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URBIS

VISUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS OAKHILL COLLEGE – INNOVATION HUB

Prepared for
OAKHILL COLLEGE
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1. PURPOSE OF ADVICE

This advice has been prepared in response to concerns raised by the Sydney North Planning Panel and included in the Notice of Deferral dated 17th March 2021. Item 5 refers to the need for:

“a visual impact analysis of the proposed development from surrounding streets including from residential streets”.

To analyse the extent of visual effects (how much of the built form is potentially visible from Armidale Crescent) and the importance or significance of the visual effects, Urbis has reviewed two views of the built form proposed, as prepared by BVN Architects.

2. PROJECT UNDERSTANDING AND BACKGROUND

The built form proposed is part of a Development Application for Oak Hill College submitted to Hornsby Shire Council as the consent authority.

The building is known as the 'Innovation Hub' and is to be located close to the north-eastern boundary of the subject site. This part of the subject site is characterised by steep topography which falls in elevation broadly from west to east. Therefore, residential development in Armidale Crescent springs is significantly lower in elevation compared to the ground floor of the innovation hub and the three-storeys of built form rise above it.

Visually the building will be approximately equivalent to the height of a three-storey residential building above a partially excavated ground level which will house storage and workshops.

The building includes two separate masses that are arranged in an 'L' shape floorplate, where upright of the 'L' is a single level building which sits parallel and adjacent to the rear of dwellings located at 13, 11, 9, 7, and 5 Armidale Crescent.

The 'foot' of the 'L' shape is set back 9m from the site boundary and perpendicular to it. It includes three storeys within its rectangular floorplate where its short end is 24 linear metres and orientated to the north-east where it approximately aligns with the dwelling at 13 Armidale Crescent.

The short edge of the higher three-storey built form will be the most visible part of the proposed development in views from the east and south-east end.

3. VIEWS ANALYSIS

3.1. BACKGROUND

The view locations have been selected by BVN architects as directed by Urbis planning. The view places provide representative close public domain views that are likely to be available. They demonstrate that majority of potential views towards the proposed development would be partial views, above or between foreground-built forms via side setbacks.

BVN architects have prepared two images as pictured in the below sections, to help inform our analysis of potential visual impacts from close public domain locations. They are located via the side set back between 11 and 13 Armidale Crescent and between dwellings at 5 and 7 Armidale Crescent close to the school sites rear carpark entry.

BVN architects confirm that the proposed 3D architectural model has been located and aligned with visible built features that are present in the base photographs. The outline of the roof forms of dwellings 5, 7 and 9 Armidale Crescent have been traced, as shown by the black outline. This shows the relationship of the visible built forms (actual dwellings) to those predicted by the architectural model in Revit shown as a grey block. The model of the proposed development is linked to the model of the dwellings so that its location can be cross-checked for accuracy.

The model of the proposed development appears to closely relate to the visible built forms in each view, so that the photomontages can be relied upon as showing the indicative height and massing of the Innovation Hub building.

3.2. PRINCIPLES FOR ANALYSIS OF VISUAL IMPACTS

This is a 'high-level' analysis of the effects of the proposed development on two views. This information should not be considered as a visual impact assessment (VIA) but rather a summary of the likely visual impacts based on the information that is currently available.

To assist the Panel's understanding of assessing visual impacts we provide the following information.

3.3. VISUAL EFFECTS

The extent of the visual effects is the baseline assessment against which to judge the visual impacts. Whether a visual effect is an impact of potential significance cannot be equated directly to the extent of the visual effect. For example, a high visual effect can be quite acceptable, whereas a small one can be unacceptable. Therefore, it is necessary to give a weighting to the assessed levels of effects to arrive at an overall assessment of the visual impact.

Some factors are more relevant than others depending on the regulatory context of the subject site and proposed development, for example: compliance with controls that are relevant to visual impacts and view loss (height and setbacks), land-use zone objectives, DCP aims, heritage significance and the surrounding visual context including existing visual character, scenic quality, view composition are some of the relevant factors to be considered. For this high-level analysis, the technical town planning merits of the proposal have been left to others with the appropriate level of expertise.

In our opinion a robust VIA does not equate the level or extent of visual effects directly to a final rating of visual impacts. Our approach is to assess extent of visual effects of the proposal for view places (compared to the existing situation) and then to assess the level of impact, if any, by giving differential weighting to impact criteria.

In this regard the relative importance of impacts is distinguished from the size of the effect.

In our opinion the most relevant weighting impact criteria are addressed in the following sections.

3.3.1. Compatibility with the existing visual environment

Visual Compatibility is not a measure of whether the proposal can be seen or distinguished from its surroundings. It refers to whether the proposal can be constructed and utilised without the intrinsic scenic character of the locality being unacceptably changed. It assumes that there is a moderate to high visibility of the project to some viewing places. It further assumes that novel elements which presently do not exist in the

immediate context can be perceived as visually compatible with that context, provided they do not result in loss of or excessive modification to the visual character of the locality.

