

# MINUTES OF DESIGN EXCELLENCE PANEL MEETING

## Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021

### DEP PANEL MEMBERS:

Alf Lester	Chairperson	Architect/Urban Designer	LFA
Lucinda Varley	Panel Member	Landscape Architect	Play By Design
Sam Crawford	Panel Member	Architect	Sam Crawford Architects
Brendan Randles	Panel Member	Architect/Urban Designer	Brendan Randles Architect

### APPLICANT REPRESENTATIVES:

Colin Rockliff	Greaton
Helena Miller	MG Planning
Georgia Wilson	Koichi Takada Architects
Andrew Chung	Koichi Takada Architects
Sacha Coles	Aspect Studios
Effy Ge	Aspect Studios

### COUNCIL STAFF:

Mark Brisby	Executive Manager
Rajiv Shankar	Manager Development Assessment
Greg Samardzic	Senior Town Planner
Lara Fusco	Strategic Planner
Angela Panich	Panel Secretary

### APOLOGIES:

NIL

### ITEM DETAILS:

Application Reference Number: Pre-DA

Property Address: 24-34 Berry Road, 23-31 Holdsworth Avenue and 42-46 River Road, St Leonards

Council's Planning Officer: Greg Samardzic

Owner: Greaton St Leonards Holdings Pty Ltd

Applicant: MG Planning

Proposal: Construction and use of four (4) stepped residential flat buildings ranging in height from 4 to 10 storeys. The development consists of:

- A total of 216 residential apartments
- Three-four (3-4) levels of basement carparking with provision for 378 car parking spaces, 30 motorcycle spaces, four (4) car wash bays, storage and bicycle parking
- Vehicular access provided from Berry Road
- A 19m "green spine" connecting through to River Road in the south
- An east-west through-site pedestrian link at the northern end of the site.

## **1.0 WELCOME, ATTENDANCE, APOLOGIES AND OPENING**

The Chairperson introduced the Panel and Council staff to the Applicant Representatives. Attendees signed the Attendance Registration Sheet.

The NSROC Design Excellence Panel's (the Panel), comments are to assist Lane Cove Council in its consideration of the pre-DA proposal.

## **2.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

NIL.

## **3.0 PRESENTATION**

The applicant presented their Concept Development Application for 24-34 Berry Road, 23-31 Holdsworth Avenue and 42-46 River Road, St Leonards.

## **4.0 DEP PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

The development framework for the project is established by the Lane Cove Local Environmental Plan 2009 (2010 EPI 49) and supporting DCP for St Leonards South. The broad scale and form of future buildings and future communal open space as well as cross site linkages are clearly defined in the LEP/DCP documentation.

Although the material presented to the Panel is in Concept DA form, it clearly demonstrated that substantial professional effort has been directed toward reviewing and, to some extent, re-interpreting the structural and design intent of the LEP/DCP.

The principal change to the intent expressed in the LEP/DCP involves the proposed extension of the "green spine" to intersect with River Road. Effectively this displaced a sector of residential development that would otherwise have faced River Road, led to a narrowing of the "green spine" from 24m to 18-19m and resulted in the transfer of building mass to proposed buildings aligned with Holdsworth Avenue and Berry Road.

The Panel carefully considered the arguments put forward by the Applicant but, on balance, formed the view that there was questionable benefit in extending the "green spine" to River Road given the significant changes in level at the southern end of the site, the potential transfer of noise associated with vehicular movement on River Road into the spine, the scale of built form transfer to the proposed buildings addressing Holdsworth Avenue and Berry Road, and the resultant "canyon" effect of those buildings on the reduced "green spine" width.

The Panel noted the site's natural resources including the sloping tree-lined streets, established trees and significant sandstone outcrops. The Panel believes that the design should better respond to site features and topography, retain trees and maintain existing levels wherever possible within a deep soil "green spine".

