local character. Site photographs from areas surrounding the site from public vantage points indicate the existing visual charatcer for this landscape unit.

The proposed additional storey to building A will be perceived as a minimal visual change to the approved development. This is due to the fact that:

- The proposed additional floor on the existing approved high rise building will be an extension of the existing building form and unlikely to be perceived to be a significant visual change.
- The local character includes many high rise buildings, this is consistent with the local town centre visual character.

- The approved development of building B and C are higher than this building and therefore the overall height of the development will appear to remain unchanged,
- The approved development of building B and C are higher than this building and therefore will screen the views of proposed new floor to building A from several surrounding locations to the south and to the west.
- The adjoining land zoned to the east of the site has a permissible height limit of 30 meters and therefore will likely be developed, this would provide additional screening of views to the approved development and further add to the amount of high rise development in the vicinity.
- The rise in height for building A will have minimal visual change from dIstant views from the eastern location as the backdrop for buildings B and C is higher than the proposed building A height increase.
- Many vantage points are seen in a context of surrounding and nearby high rise development establishing the visual character.

09 references

09.1. Publications and Reports

Clouston Lake Macquarie Recreation and Open Space Plan: Scenic Quality Plan [Draft], prepared for Lake Macquarie City Council, August 1997.

Coastal Council Coastal Design Guidelines for NSW, NSW Coastal Council, 2003

EDAW (Australia) Pty Ltd "Section 12, Visual Assessment", The Mount Arthur North Coal Project: Environmental Impact Statement, URS Australia Pty Ltd, prepared for Coal Operations Australia Limited, 2000

LMC2 Consulting Lake Macquarie City Council Scenic Quality Guidelines, Lake Macquarie City Council, September 2003

Williamson D. "Scenic Perceptions of Australian Landscapes", Landscape Australia, Vol 2, pp 94-100, 1978.

10 appendix 1 - viewpoint worksheets

10

Viewing point across the bay at Tuncurry

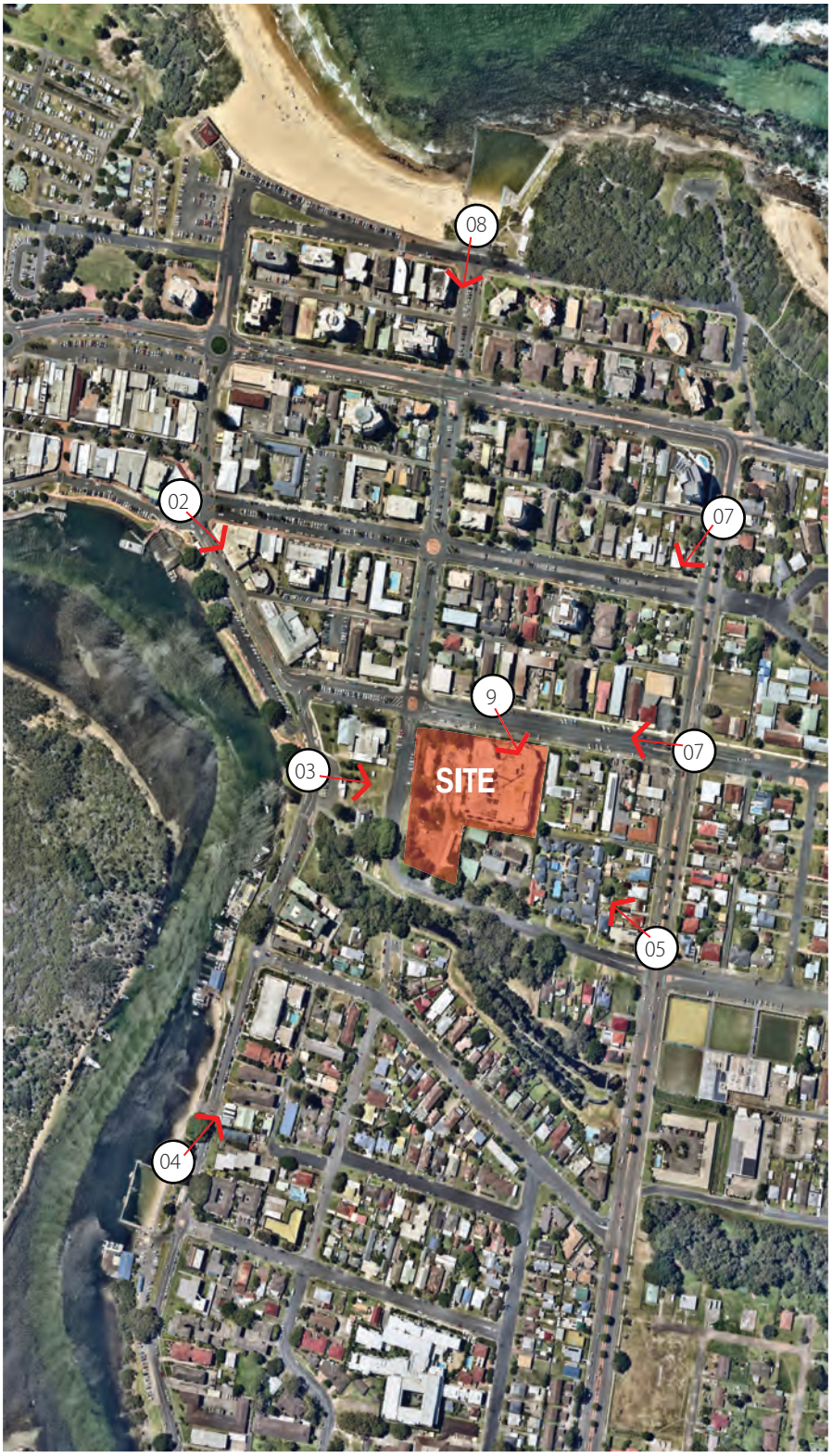

Figure 7.0
Viewpoint locations

viewpoint 4

Viewpoint 4					
Location	Stitched panorama view from the intersection of Bruce and Little street along the waters edge south of the site. The close proximity of buildings and trees from along this road location blocks any significant views to the site.	Visual Evaluation Criteria			
			LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
		Viewer Position	INFERIOR	NEUTRAL	SUPERIOR
		Visual Quality			
		Viewer Access			
		Visual Sensitivity			
Distance to The Site	300m to nearest point on the western boundary.	Visual Effect			

