



DA No: DA204/2022

PAN: 239356

ADDRESS: 175-177 Ben Boyd Road, Neutral Bay

PROPOSAL: Neutral Bay Public School upgrade

DATE 9 August 2022

APPLICANT: School Infrastructure NSW

Principle 1—context, built form and landscape

- There are fundamental issues with the proposal. The panel considers that the siting and scale of the new building impacts poorly on the existing school structure and streetscape.
- The proposed changes to external spaces, school structure and streetscape are not supported.
- It appears that a standard building footprint has been used as the basis for the proposed development. While this may work on other less constrained sites, it is the Panel's opinion that in this location a bespoke building is required. Other approaches considered from first principles would be welcome. Some options are further elaborated below.
- Fundamental to the successful integration of this and future proposals is a comprehensive master plan which will guide the school's growth.
- The north-east and north-west corners of the site appear unresolved and provide good opportunities to further strengthen the identity of the school and its street presence. The siting of mechanical plant to these areas is a poor use of potentially high-quality space and is a very poor outcome for both the school and the urban interface. An alternate location for the mechanical plant should be identified.
- Building L significantly exceeds the maximum permitted building height by 50 to 60%. This massing is exacerbated by the recessed south facing COLA space which has the effect of pushing additional building envelope upwards. The built form would result in some winter overshadowing of residential buildings on the opposite side of the street. The height of the building relative to the planning controls and adjacent context fronting Bydown Street is considered unacceptable. The building height should be reduced to comply with the planning controls and better relate to the context.
- The east elevation of Building L appears excessively massive, exaggerated by the narrow windows. Consideration should be given to significantly increasing the window sizes to the learning spaces and library to take advantage of the outlook to the street and trees canopies. This would also have a benefit to reducing the massing of the building envelope. Any revised



third level would require further detailed design review by the panel, and as a minimum would need to be well set back from Bydown Street by at least 9m or 50% of the building footprint. It may be acceptable to provide a planted terrace and outdoor teaching space on level 3 fronting Bydown Street (subject to achieving compliance with height controls). The proposed parapet flat-roof form exacerbates the street wall height. A pitched roof to complement existing buildings would be strongly preferred.

- The use of a standard floorplate template and EFSG standard hub layout needs to be customised to suit the bespoke nature of the site. The scheme has taken a complying development approach to what is a more complex site with heritage constraints. The use of the EFSG standard hub layout within a narrow zone of the site is particularly problematic, causing bulk and scale issues, internal circulation issues within the school, and privacy issues for neighbours. Bourke Street Public School in Surry Hills could be reviewed as a precedent for a more appropriately scaled intervention within a heritage site.
- Consider relocating some of the programme currently proposed in Building L, such as admin zone to the northeast corner of the site, creating a formal school entrance here from Yeo St. This may also have the benefit of reducing the floor area and building height of Building L to two levels and achieving a library at ground level.
- A two storey Building L would be more appropriate to relate to the scale of the heritage buildings on the site and the surrounding residential context.
- The 700mm proposed landscaped setback to Bydown Street of Building L does not appear to serve any functional purpose. The narrow-planted strip adjacent to the footpath would pose significant maintenance issues and takes up space which could be added to the playground area. Either a more substantial setback is required to establish tree planting, or the building should be sited along the boundary and designed to address the streetscape, as are some of the existing buildings on the site.

Principle 2—sustainable, efficient, and durable

- The proposed new Building L adopts a deep floor plate with a significant number of internal rooms and corridors. A shallower and longer floorplate would fit better with the context and enhance amenity including daylighting and cross ventilation which is strongly encouraged. Cross ventilation with openable windows is an increasing focus in schools due to Covid

Principle 3—accessible and inclusive

- The new / refurbished site entry does not provide a welcoming entry to the site. It could be enhanced by high-quality paving, planting and desirably a canopy to provide weather protection and delineate the entry zone.
- The integration of improved accessibility and amenities is supported.



- The proposed location of Building L bisects the site, separating play spaces and reducing good supervision and accessibility. Reducing the east-west width of Building L to align with the existing Building B to the north would help improve this.

Principle 4—health and safety

- Provide additional glazing and outdoor covered learning space to the library. The northeast corner of the library is fully enclosed by masonry despite providing an ideal northeastern orientation. The library may be best located at ground level.

Principle 5—amenity

- The location of Building L results in overshadowing of the playground and a south facing COLA. This represents poor amenity with dark and cold outdoor space for much of the year. The design of the COLA should be reconsidered to reduce bulk and scale and if it could possibly be better relocated.
- The excessively large floor plates limit the potential for good solar amenity and natural ventilation of classroom spaces. Use of operable skylights to the top-floor spaces should be explored to further provide opportunities for passive solar access and natural ventilation rather than relying on air conditioning these spaces.
- It is suggested that outdoor learning space be provided directly accessible from the learning common spaces to enhance both wellbeing and learning outcomes. Outdoor learning space should be clear of any required circulation routes.
- Internalised rooms and corridors should be avoided.
- Balustrades appear fortress like from the central outdoor space – alternatives should be considered.

Principle 6—whole of life, flexible and adaptive

- How do the new buildings and outdoor spaces fit into the overall proposed master plan for the campus looking to the future. A long-term masterplan should be provided to detail how the proposed development fulfills the future needs of the school. Population numbers now and into the future should be considered relative to the advised Core 28 size (which caters for 4 streams and potentially up to 840 students).

Principle 7—aesthetics

- Mechanical plant is currently proposed to be located to the northwestern and northeastern corners. This is a poor aesthetic and amenity outcome, and alternative siting of the plant areas should be explored. These street corners represent a significant urban design and aesthetic opportunity to reinvigorate the presence of the school, provide substantial planting, and improved wayfinding.



- Building L should respond to both the existing heritage building to the north and the residential scale and character of buildings to the eastern side of Bydown Street.
- The use of limited changes in materiality on the facades and repetitious verticality of the windows on the eastern elevation of Building L exacerbates the height of the building.
- In a heritage context such as this, larger shifts in the building form should be explored to help reduce the excessively bulky appearance of the building
- The lift shaft of building L should be embedded within the building form to improve site wide circulation and building appearance.

Summary Recommendation

The design cannot be supported due to significant issues covered above. The excessive height and inappropriate character of the proposed building are of particular concern.

The Panel recommends that a master plan approach, that enables better street presence, clearer entry points, more appropriate bulk and scale and better play opportunities through a considered response to the site and its context. This would enable a much higher quality outcome and be of significant benefit. The Panel would encourage the proponent to present further investigations and welcome the opportunity to help shape a better outcome for all.