The Panel was not convinced that the proposed internal north-south access link to River Road within the "green spine" was required given that pedestrian access to River Road is readily provided at the southern ends of both Holdsworth Avenue and Berry Road. The introduction of a publicly accessible link would impact adversely on the effective use of the "green spine" for Communal Open Space purposes.

The Panel concluded that the proposed changes to the "green spine" did not achieve Design Excellence and recommends that the development form identified in the LEP/DCP be pursued and that the width of the "green spine" be maintained at 24m. The 24m width required by the DCP reflects a public commitment negotiated over many years. Moreover,

this dimension reflects a commitment to design excellence over and above minimal ADG separation. The modulated built form over six storeys is intended to enhance and enrich the precinct's key landscape spaces. Any reduction in width would not only reduce amenity on the subject site, but could potentially become a precedent for all development to the north.

As part of the review process, the Panel also noted the existing high-quality streetscapes, including the significant street trees in both Holdsworth Avenue and Berry Road, and the role they should play in the progressive transition of the St Leonard South precinct. Accordingly, the Panel recommends that detailed consideration be given to the way in which the infrastructure upgrading, that will be required to service the proposed development of the precinct, is implemented to ensure the retention and protection of these important elements.

The nine design principles considered by the panel in the review of the Concept DA include 1] **Context**, 2] **Built Form + Scale**, 3] **Density**, 4] **Sustainability**, 5] **Landscape**, 6] **Amenity**, 7] **Safety**, 8] **Housing Diversity + Social Interaction**, 9] **Aesthetics**.

The absence of a comment under any of the principles does not necessarily imply that the Panel considers the particular matter has been satisfactorily addressed, as it may be that changes suggested under other principles will generate a desirable change.

#### 4.1. Context

The Panel does not accept the Applicant's arguments for significant changes to the form and scale of the LEP/DCP "green spine" (refer Introduction).

With well-established trees and clear visual and physical links to the south, Berry Road and Holdsworth Avenue are significant public domain corridors. The Masterplan's proposed pocket parks at the southern ends of Berry Road and Holdsworth Avenue result in a single point of vehicular access to the subject development site and necessitate the bridging of car parks under the "green spine". It also results in the lobby to the south eastern building being located 40m from the nearest street impeding pedestrian and drop-off access.

The Panel believes that north-south pedestrian continuity should become a priority for existing north south streets, but not the "green spine", which must achieve the appropriate levels of safety, security and amenity required for communal open space. In contrast, the proposed east west link should be more strongly public, the transition between public and communal spaces more clearly defined, levels more positively used and the location of fences and gates better and more cohesively integrated.

The Panel considers that the proposed single vehicular access from Berry Road for all 216 apartments is less than satisfactory and does not reflect equity of accessibility given that more than 50 per cent of the total apartments address either Holdsworth Avenue or River Road. The Panel further notes that the proposed Berry Road access is located at the highest point of the site and involves ramp access which will abut and impact on the adjacent development site to the north.

The Applicant indicated that access from Holdsworth Avenue was not possible given their understanding that the Masterplan provide for a proposed northern extension of a pocket park at the Holdsworth Avenue cul-de-sac. In the Panel's view, maximising street accessibility to the development site is critical in ensuring ready accessibility, taxi drop off etc and significantly outweighs any proposed northern extension of pocket parks at the existing cul-de-sacs. This will help ensure that a second vehicular access point from Holdsworth Avenue can be gained to the subject site.

