Wollongong Design Review Panel
Meeting minutes and recommendations

Date	7 June 2023
Meeting location	Wollongong City Council Administration Offices
Panel members	(Chair) Brendan Randles
	(Member) Marc Deuschle
	(Member) Stephen Pearse
Apologies	None
Council staff	Pier Panozzo – City Centre & Major Development Manager Anne Starr – Senior Development Project Officer Amanda Kostovski – Design Expert
Guests/ representatives of the applicant	**Luke Rollinson – MMJ Wollongong** **Lauren Turner – MMJ Wollongong** **Liam Allen – IRT** **Nicole Wilson - Arcadia** **Hyun Kim – Gardner Wetherill** **Ross Gardner – Gardner Wetherill** **Michael Reeves – Flooding Consultant**
Declarations of Interest	None
Item number	2
DA number	DA-2023/284
Reason for consideration by DRP	Advice for Council and Applicant
Determination pathway	Southern Regional Planning Panel (SRPP)
Property address	17A & Lot 505 Murranar Road, 121-226/3 & 101-118/1 Edgar Street Towradgi
Proposal	Seniors housing development - demolition of existing structures, construction of 89 independent living units and amenities, including a neighbourhood shop with café and resident clubhouse and proposed staged development - three (3) stages
Applicant or applicant's representative address to the design review panel	
Background	The site was Inspected by the Panel on 7 June 2023.
Design Quality Principles SEPP 65	
Context and Neighbourhood Character	The site is located with a low-density residential precinct, characterised by consistent landscaped setbacks along wide orthogonal streets, detached houses on rectilinear blocks, landscaped gardens and glimpses of the ocean to the east. Although the predominant topography is relatively flat, the topography south of the site includes raised banks to the Towradgi Arm, which drains to the south to the Fairy Creek and eventually, the Pacific Ocean. The site is significantly sized and spans a number of blocks, with two "cul de sacs" resulting to the north. It is occupied by an aged care and seniors housing facility dating from the 70's, that has a distinctive "Sydney School" scale and character and a clear influence of the architect Alvar Aalto. This is evident in its staggered two storey terraced forms with single pitched tiled skillion roofs, face brickwork, timber framed windows and doors, and quarry tile porches. While the layout completely upsets the predominant urban pattern, its response to the site is surprisingly rich with beautifully laid out paths threading their way through well established trees. The site contains a 12m wide sewer easement, which crosses the site diagonally from its southwest to northeast. This accounts for the staggered layout strategy in the proposed design. The site

	includes an existing pedestrian link from Marlo Road to Murranar Road, a requirement of the previous development that has now been imposed on the current proposal. The site is flood affected and classified in the WLEP 2009 as a "medium flood risk precinct". Flood advice has followed the requirements of DCP; this requires that in time of flooding, any future development on the site must allow for sufficient on-site flood storage to ensure that no additional impacts on adjacent properties are created. This has required a new flood level being imposed on the site, requiring all habitable space, streets, and pedestrian paths being raised to level 5.45 (2.0m - 2.65m above existing levels), which completely detaches the site from its adjacent built and landscape contexts. Despite the very clear challenges of the site, the site and context analysis provided is very bare, instead focussing on the site itself rather than its local environment. The analysis fails to assess how the existing staggered layout manages to resolve its interface with its adjacent orthogonal layout and sewer easement; it does not present alternative means to addressing flood requirements, such as creating lakes or retaining natural ground levels in some form; nor does it identify and / or retain the existing trees on the site, which are of immense value. This is an inadequate response for a project of this scale and complexity, and has lead to a series of design decisions that are completely at odds with the logic of the surrounding orthogonal streets, its low scale adjacent built form, and the rich dialogue that currently exists between adjacent streetscapes and its coastal landscape context. It is therefore strongly recommended that a thorough site and context analysis be undertaken at multiple scales before any further design work is attempted. To prepare such an analysis, refer to the ADG part 3A and Appendix 1.
Built Form and Scale	As noted above, the proposed built form has been designed without any demonstrated regard for its immediate and broader built and landscape context. Instead, it adopts the sewer easement as its key spine, adopts a secondary drainage easement as an additional spine, and proposes a poor amenity outcome of two-level stacked laneways(i.e. one on top of the other) so as to maximize the number of dwellings on the site with direct access to cars– in clusters, rows and elongated low scale apartment buildings. With no apparent regard for continuity with context, the whole layout is raised to the new flood level; as a result, virtually no trees are retained, no cross-site vistas from adjacent streets are introduced, and very little reference is made to the scale and character of adjacent streets, the form and scale of adjacent dwellings, existing alignments, setbacks, or adjacent patterns. As was made clear at the meeting, the panel cannot support the proposed layout in its current form or its interface with its street, neighbours, built form, and landscape context. The design does not make reference to Designing with Country or Designing for Country. It would be expected that this be included for any new development, especially given this site's scale and impact upon the landscape. The two-level stacked laneways are a particularly poor outcome. The lower lane will be dark, airless, and subject to traffic fumes and constant noise from vehicles and adjacent dwellings. No