3.3.2. Sensitivity of the view place

Sensitivity relates to the importance of a view or view place in the public domain. View place sensitivity means a measure of the public interest in the view. The public interest is considered to be reflected by the relative number of viewers likely to experience the view from a publicly available location. Places from which there would be close or middle-distance views available to large numbers of viewers from public places such as main roads. Or large or smaller numbers of viewers over a sustained period of viewing time in places such as reserves, beaches and walking tracks, are considered sensitive viewing places.

3.3.3. Physical Absorption Capacity

Physical Absorption Capacity (PAC) means the extent to which the existing visual environment can reduce or eliminate the perception of the visibility of the proposed redevelopment.

PAC includes the ability of existing elements present in the view or the landscape to physically hide, screen or disguise the proposal. This includes the capacity for proposed or existing vegetation to provide screening effects. It also includes the extent to which the scale and character, colours, materials and finishes of the proposal can blend with or reduce the contrast with others of similar character so the extent of built form proposed cannot easily be distinguished as a new feature in the visual environment.

Prominence is also an attribute with relevance to PAC. It is assumed in this assessment that higher PAC can only occur where there is low to moderate prominence of the proposal in the scene.

Low to moderate prominence means:

- **Low:** The proposal has either no visual effect on the landscape or the proposal is evident but is subordinate to other elements in the scene by virtue of its small scale, screening by intervening elements, difficulty of being identified or compatibility with existing elements.
- **Moderate:** The proposal is either evident or identifiable in the scene, but is less prominent, makes a smaller contribution to the overall scene, does not contrast substantially with other elements or is a substantial element, but is equivalent in prominence to other elements and landscape alterations in the scene.

Design and mitigation factors are also important to determining the PAC. Appropriate colours, materials, building forms, line, geometry, textures, scale, character and appearance of buildings and other structures are relevant to increasing PAC and decreasing prominence.

Other factors relevant to this assessment that affect the perception of visual effects are; view type (the nature of the composition that is; whether it is expansive, restricted, panoramic or a focal view), viewing period and viewing distance.

3.3.4. Viewing period

Viewing period in visual assessment means the influence on the visual effects of the proposal in relation to the time available for a viewer to experience the view. It is assumed that the longer the potential viewing period experienced either from fixed or moving viewing places such as dwellings, roads or the waterway, the higher the potential for a viewer to perceive the visual effects of the proposal. Repeated viewing period events, for example views repeatedly experienced from roads where people are travelling, are considered to increase perception of the visual effects of the proposal.

3.4. VIEWS ANALYSIS IMPACT

Figure 1 Views to the west, from Armidale Crescent



Picture 1 Existing View



Picture 2 Proposed View

Source: BVN Architects

3.4.1. Existing view

Figure 1 shows a typical vernacular suburban view from a local crescent which is accessed via a cul-de-sac. The curvilinear design of the carriageway is such that the potential view is limited to a short section of the road. The view is predominantly characterised by a foreground of two-storey residential development which is elevated above the road carriageway and limits potential distance of the view. The view composition does not appear to include any significant natural features, heritage items, areas of high scenic quality or unique items.

3.4.2. Proposed view

A minor amount of built form proposed is visible to the north-west in the mid-ground composition. In this upward view a narrow horizontal extent of the south-east corner of the upper floor is visible and will block some vegetation and open areas of sky.

3.4.3. Compatibility

The proposed development in this view is highly compatible with other built forms that are present in the foreground in terms of height, form and scale. The building is not dissimilar in size, form or character to other buildings on the site and are typical of those present on school campuses. The minor amount of additional height sought by the proposed development as described in the Clause 4.6 application does not block access to any scenic or unique features, with only minor disturbance to areas of sky.

3.4.4. Sensitivity

This view is from a local road which is accessed via a cul-de-sac and therefore is rated as being of low sensitivity. This is based on assumptions that this road is subject to a low level of public use and interest, compared to high-use main roads and public parks or reserves.

3.4.5. PAC

The visual absorption capacity in this view is High, given that majority of the built form proposed is permanently screened or blocked from view by intervening development.

3.4.6. Visual Prominence

The proposed building is of **Low** visual prominence in this view.

3.4.7. Viewing Period

Given the nature of the curvilinear roads, it is likely that views access will be constrained to a short section of the road corridor and from moving viewing situations. Further we note that from the pedestrian pathway located along the north side of the road, access to the view would be further constrained due to close proximity of existing dwellings. The limited viewing period provides a 'down weight' to the level of visual impact.