Any extension of a limited Holdsworth Avenue pocket park will have the following negative impacts:

- No equitable additional vehicular access to basement carparking
- Limited pedestrian access to Block C and D
- No legible street address to Block C and D
- Poor outcomes in terms of wayfinding and urban design principles
- Possible impact on east-west pedestrian link

**(Note: the applicant is advised that this is only a view provided by the Design Review Panel. The applicant is to refer to Council's comments and/or views contained within the Pre-DA Notes under the Site Amalgamation Pattern and Minimum Site Areas on Page 8 in respect to this matter where it is advised that Council does not support any reduction in the size or area of the Holdsworth Pocket Park).**

Vehicular entries should, if at all possible, be located within street façade of buildings rather than to the side of building forms; thus minimising the impact of driveways on green space and amenity of residents of lower level apartments within the development and of neighbouring sites. Furthermore, internal, direct and legible pedestrian access should be provided from the basement carpark to each apartment and townhouse, preferably via a lobby, unless an alternate parking, or vehicle strategy is devised.

#### **4.2. Built Form + Scale**

The Panel accepts the Applicant's argument that the removal of built form at the southern end of the "green spine" will enhance outlook and ADG solar compliance. However, it does not believe that the "green spine" must make a direct connection with River Road. It could, for example, be more amenable for the "green spine" and its flanking buildings to become a naturalistic "belvedere" at its southern end. While this would reduce the impacts of traffic and enhance landscape vistas to the south, the Panel recognises that it also limits the building footprint within the development site.

The Panel agrees with the Applicant that a compliant envelope height can accommodate more levels than indicated in the DCP diagrams and that, in this regard, the proposed number of levels are justifiable. However, with additional storeys, it is clear that greater articulation is required to achieve an amenable street and "green spine" wall height. Accordingly, the Berry Road and Holdsworth Avenue street setbacks at six storeys as required under the DCP must be integrated into the proposed built form and also reflected in the built form treatment to the "green spine".

The Panel expressed concern about the limited 9m setback between apartment buildings adjacent to the east-west through-site pedestrian link. The Panel notes the need to avoid extensive blank walls to the through-site link to achieve the levels of visual and acoustic privacy required by ADG criteria as well as the need to ensure measures of passive surveillance in response to CPTED principles.

#### **4.3. Density**

The data presented to the Panel indicated that the density of the development is consistent with the permissible FSR of 2.6:1. The Panel remained concerned that the FSR target has been achieved by vertically extending the proposed built forms to the maximum permissible height limits without reflecting DCP "street wall" criteria.

#### **4.4. Sustainability**

The Panel raised concerns regarding thermal bridging associated with the extensive use of projecting floor slabs at each floor level and the required compliance with relevant building regulations. The Panel recommends that the Applicant conduct further studies/research over

the impacts of thermal bridging on the overall design proposal. The Panel encourages the Applicant to explore the ideas of passive design for buildings to address the issue of thermal bridging.

The Applicant indicated that a number of sustainability measures were proposed including use of photo-voltaic cells and the collection and retention of stormwater for irrigation purposes. There was also reference to the possible inclusion of a raingarden adjacent to River Road for water quality purposes.

Clarification is sought regarding the coverage of the roof tops by solar panels. Areas that do not have solar panels should be considered as potential sites for roof gardens to reduce the thermal loading on the buildings.

The Panel notes that while the submitted documentation does not appear to include such sustainability measures the Applicant is encouraged to pursue them.

#### **4.5. Landscape**

The Panel does not accept the Applicant's arguments for significant changes to the form and scale of the LEP/DCP "green spine" (refer Introduction and Context).

A consultant arborist has identified a number of trees – including 12 within the "green spine" and 10 along River Road - for retention. The proposed removal of these trees, which would result in the wholesale removal of tree canopy, is not considered acceptable and replacement vegetation is not considered sufficient to prevent the creation of a heat island effect. The removal of the trees will also negatively impact the existing wildlife corridor between the Wollstonecraft/Waverton bushland parks and the open space areas adjacent to the North Shore Hospital and Gore Hill Cemetery.

The Panel recommends the engagement of an ecological consultant to provide recommendations on how to manage the existing wildlife on site and the ongoing provision of habitat trees.

The retention of the 24m wide "green spine" and a natural deep soil zone, without basement car parking below, will allow for the retention of existing trees.

