

DESIGN EXCELLENCE PEER REVIEW

Bayside Local Government Area

Project: 7-21 Chalmers Crescent, Mascot Concept DA Review

Date: 24/11/2024

To: The Chair, Sydney Eastern City Planning Panel

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1. Introduction

This peer review assesses the Concept Development Application for a commercial development comprising five (5) x eight (8)-storey towers above a four (4)-level split-parking podium across the following land parcels: 7–9 Chalmers Crescent, 14–16 Chalmers Crescent, 19–21 Chalmers Crescent, *and* Lot 1 DP 1260420, Mascot.

The review is prepared to support the deliberations of the Sydney Eastern City Planning Panel, following the Panel’s resolution of 27 September 2024 to defer determination pending further information.

Scope of Review includes the following actions:

- Reviewed the briefing material and updated design prepared by Crone Architects.
 - Identified key urban design, built form and public-domain factors influencing design excellence.
 - Held meetings and discussions with Bayside Council officers and the applicant’s team to understand design intent and resolve outstanding issues.
 - Confirmed modifications to the reference scheme and identified matters suitable for conditioning as part of any consent.
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2. Context and Key Considerations

The site has a set of contextual characteristics that differentiate it from many other projects in the Bayside LGA that are typically subject to design excellence provisions (which are predominantly high-density residential). In contrast, the subject site sits within an established and emerging commercial/light industrial precinct close to Sydney Airport.

Key contextual considerations with implications for the design response include:

- **Strategic commercial location:** Proximity to the airport, Mascot Station, and significant employment uses.

- **Opportunity** to accommodate a substantial commercial office workforce on a large, consolidated site within a single integrated development.
- **Absence of residential neighbours:** Supports 24-hour commercial operations ; *and* minimises sensitivity to built-form scale and acoustic impacts.
- **Relatively discreet setting** (without through-running traffic): Well-suited to specialised or secure commercial uses requiring proximity yet separation from public-facing streets.
- **Surrounding land use pattern:** Adjacency to large airport-related functions, including Qantas Catering, serviced by a privately controlled road network and bridge connections to the airport.

Overall, the site is well-placed to support significant employment floor space, *and* given land scarcity and strategic value, the design excellence considerations should be appropriate to the setting.

3. Assumptions and Commentary

Several assumptions have guided both the concept design and this review:

- High water table effectively precludes basement parking, necessitating an above-ground podium.
- A single, consolidated car-parking plate minimises ramping, maximises efficiency and allows future design flexibility.
- The continuous podium restricts open-to-sky mid-block links; however, site edges offer opportunities for linkages.
- The surrounding employment-intensive land uses support a reduced car-parking rate, which is desirable for sustainability reasons (reduced embodied carbon, reduced transport emissions) and helps limit podium bulk.
- The site's location minimises risks associated with off-site parking overflow—there are no adjoining residential streets with unrestricted parking, and the development is close to rail, has extensive EOT facilities, and sits within a large residential catchment for nearby workers.

4. Design Review Issues and Response

Broadly, the proposal is appropriate and capable of achieving design excellence. The main characteristics in this regard are the multiple above-podium towers, which create relatively small commercial plate sizes; these tend to improve the amenity of the spaces since more of the space would have access to daylight and outlook. The podium level creates a flexible, high-amenity zone with the potential for a distinctive and attractive work environment. Furthermore, the extensive use of landscape forms an important contribution to the potential excellence of the development.

The analysis indicates that the key urban design issues in the original Concept DA can be distilled into two interrelated themes:

4.1 Activation

Street Activation: Relative to the original DA design, revisions to the street activation diagram significantly improve the proportion of active frontage. While some of the activation relies on end-of-trip (EOT) facilities, this is appropriate given the commercial use and location. It avoids introducing retail uses that may be unviable. The ground-floor layout and EOT spaces also retain flexibility and could be repurposed if a different mix of uses is required over time.

Podium Activation: The reference design adopts a deliberate strategy to create an activated podium level. This effectively shifts some activity that may otherwise be on the ground floor to a consolidated level above ground. On the condition that the ground level and street activation are treated with care, this is a rational design response given:

- The ground level would be activated by lobbies, footpaths, high-quality landscaping, and EOT facilities. These uses form a “crust” of active uses with car parking and servicing behind. The zoning limits land uses, such as retail shops, that would ordinarily serve as street activation.
- The podium contains appropriate active uses, such as shared workspaces, breakout areas and informal meeting spaces. This elevated area is desirable for outdoor spaces with good light and air, in a position that overlooks the street and can still contribute to a lively street wall.
- The podium activation zone is configured to provide continuous linkage along the frontage of the site and allows for possible future podium-level links to neighbouring sites.

3.2 Urban Linkages

The Chalmers Crescent frontage is at the head of a cul-de-sac. Besides this frontage, the site is bounded on all sides by private land holdings. The site is therefore ‘landlocked’ with respect to onward connections. There is no formally adopted precinct plan or development control plan showing where urban connections should extend.

Three potential connections beyond the site are to the north, east and south. The relative importance and viability of these depend on the value of the link and the difficulty or probability of it being achieved.

EAST:

The connection eastward to Bourke Street would require crossing a neighbouring site to a major traffic route, and an open-to-sky link would mean bifurcating the podium. The limited utility and difficulty of achieving this link place it beyond practicality.

SOUTH:

South of the site is the large, consolidated Qantas Catering Site (CCS), beyond which are the freight train line and the Qantas Drive motorway. This connection also has limited utility. However, a scenario where the subject site could incorporate an internal connection to the CCS is conceivable as part of a redevelopment of CCS and/or 1–5 Chalmers Crescent and could be accommodated without significant impediment to the development on the subject site. Therefore, the approval should be ‘future-proofed’ with the addition of a 4 m setback along the common boundary with 1–5 Chalmers Crescent.

NORTH:

The most important of these is a potential future pedestrian link northwards to Coward Street and the train station. Such a link would reduce the walking distance to the station by hundreds of metres. The link would require access across one or two sites to the north, and therefore require work beyond the site. Advice from the applicant's architects indicates that, with the existing conditions on the ground and without the need for level changes or demolition, no direct access can be created. However, a 'dogleg' path could be created that makes the connection. This link runs along the western boundary of the subject site from Chalmers Crescent to the north-western corner. From there, it continues west (inside 241 Coward Street), turning north and running to Coward Street inside 251 Coward Street.

While this concept has shortcomings relating to wayfinding and CEPTED due to the dogleg path and will require the concurrence of two other properties, it has a very high value for pedestrian access and can apparently be achieved without demolition. It would effectively give additional frontage to the two other properties and would benefit all the nearby Chalmers Crescent properties by providing more direct pedestrian access to the station. Numbers 10 and 12 Chalmers Crescent would particularly benefit because they would have direct access to the link.

Regarding the activation of the possible future pedestrian link to Coward Street and the train station along the boundary with 12 Chalmers Crescent: whereas the previous scheme for the subject site left only a narrow setback and presented this potential link with a 'dead edge', the reference scheme has been modified to enlarge the setback to 12 metres and reconfigure the plan to allow for activation of the edge.

Conclusion

Based on the revised materials prepared since the first round of the development application, combined with the proposed modifications set out above, which will be captured in the conditions of consent, I am satisfied that the concept design is capable of achieving design excellence.



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