



DA No:19/21

PAN: 61705

ADDRESS: 110-122 Walker Street North Sydney

PROPOSAL: Commercial building

DATE 9th November 2021

ATTENDANCE

***Chair* Anita Morandini**

***Panel Members* Professor Peter Webber, Peter St. Clair, Louise Pearson**

***Council staff* Stephen Beattie, Jim Davies**

PANEL REPORT

Introduction

The Panel with different members has viewed this matter on 2 previous occasions. This report reaffirms and supplements previous advice. The Panel has reviewed the amended scheme and notes a number of significant issues previously raised have not been satisfactorily addressed.

Principle 1: Context and local character

Current & future context

The proposed development is one of an emerging cluster of high-rise towers, sitting high on the south-facing hillside of North Sydney. Collectively the cluster of towers mark and define the locality of the North Sydney central business district as viewed from the broader context and Sydney Harbour.

The proposed development is likely to remain one of the tallest in North Sydney and will feature in the skyline rising above surrounding development. At street level, the scale of the development block will be formative in creating a cohesive, attractive and vibrant environment and public domain.

Currently, the proposed development does not satisfactorily enhance the public domain nor sufficiently respond to context in a manner commensurate with its location, visual prominence and scale.

Principal context and character elements which should be addressed are listed as follows:

- Walker Street ground level activation
- Little Spring street activation
- Tower setbacks above podium to respond to adjoining sites and to create a tower in the round
- Podium treatment distinguished from the tower form to create an appropriate scale at street level
- Through site link coordinated with southern neighbouring site



Recommendations are detailed below.

Principle 2: Built form, scale and public domain/urban design response

Height

The non-compliance with RL 260.00 height control by 10.3m is unjustified and is not supported.

The exceedance results in overshadowing to residential uses which would otherwise be unaffected by a compliant development. Although causing minor impact, the additional overshadowing would set an unfortunate precedent, noting the height control already permits very substantial increase on the site well above surrounding sites.

The height non-compliance further reduces sky view from the public domain, light to streets and laneway, and may exacerbate wind downwash setting a precedent and potential cumulative negative impact within the tower cluster.

Accommodating the stepped roof top feature within the height control would not compromise the architectural integrity of the tower.

Further, the roof feature presents as an extension of the primary facade treatment with a panel removed. The treatment is questionable as a “feature” as it is largely indistinguishable from the principal building facade.

Tower setbacks

Separation between the proposed and adjacent current and future tower forms is important to provide:

- light and air to the street and laneway
- outlook to building occupants
- definition of the building podium
- a tower in the round

The proposed development should provide appropriate setbacks to achieve the above and contribute to a layered visual effect of towers when viewed from a distance to avoid creating a “wall of towers”.

Recommended tower setbacks are as follows:

Walker Street:

The Walker Street setback marginally encroaches upon DCP required setbacks. There is no justification for this encroachment.

- The building including all structures, sun-shading devices and the like should be setback to comply with DCP required 5m weighted average.

Little Spring Street:

The building core with zero setback above podium results in an imposing 26 storey (approx. 95m) high sheer wall. The total scale of the wall impacts on the amenity of the residential apartments opposite, sky view and light to public domain and laneway.

- The tower setback should respect the DCP required 4m weighted average above podium. See podium height recommendations below.

Side setbacks

The tower above podium should be a setback a minimum of 6m from side boundaries to fulfill the objectives of the Draft DCP and provide appropriate building separation



commensurate to a tower of this scale and height.

Southern boundary:

The proposed tower facade is flush with the podium facade and looms around 205m above ground level of the pedestrian through site link.

- Tower setback above podium should be a minimum total 6m from the boundary, constituted of 3m for the through site link plus 3m setback from face of the podium facade.

Northern boundary:

- Tower setbacks above podium should be a minimum of 6m to fulfill the objectives of the Draft DCP.

Podium - Setbacks and Height

Walker Street

The podium height is stepped to work with the topography and references the street block context, approximately aligning with the tower undercroft of 88 Walker Street to the south and at the northern boundary stepped and setback with infill to transition to the 2 storey podium of 124 Walker Street.

The stepped podium height is generally supported, however, the height of northern portion which neighbors and faces 124 Walker Street for the full extent of northern boundary is not acceptable and should be reduced by at least one storey.

North side setback

The proposed 1.2m setback from Level 2 to top of podium should be retained for the full extent of the northern boundary to provide separation from 124 Walker Street windows. The two storey infill facade should be carefully detailed in form and materiality to address and meet the two storey podium of 124 Walker Street.

Little Spring Street

The expressed podium is legible only at the extreme corners of the site. The zero setback of the building core on Little Spring Street to height of 26 storeys (approx. 95m) is unacceptable.

The podium should be expressed to a height of around four storeys with tower setback above podium compliant with DCP to create a street wall of pedestrian scale and in context with neighboring recent developments.

Green Wall

The green wall concept is supported, providing amenity to Little Spring Street and outlook to neighboring building occupants. The viability of maintaining a green wall of such scale is questioned. See further comment Principle 5 – Landscape integration.