The Panel recommends that the Applicant review landscape proposals for Communal Open Space to provide a more intimate and detailed landscape. Greater emphasis should be placed on creating gardens for children to engage in creative play and for people to sit and enjoy. The current spaces appear highly paved with little character or fine grain detail.

The northern seating area will potentially have the greatest usage as it will have the least privacy and acoustic impacts on the residents, however, little shade provided.

Communal seating areas closer to River Road may well be too noisy to be used. If pursued, consideration could be given to ameliorating the traffic noise impacts with water features.

Access control and fencing of the pedestrian corridors should be clearly resolved in the Landscape Plans to ensure night time security and the safety of children.

Lighting of the open space areas needs to be resolved to ensure safety and light spillage are not issues.

The proposed re-use of stormwater is required, particularly as the receiving watercourse Berry Creek is subject to extreme changes in water flow after rain. The proposed ephemeral creek bed and raingarden adjacent to River Road is supported. Further detail is sought

about stormwater utilisation and integration with the landscape planting scheme. The Landscape Plan should indicate how stormwater will be re-used across the subject site.

#### **4.6. Amenity**

The Panel notes that the current design does not provide a legible pedestrian street address to each individual building. The design should be amended so as to provide a legible, accessible pedestrian entry lobby and street address, of high amenity, to each individual apartment building. Each entry should be within close proximity and direct line of sight of a car drop off point, so as to facilitate safe and amenable drop off and pick-up of residents by car, from the street, rather than from a basement carpark. Likewise, first-time visitors to an apartment should be able to be provided with the street address of an apartment within an individual building, accessed from the street nominated in that address.

ADG guidelines should be adhered to unless an alternative design provides better amenity, or the peculiarities of the site prevent it. For example, entry lobbies on each level should be provided with natural ventilation and daylight.

More specific amenity concerns include:

- Lower apartments facing River Road are not directly accessible from the car park - double storey eastern terraces at Basement 04 and 03 have no direct pedestrian connection to the basement car park, requiring residents to take the lift to ground floor and walk through the green spine/communal open space to River Road to access their apartments from the car park;
- Remaining River Road apartments are generally accessible only from the car park;
- Further compression of the “green spine” Communal Open Space stemming from the intrusion of Ground Floor balconies;
- Studies do not appear to be provided with access to natural light;
- As previously noted above, the environmental qualities associated with the Communal Open Space are compromised by cross-site links (both east-west and north-south) which will require appropriate security and access control;
- The 9m wide separation between buildings defining the east-west pedestrian through-site link will need to clearly demonstrate how both visual and acoustic privacy can be provided between apartments and balconies;
- Limited/nil built form setbacks at Level 6 and above.

#### **4.7. Safety**

The scheme as presented did not delineate between the publicly accessible, east-west through-site link and north-south communal open space, allowing uncontrolled access between Holdsworth Avenue or Berry Road and River Road, presenting an unacceptable security risk for residents. It was indicated that visually permeable fencing with controlled gates would be provided along the through-site links. There would also be a need for access control to the Communal Open Space from River Road.

#### **4.8. Housing Diversity + Social Interaction**

The Panel supports the proposed diversity of dwelling mix in the development and the potential level of social interaction associated with a “green spine” Communal Open Space.

#### **4.9. Aesthetics**

The Panel notes the submitted CGI material which provides an indication of the range and subtlety of design images and proposed materials.

The Panel anticipates that the design refinement process will further inform built form and elevational treatment by reflecting the subtleties associated with the target levels of environmental amenity, building orientation and aspect.

## **5.0 OUTCOME**

The Panel has determined the outcome of the DEP review and provides final direction to the Applicant as follows:

The Panel recommends that the pre-DA concept design be modified with particular reference to the form and scale of the “green spine”, enhanced built form modulation, increased equity of vehicular access and maximised effective street frontage and returned to the Panel for consideration.