	dwellings will be able to open windows onto this space – as proposed for many carer's rooms – thereby reducing cross ventilation. In addition, entries will be severely compromised. The upper-level laneway is accessed by a 1:6 ramp, which is inaccessible not only for people with disabilities but also for most senior residents. It is also empty of any climate modification with only limited planting in tubs and no shading of the extensive hard paved surfaces. (This approach occurs in other areas of the site). The single lift provided will require excessive walking distances and may be deemed discriminatory. With so many negative qualities, including open waste compounds along their respective lengths, both laneway environments are liable to be poorly used, neglected, and even dangerous, especially at night. The main spine achieves inadequate levels of urban design quality and pedestrian amenity. With poorly designed pedestrian paths, an excessively steep (1:8) interface with adjacent Murranar Road, intrusive and excessively long accessibility ramps, minimal landscape, multiple bin enclosures, and 90-degree parking, this carriageway fails to relate to, or match, the urban design quality of adjacent streets. The culmination in stepped landscaped platforms at the southern end of the main spine leading to a circuitous path is confusing and liable to be dangerous after hours. The secondary connection from Murranar Road is similarly marginalised by the steepness of its interface, excessively long accessibility ramps, servicing, and lack of pedestrian paths. The communal open space is poorly designed, detached from the seniors' club, marginalized by two dwellings within its apparent spatial domain, and is not designed to be contiguous with adjacent street levels. This COS is effectively surrounded by a moat where the level changes are included to meet flood storage and flow requirements. The nearby shop is inaccessible from adjacent public domain, except via an obscure accessibility ramp further east. The northern right of way is very tight, completely inactivated and therefore also liable to be dangerous at night. The raised walkway to the east of the site is similarly compromised, not only for its potential impacts on its adjacent riparian zone but also due to its failure to engage with the public domain in a manner that can be considered safe and secure. Numerous bedrooms directly open onto the carriageway with insufficient space for landscape to mediate with passing traffic, vehicular and pedestrian noise, light spill, and constant privacy impacts. Hence, bedroom windows will remain closed. The northern and western apartment buildings are excessively long, out of scale with adjacent built form, depend on featureless long corridors, and do not to achieve minimum 60% cross ventilation compliance. The angular nature of built form, ramps, and roads have created awkward junctions and interfaces at various levels where amenity of adjacent units are compromised. All units to Edgar Street are raised above street level on car park enclosure further isolating this edge of the street. As an ungated community it would be ideal if street facing units accessed the street directly. The solution to the flood management appears to be to raise much of the whole layout – including streets, communal spaces, and built form - to the required level, resulting in many of the new

	buildings being suspended more than 2m above natural ground level, and completely open to facilitate flood storage. This has created a vast chamber below the accommodation, which is likely to be full of vermin, impacted by the smells associated with rotting flora and fauna, and completely open to intruders. It will therefore be insecure and potentially unsafe, and a constant source of risk. The applicant has advised that the site will not be gated and be open to the public with limited fencing. While this is supported as an outcome, the ability for these undercrofts to be easily accessed will lead to security issues. The flood mitigation restricts any fencing from these areas. The result of the design being the creation of an extremely problematic amenity and safety outcome. The raised levels relative to adjacent neighbours is also problematic with overlooking and privacy concerns addressed poorly via excessive walls and screen combinations in a number of locations. The building form and detail do not fit well within the context of the residential single dwelling neighbourhood and the outcome reads more as an institutional design. The effect is that of a long, low building without variety or range of scales as might be expected to reinforce key destinations / activity zones within the new community. The site planning lacks a clear supportable vision and does not present a clear hierarchy of space which you might expect when developing a community neighbourhood. It could be expected that a focus may be developed around the clubhouse, shop and COS; and that a system of streets and paths be developed to connect both residences and the neighbourhood. This would be supported with a clear wayfinding strategy. It is not clear to the Panel if the requirements of the DA make the suspension of all habitable space and carriageways inevitable, if there are other ways to facilitate flood storage on the site, or if alternative means to achieving effective flood management should be sought. It is clear however, that the current proposal results in poor built form outcomes and compromised amenity throughout, including accessibility, significant safety and security, privacy impacts along all boundaries, numerous compliance issues, poor streetscape, poor interfaces with existing streets and neighbours, removal of established trees etc. For the many reasons listed above, the proposal - including its internal street layout and built form - cannot be supported by the Panel in its current form.
Density	The proposal fails to demonstrate that the density proposed can be accommodated on the site in a safe, amenable and compliant manner.
Sustainability	Sustainability was not discussed at the meeting. However, numerous compliance issues plague the proposal. It is advised that sustainability be considered as part of the recommended analysis at a site and contextual level before focusing on detail resolution. A better resolved proposal would need to integrate a broad range of well-considered sustainability initiatives such as:

	- Site-sensitive stormwater management and filtration, - Rainwater harvesting and implementation of WSUD systems across the site, - Retention of existing large trees, - Addition of new trees, - Reduction of impacts of the UHI Effect, - Solar energy generation, - EV charging spaces, - Enhanced bicycle storage, etc. In addition, the need to insulate all slabs was raised as a means to control endemic heat loss. Nor is solar compliance and cross ventilation demonstrated to individual dwellings, the screening of western sun to control heat gain and/or solar compliance demonstrated to a well resolved amended communal open space.

Landscape	The landscape design report suggest that some level of contextual analysis has been undertaken with regards to the local landscape; the landscape character and site history in particular allude to interesting opportunities to explore that could inform how to approach the site and what is important to consider.
	
	Unfortunately, it feels like landscape design was not considered at this level, rather developed only after the built form as an infill.
	
	Given the significant potential good landscape design possesses in helping resolve or mitigate constraints such as flooding, it is disappointing that more was not done to prioritise this in the design.
	
	Moving forward greater attention must be placed on the landscape design, in particular with regards to:
	- The retention of existing trees with a moderate or higher retention value. Benefits include:
	  o Retaining the site's visual character,
	  o Retaining the site's micro-climate,
	  o Retain the urban canopy (thus mitigating the UHI Effect and providing shading),
	  o Sequestering greater amounts of carbon, and
	  o Absorbing more water, to name a few.
	- Considering how these trees can help locate and generate future COS as well as provide environmental benefits listed above.
	- Integrating WSUD systems and elements across the site, especially focussed on channelling water through the site and allowing water to collect and infiltrate where most beneficial. These systems should be considered part of the landscape design, should be well-detailed, and should become part of the sites usable and accessible landscape (i.e., not engineered solutions hidden from view via green buffers).
	- Location of COS where it is most appropriate. Ideally it should be associated with the clubhouse, preferably as a

	consolidated central space (as opposed to the proposed central space constrained between apartments and POS). - The transition / interface between natural ground levels and required flood levels. The current level differences across the site are problematic, requiring balustrades or safety barriers, as well as visually disconnecting spaces. - Materials being specified that are natural and, importantly, permeable. The current use of synthetic lawn for example, especially on a site like this, is not supported. The Panel expects that the relationship between built form and landscape will become much more sensitive and integrated in response to a thorough site analysis. As such the expectation is that the detailed design will be vastly improved, providing a balance of sustainable measures (for example tree retention and flood mitigation via WSUD) and a well-conceived, usable, and well-connected series of communal open spaces (providing a large variety of program and amenity).
Amenity	As noted above, the proposal raises numerous amenity issues: - Poor access, amenity and safety to lower laneway - Poor access and amenity to upper laneway - Poor access and accessibility from local streets - Highly constrained cross ventilation to lower laneway dwellings - Excessively long corridors and non-compliant cross ventilation to western and northern apartment buildings - Poor open space amenity to central communal open space - Traffic and privacy impacts on bedrooms along the central spine - Safety and security, amenity, odour, and vermin issues resulting from the open suspended undercroft. - Unsafe pedestrian access from Marlo Road - Overlooking to the west neighbours from rear-facing suspended dwellings - Poor access and amenity to proposed shop - These types of accommodation can mean owners have boats, caravans etc. Parking, access and storage needs to be described on the plans - Some kitchens within 2.5 bed villas appear to be further than eight metres from external walls set behind bathrooms. Edgar Street lobby lift fire stairs configuration adds to extended linear impact of building and would be better if provided open light and view to street and gardens. - Clarify all internal storage areas (sq.m) - Bedroom access directly from living areas is not supported - Bedroom / carer room windows in some types view directly onto pathways