Spatial allocation for planting and maintenance

The proposed green wall has zero setback to the Little Spring Street boundary. Plant growth encroaches on the narrow 1.3m wide footpath and building maintenance equipment to access the planting will likely intrude on the public domain.

- Sufficient setback from the street, in the order of 1.5m should be provided to accommodate plant growth and maintenance equipment.

Pedestrian through-site link

The proposed through site link width may be satisfactory subject to:



- further set-back of southern tower facade above podium as recommended above
- confirmation of wind conditions and suitability of proposed ground level uses
- verification of spatial allowances for proposed uses at the activated frontages
- maximizing opening to the sky to provide natural light at ground level

Wind conditions

Current wind modelling indicates conditions would not provide for comfortable sitting or al fresco dining. Activation of the link relies upon generous openings to flanking ground floor retail.

The narrow canopies located over the three entrances to retail/commercial spaces provide some shelter however should not be relied upon to counter wind downdraft.

Wind studies presented with the SEE do not appear to account for the future development of 100 Walker Street and consequent impacts.

- Wind impact studies with future context must be undertaken to determine the most appropriate treatment of the through site link to ensure street level activation and pedestrian comfort.
- The through-site link should be open to the sky to provide as much light as possible to ground level.

Pedestrian traffic and equitable access

Once Victoria Cross Metro is operational the through-site link will be subject to significant pedestrian traffic.

Relative levels of the through-site link appear to be located approximately 1.2m below the footpath of Walker St RL 56.7, resulting in a ramping down to the link at RL.55.5m and poor interface with existing Walker Street footpath levels.

- A 24hr publicly accessible lift should be provided, contained within the building footprint, clearly visible and easily accessed from the link.
- Ground level gradients to the link and stairs should ensure ease of access in balance with interfacing with adjacent retail activated edges and existing footpath levels.
- Pedestrian traffic flow analysis should be provided to verify the width of the link is adequate to support future pedestrian traffic generated from the Metro.

Coordination with 100-102 Walker Street

Council advised this application and that recently lodged for 100-102 Walker have not provided a fully considered design for the upgraded link.

- Coordination with 100-102 Walker Street is essential, to ensure a unified and coherent solution between the two sites delivering the link
- Ownership of the link should either be transferred to Council, or a legally binding agreement put in place to ensure that Council will have control of its design and management in perpetuity.

Awnings in Walker Street

Awnings are essential and as proposed they are too narrow and far too high to provide good protection for pedestrians in inclement weather and should be redesigned to address these concerns. At the northern end the awning should be



connected to that on the adjacent site to ensure continuity of cover.

Public domain interface

There has been a significant change to the ground level/level 1 podium and public domain design from the December 2020 Design Report to the current Design Report Addendum dated August 2021. The earlier design provided far greater public interface and open area to Walker Street including terraced platforms, stairs and landscaping.

It is acknowledged the relocation of vehicle entry off Little Spring Street and ramp to the basement impacts podium levels, however an over reliance on discretionary features such as the green wall to create pedestrian scale, interest and detail is not supported.

- The ground floor and interface with Walker Street should be redesigned to maximise activation and landscape opportunities. See detailed recommendations under Principles 5 and 6.

Principle 3: Density

The FSR (noting there is no statutory standard) is about 29.6:1, significantly higher than buildings permitted previously in North Sydney.

The basic twin tower form has the potential to be modified to achieve an acceptable density and provide appropriate setbacks as recommended above.

Principle 4: Sustainability, building performance and adaptability

Energy efficiency initiatives

The faceted facade provides an adaptable system with capacity to respond to and manage solar heat loads although possibly more effective to the east and south facades and less effective to the north façade (higher altitude sun) and west facade (late summer afternoon from the south-west).

Subject to the extent of solar exposure and glazing specification/performance, some external sun-shading may be required to the north and west facades. Glazing should be as clear as possible and not result in a dark glazed tower.

Natural ventilation

Opportunities for naturally ventilated break out spaces in the tower and hybrid AC/natural ventilation to podium levels opening to streets should be considered.

Principle 5: Landscape Integration

Green Wall

Limited details have been provided regarding the proposed green walls to Walker and Little Spring Street.

The viability of maintaining scale of the Little Spring Street wall, 26 storeys (approx. 95m) in height with a width of 20m is questioned. Concerns are raised with regard to climatic conditions, exposed to potential high winds and tower down draft, western



summer sun and very limited winter sun. The extent of contiguous greening may be difficult to sustain in good health and at risk of resulting in patches of barren wall.

- The Panel cited the precedent of Central Park Broadway, noting the extensive greening is treated in a quilting of facade patches, balcony edge planters and is centrally managed.
- Consideration should be given to alternative strategies to achieve the extent of greening with the capacity to manage sections.
- Precedents should be provided demonstrating similarly scaled green walls and sustainability.