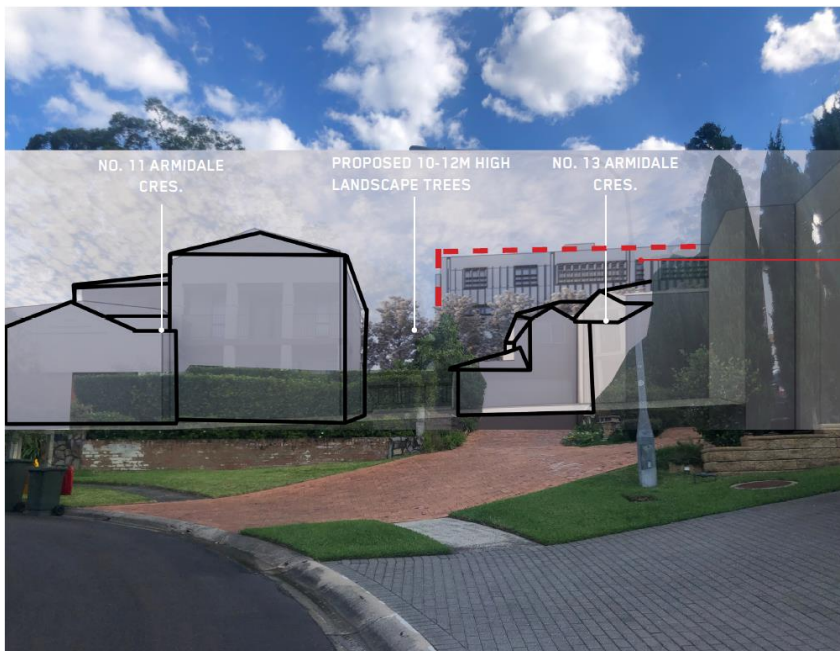
3.4.8. Visual Impact

The extent of visual effects of the proposed development is minor to negligible. The minor amount of built form introduced to the composition will not create any significant view loss or change to the composition. The intrinsic scenic character of the locality would not be unacceptably changed. The view is from a location of low sensitivity, where there is high PAC, low visual prominence, where views are likely to be short term and limited to a short section or isolated location of the road corridor. In this regard the overall visual impact is rated as low.

Figure 2 Views to the South, from Armidale Crescent



Picture 3 Existing View



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- BLACK OUTLINES DERIVED FROM VIEW 2 PHOTO
- NEIGHBOURING 3D BLOCK MODEL INFORMATION APPROXIMATED FROM SURVEY INFORMATION AND PHOTOS

Picture 4 Proposed View

Source: BVN

3.4.9. Existing view

This view is south from the north side of Armidale Crescent, via a wide setback between dwellings. It potentially represents a 'pedestrian' view, given that traffic would be oriented to the north at this location. The view is predominantly characterised by existing two-storey residential development and ornamental planting and does not appear to include any notable natural features, views to heritage items, areas of high scenic quality or unique items.

3.4.10. Proposed view

Part of the upper storeys of the proposal are visible and will introduce a novel element into the background composition where the upwards views will be silhouetted against the sky. A minor amount of the south-east corner of the upper floors is visible and will block some vegetation and open areas of sky.

We note that no screen planting is represented in this view which, once established will create some screening effects in relation to the built form proposed.

3.4.11. Compatibility

The minor amount of the proposed development that is visible in this view is not dissimilar to the form, character and height of other built forms present in the foreground composition. The building proposed is similar in form and character to other buildings on the school site that are visible in the wider visual context and typical of the built form expected to be present on a modern school campus. The minor amount of additional height sought by the proposed development as described in the Clause 4.6 application does not block access to any scenic or unique features and will block only areas of sky.

3.4.12. Sensitivity

This view is from a local road which is accessed via a cul-de-sac and therefore is rated as being of low sensitivity. This is based on assumptions that this road has a low level of public use and interest, compared to high-use main roads and public parks or reserves.

3.4.13. PAC

The visual absorption capacity in this view is moderate to high given the presence of foreground two-storey dwellings and would increase following the successful establishment of mitigative screen planting.

3.4.14. Visual Prominence

The proposed building is of Low visual prominence given that only a small amount of built form will be visible in the mid-ground composition.

3.4.15. Viewing Period

Given the nature of the curvilinear roads, it is likely that views access will be constrained to a short section of the road corridor and from moving viewing situations. Further we note that this view aligns with the western pedestrian path and that views from south bound vehicles would be more oblique and likely to be further constrained by the built form at 11 Armidale Crescent.

3.4.16. Visual Impact

The extent of visual effects of the proposed development is minor. The minor amount of built form introduced to the composition will not create any significant view loss or change to the composition. The intrinsic scenic character of the locality would not be unacceptably changed as a result of construction of the built form proposed. The view is from a location of low sensitivity, where there is high PAC, low visual prominence, where views are likely to be short term and limited to a short section or isolated location of the road corridor. In this regard the overall visual impact is rated as low.

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