	- Location of AC and clothes drying to be indicated - The extent of adaptable units is not clear. Please clarify the extent of adaptable and show post adaptation plans, as necessary - Provide min. 15m^2 POS for all at grade units - Locate all services including comms, electrical, mechanical, fire, etc on plans - All bins to be within enclosed store areas.
Safety	As noted above, the lower laneway and open under croft are liable to be insecure and unable to be managed, thereby making the whole precinct unsafe.
Housing Diversity and Social Interaction	As proposed, this flood affected and highly constrained site does not appear to be an appropriate location for seniors housing.
Aesthetics	The form and materiality of the buildings would benefit from more influence of the Sydney School aesthetic demonstrated by the existing built form. As proposed, the expression of the built form is very crude and fails to respond to the scale and character of its adjacent context.
Design Excellence WLEP2009	
Whether a high standard of architectural design, materials and detailing appropriate to the building type and location will be achieved	Not demonstrated
Whether the form and external appearance of the proposed development will improve the quality and amenity of the public domain,	Not demonstrated
Whether the proposed development detrimentally impacts on view corridors,	N/A Not illustrated. If there are views across the site from surrounding ridges, the new development is likely to impact negatively due to its monolithic nature within the small-scaled landscaped residential neighbourhood. It is expected that the new development would enhance any vistas along streets when viewed looking east, especially as it abuts the natural setting of Towradgi Arm.
Whether the proposed development detrimentally overshadows an area shown distinctively coloured and numbered on the Sun Plane Protection Map,	N/A
How the development addresses the following:	

the suitability of the land for development,	Although the Panel supports seniors living generally, this flood affected and highly constrained site does not appear to be an appropriate location for seniors housing.
existing and proposed uses and use mix	Although the Panel supports seniors living generally, this flood affected and highly constrained site does not appear to be an appropriate location for seniors housing.
heritage issues and streetscape constraints,	Poor streetscape interfaces as noted above.
the location of any tower proposed, having regard to the need to achieve an acceptable relationship with other towers (existing or proposed) on the same site or on neighbouring sites in terms of separation, setbacks, amenity and urban form,	No towers proposed
bulk, massing and modulation of buildings	Not supported
street frontage heights	Raising of built form results in incompatible built form. The design as presented does not provide a satisfactory outcome to the streets or cul de sacs.
environmental impacts such as sustainable design, overshadowing, wind and reflectivity	Removing of all trees and building out the site with a raised site is not supported.
the achievement of the principles of ecologically sustainable development	Not demonstrated.
pedestrian, cycle, vehicular and service access, circulation and requirements	Poorly resolved internal circulation - pathways and carriageways.
impact on, and any proposed improvements to, the public domain	Significant physical and visual impacts on adjacent streets and landscapes.
Recommendations	The proposal is not supported as proposed. Nor is it clear that this greatly constrained site is capable of being developed for seniors housing unless an alternative flooding strategy can be formulated. As noted above, it is strongly recommended that a thorough site and context analysis be undertaken at multiple scales before any further design work is attempted. To prepare such an analysis, refer to the ADG part 3A and Appendix 1. It is suggested that this analysis address key site constraints as layers to overlay and assess competing issues to test whether an acceptable approach to the site planning is realisable.

	These layers / criteria should address as a minimum: 1. The flood mitigation options as a series of diagrams illustrating options for modifying the storage volumes and locations. The aim of which being to reduce the amount of building that needs to be accommodated above open catchment areas and increasing the regularised shape of site available for on ground building at sustainable level for flooding. Any new building that is over catchment would have gradual change / transition from bank to water store. Landscape would change to reflect this. This approach may include more consolidated deeper water storage within east and south of site and pumped zones as water features. 2. Implementation of sustainable design. 3. Test current design assumption of not connecting to the east boundary so as to avoid designated development. This should be assessed against any flood mitigation benefit that may flow to the overall design as outlined. i.e., does the use of only one point of connection to the south exacerbate the issues of water storage and management on the site? 4. Retention of key trees and clusters that can be incorporated at existing levels as part of the flood storage and used for COS / recreation for the majority of the year. 5. The actual controls and specific easement requirements for sewer and stormwater easements be tested to determine impact and potential options. 6. Vertical/sectional assessments of all conditions to review retain or grade and to inform the selection of best fit scenarios given the IRT users' brief and the relationships to context. 7. Neighbourhood and street edges junctions and vistas. 8. Street patterns and scale of buildings. 9. Hierarchy of spaces suitable for the type of community to meet IRT vision. This would also resolve a logical / legible wayfinding solution. 10. Review of GFA achieved and built form typologies resulting from this analysis.