Planting to Walker Street

The planting enhancing Walker Street as presented in the previous December 2020 schemes has been reduced to green walls.

- Opportunities for increasing areas of planting should be reintroduced to Walker Street.

Principle 6: Building configuration, planning, and amenity

Configuration and planning

Submission of a typical floor plate tenancy fit out should be provided to demonstrate floor plate flexibility relative to column spacing, facade configuration and 7 elevators opening directly to the floor.

Core configuration

The proposed core configuration results in a blank wall 26 storeys in height extending approximately 70% of the site width inhibiting opportunities for the activation of Little Spring Street and visual permeability through the site.

Alternative core and dual stacked lobby and lift arrangements may assist in reducing the core and unlock ground floor levels with opportunities to create voids and spatial interest.

Options should be presented investigating alternative core and vertical transport arrangements.

Ground floor, pedestrian access and entries

Much of December 2020 scheme activating the ground floors and Walker Street frontage has not been successfully carried forward in the ground floor reconfiguration. The strategy of platforms presented in the December 2020 proposal could inform an approach to the interior lobby.

The 4m level change between Walker Street and Spring Street provides opportunity to create visual connectivity and spatial interest with sectional diagonal views through the lobby space.

At Walker Street the proposed ground floor levels relative to the footpath vary between minus 0.7m to plus 3.5m resulting in the interior of the main lobby disconnected from the street. Apart from the entry at the middle of the site there are no other entries to activate the Walker Street frontage.

- The ground floor should be reconfigured to create a finer grain interface with Walker Street. Ground floor levels should work more closely with the footpath



levels, providing direct access off the street and enabling viewing into the interior life of the lobby.

- Activation at street and laneway level should be improved.

Awnings

The fully glazed awning over the Walker Street footpath is located too high above street level and is too narrow at 1.2m to provide protection from rain and hot summer sunlight.

- The awing should be positioned one storey above street level, width increased and shading provided to provide adequate weather protection.

Rooftop garden

The rooftop garden is no longer intended as a 'public' benefit.

Pending further assessment, the garden potentially provides a very attractive amenity.

Further design development must address the very windy and exposed conditions and provide adequate screening and suitable shading.

Visual Privacy

The residential tower -Alexander Apartments - is located to the west of the site at 79-81 Berry St.

The advantages of the chevron facade system should be utilised to manage orientation and extent of glazing mitigating privacy impacts on the neighbouring residential apartments.

Shadow impacts

Compliance with the LEP height control is necessary to prevent additional shadow impacts on residential properties as raised under Principle 2.

Principle 7: Safety

Increased activation of Little Spring Street and Walker Street frontages, and functionality of spaces flanking the through site link is necessary to provide natural surveillance of the public domain.

Principle 8: Housing diversity and social interaction

Not applicable.

Principle 9: Architectural expression and materiality

The chevron facade, its materiality and potential to adapt to the various micro environmental site conditions is commended, however the following issues should be resolved.

Podium composition and scale

The facade composition of the podium lacks scale and contextual reference to the neighbouring site podiums. The continuation of tower facade expression taken through to the podium does not serve to mitigate the perceived mass of the tower.

The podium character should be reviewed to respond to the neighbouring context,



and form modulated to provide a finer grain base to the tower and pedestrian street scale.

For instance, greater architectural detailing could be provided and more masonry expression complemented by openings (such as openable windows and terraces) and planting incorporated to activate the streetscape.

Tower composition

The chevron facade treatment lends itself to multiple variables.

The tower facade composition should be refined to respond to the environmental performance needs of different facade orientations, building heights and neighbouring contexts.

Discontinuation of the chevron tower facade to the south is inconsistent in treating the building in the round and should be revisited.

Recommendations to Achieve Design Excellence

The Panel does not support the proposed development in its current form. An amended proposal should be prepared, satisfactorily addressing the identified issues, as recommended below:

1. Given the size of the site the proposal should achieve practical compliance with new DCP setbacks above podium, 6m to side and 5 weighted average to Walker street and 4m weighted average to Little Spring Street.
2. Green wall to Little Spring Street should be setback 1.5 metres and details of planting and maintenance provided.
3. Given the amount of uplift granted to the site by recent LEP amendments, the maximum building height including plant should be no greater than RL 260.
4. Podium to Walker Street was generally supported in principle. However its height needs to be lowered by one level for the northern component, and facade redesigned.
5. Though site link needs to be resolved with 100 Walker Street as part of this DA. A workable draft design is required which provides equitable access and opportunities for activation.
6. The panel has again reviewed vehicle access and confirms the Little Spring Street access is the most appropriate.
7. The ground floor levels should be reconfigured to increase activation, improve the street and laneway interfaces and maximise visual connectivity between Walker Street and Little Spring Street.
8. Consideration should be given to alternative core configurations possibly rotated to provide greater visual permeability through podium levels.
9. Podium facade should be resolved to better respond to context and provide pedestrian street scale and activation.
10. Tower facade composition should be further refined to be more responsive to surrounding building and environmental conditions.