APPROVED DEVELOPMENT HERE

viewpoint 5

Viewpoint 5

Location	Intersection of Helen and MacIntosh St Forster looking northwest The yellow crane locates the site. The top of the approved building will be visible above the close foreground proximity buildings. Contextually the approved development forms part of the local build character and is consistent with the other high rise buildings visible and forming part of the skyline. The additional of the proposed additional floor level would have minimal change to this viewpoint visual quality.
Distance to The Site	South east of the site. 400m to nearest point on the south eastern boundary.

Visual Evaluation Criteria	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
Viewer Position	INFERIOR	NEUTRAL	SUPERIOR
Visual Quality			
Viewer Access			
Visual Sensitivity			
Visual Effect			

viewpoint 6

Viewpoint 6

Location	View from along MacIntosh Street looking west. Distant location of the approved development marked by the tower crane. Note other existing high rise building forms that have an established impact on the setting.
Distance to The Site	200m to nearest point on the north eastern corner boundary.

Visual Evaluation Criteria			
	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
Viewer Position	INFERIOR	NEUTRAL	SUPERIOR
Visual Quality	■		
Viewer Access		■	
Visual Sensitivity	■		
Visual Effect	■		

APPROVED DEVELOPMENT HERE

viewpoint 7

Viewpoint 7

Location	Stitched panorama view from east of the site along Lake Street looking west along the road to the site. The yellow tower crane locates the site in context. This is a distant viewpoint from a busy road used by the public. Whilst the tower crane is significant in the height of the approved development, again contextually, the development will not have a significant detrimental visual impact of the scenic value of the area as the character of the town with the scattered high rise has been established. The proposed additional floor level for building A will be a minor visual change although it will be visible from this location..
Distance to The Site	100m to nearest point on the eastern boundary.

Visual Evaluation Criteria			
	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
Viewer Position	INFERIOR	NEUTRAL	SUPERIOR
Visual Quality			
Viewer Access			
Visual Sensitivity			
Visual Effect			

viewpoint 8

Viewpoint 8					
Location	View looking south from the beach front at West Street. The yellow tower crane is visible in the distance behind the Norfolk Island trees. The approved development will be seen as a new high rise building in the background and forms part of the existing high rise character of the town centre. The additional floor level proposal for building A will seen, but again, given the existing approved development, the contextual setting, existing high rise and a distant setting the visual impact of the proposed new storey has minimal impact of visual quality, sensitivity and effect.	Visual Evaluation Criteria			
			LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
		Viewer Position	INFERIOR	NEUTRAL	SUPERIOR
		Visual Quality			
		Viewer Access			
		Visual Sensitivity			
Distance to The Site	400m to nearest point on the site norther boundary.	Visual Effect			

Viewpoint 9

Location	View of the approved development site viewed from immediately in front of the site in Lake Street The photo shows the approved development under construction, building A tower will be extended above the far section of the site above the curved built form. The proposed additional floor level to building A will appear slightly higher when viewed from this location. The increase in floor height will be visible but will have a minimal increase in visual impact and visual quality. The adjoining buildings B,C and D are all taller than the proposed building A proposal.
Distance to The Site	20m to nearest point on the northern boundary.

Visual Evaluation Criteria			
	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
Viewer Position	INFERIOR	NEUTRAL	SUPERIOR
Visual Quality	■		
Viewer Access			■
Visual Sensitivity	■		
Visual Effect	■		

existing proposed comparison

These images indicate the general massing apperance of the approved development [top image] and the proposed additional floor to building A [lower image].

What is apparent is the difficulty in identifying the changes to the visual appearance of the development with the additional floor level. The general mass, style and bulk of the building remains the same.

The rezoned height limit of 30m for the land to the east of the site [behind building A on the left, will potentially likely screen views of building further.

The basis of the visual assessment is to determine the visual impoact based on the visual setting and the visual quality and the visual sensitivity. We summarise as below.

VIEWER ACCESS: **MEDIUM-HIGH**
[Can be seen by many people but often from a distance or adjoining streetscape form and trees partially screen views to the site.]
VISUAL QUALITY: **LOW**
[The existing development of adjoining high rise has significant impact on the local character as a modified built environment].
VISUAL SENSITIVITY: **LOW**
[Once built the building is consistent with the existing town centre character with scattered high rise residential and will not have a significant change to the charatcer of the area. The additional fllor level will not change the visual sensitivity.]
VISUAL IMPACT: **LOW**
Summary of the above criteria - see worksheets viewpoints.

viewpoint 10

Viewpoint 10					
Location	View from across the waterway on the northern side of the bay. The tower crane-site location is just visible on the right. Existing built high rise and the approved development for part of a consistent visual effect of high rise built form. From this western location	Visual Evaluation Criteria			
			LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
		Viewer Position	INFERIOR	NEUTRAL	SUPERIOR
		Visual Quality	■		
		Viewer Access			■
		Visual Sensitivity	■		
Distance to The Site	1500m to nearest point on the western boundary.	Visual Effect	■		