

Wollongong Design Review Panel
Meeting minutes and recommendations

Date	26 March 2020
Meeting location	Wollongong City Council Administration Offices
Panel members	David Jarvis
	Gabrielle Morrish
	Sue Hobley
Apologies	Mark Riordan – Manager City Planning
Council staff	Vivian Lee - Senior Development Project Officer
	John Wood - City Wide development Manager
Guests/ representatives of the applicant – Skype meeting	Martin Jones - Architect - AEJ Margie Rahman - AEJ Helen Deegan - Planner City Plan Stuart Scobie - Landscape- AEJ Edward Cheung - Surewin Parkview Frank Mangione - Project Manager – MAM
Declarations of Interest	
Item number	1
DA number	DA-2020/4
Determination pathway	Council Referral
Property address	14 Cosgrove Avenue Gwynneville
Proposal	
Applicant or applicant's representative address to the design review panel	
Background	The site was Inspected by the Panel on 26 March 2020
Design quality principals SEPP 65	
Context and Neighbourhood Character	The proposal is located on visually prominent site at the base of Mount Kiera. The site falls 76m from its rear down to the street, creating an extremely challenging terrain An initial site analysis (DA/03) has been provided that outlines heritage, environmental, bush fire and geotechnical constraints, from this analysis an area of land with potential for development is identified and noted as the “<i>Site development opportunity area</i>”. Within the area identified as the “<i>Site development opportunity area</i>” are significant natural features which must also be identified as part of the site analysis, such as existing trees, watershed, level plateaus and knolls. These features should also be taken into consideration when developing the site. The remainder of the site analysis then focuses upon a single solution for the development of the site. Rather than exploring alternative strategies to respond to the constraints and opportunities of this very challenging but naturally beautiful site. The proposal orientates every building to achieve an outlook containing coastal and escarpment views to the north-east irrespective of the contours. This ignores the diversity of outlooks available from the site, and the opportunities this provides to develop a design that sits better within the topography and reduces drainage (and therefore also ecological) issues, tree loss, privacy, visual and amenity impacts.

Built Form and Scale	<u>Access and circulation</u> The 41,934sqm site is accessed from Cosgrove Avenue via a steep access handle (approximately 17m in width) located between existing residential dwellings. Because the natural gradients of the site are too steep to accommodate vehicular movements, the proposed road has been cut deeply into the hillside and a hairpin turn created. The hairpin entry road connects to a loop road positioned around the perimeter of the designated developable area of the site, providing access to the proposed dwellings and some elements of the communal open space. The challenging topography and limited entry option of the site are acknowledged. However, further consideration should be given to the following issues: - The western edge of the loop road extends to almost about the western site boundary, cutting through the base of a knoll and requiring the north western corner of the site to be filled. Pulling the loop road back (approximately 50m) from the western boundary would reduce the extent of cut and fill and create a relatively level access road running in a north south direction. This could create a street from which level access could be provided to dwellings on either side, noting that this would have to be approved by the Rural Fire Services. If the RFS rejects an internal road, it would confirm the panel's opinion that the proposal represents an over-development of such a constrained site. - What safety measures are being provided at the outer perimeter of the loop road, where steep drops are created at the edge of the road. What is the aesthetic impact of the required safety measures? The applicant, when asked, confirmed that sandstone facing of engineered retaining walls up to 10m in height would be specified. The exorbitant costs and visual impact of this would, again, suggest that the proposed earthworks relate to a proposal that is an over-development of the site. - Where will the clearly defined public paths be provided to create a legible pedestrian access strategy for the site. No paths appear to be provided on the main loop road. The pedestrian paths indicated on site operation diagrams are narrow, pass through podiums in close proximity to bedroom windows and lack consistent casual surveillance. Universal access, ease of circulation and daunting way-finding result, along with potential safety concerns. An alternative pedestrian movement strategy should be developed - Have alternative access strategies been explored? For example, a clear linear stepped pedestrian access path could be provided through the centre of the site. The path could sit within a landscaped setting with generous pockets of communal open space. Creating a landscaped spine through the site, breaking down the scale of the development. <u>Topography / built form</u>
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	The current proposal responds to the steep undulating topography of the site with large, flat building footprints which require large-scale earthworks. Proposed buildings are up to 70 m in width, containing up to 14 dwellings. This strategy results in an excessive amount of cut (up to 10m in some locations) and projection of the dwellings well above the contours in other locations, creating building forms that relate extremely poorly to the site's natural topography and the proposed access roads. For example, the northern pedestrian entry of building 2 is located approximately 2m above the adjacent road, effectively isolating the building from the street. The southern end of the podium level pedestrian access is approximately 10m above the southern driveway. Whilst the carparking level above is 7m above the adjacent road level. It is recommended that smaller building footprints containing less dwellings are developed to allow buildings to be sited more sensitively, touching the site lightly using lightweight construction and stepping with the topography of the site. This will allow building entrances to be accessed directly from roads and assist in providing a better relationship with natural ground level and the environmental and urban context of the site.
Density	The proposal is compliant with council's numerical floor space ratio controls. However, a large proportion of the site is undevelopable, which has focused buildings into the central portion of the site. Groupings of up to 14 dwellings have been proposed, with relatively tight spaces created between dwellings. This results in a distinctly urban building typology, which is at odds with the natural environment and scenic quality of site. It is a concern that the current proposal reads as an over-development of this highly visible site.
Sustainability	Issues of water sensitive urban design, ecological management and tree loss are not acceptably addressed. Species selection for the landscape plantings does not acceptably address the recommendations of the Vegetation Management Plan.
Landscape	The landscape plan for the site appears to have been developed in response to the proposed architectural plans. On a site with such significant environmental and development constraints and such outstanding ecological improvement and amenity opportunities, an ecological landscape design understanding should drive the design process, with the architectural plans responding to it. The following key concerns are raised in relation to the proposed landscape design: - The earthworks will alter the landform, requiring extensive retaining walls that will be visually dominant and physically over-bearing. The topographical relationship with the natural context of the site will be very poor and the hydrology of nearby slopes, vegetation

	and watercourses will be altered, potentially giving rise to detrimental ecological and environmental outcomes. - Total tree removal is proposed within the designated development area. - Pedestrian and bicycle access, way-finding and circulation are very poorly resolved and give rise to serious amenity concerns (see below under Amenity). - Communal Open Space (COS) is scattered across the site with poor linkage. There is lack of consideration of how each space contributes to an integrated 'communal open space masterplan' that provides for a variety of social and recreational activities for the anticipated demographic of the development and relates strongly to its environmental context. - The species list should be developed as recommended in the Vegetation Management Plan, with all plantings (except for the vegetable gardens) selected from tables 11, 12 and 13. On such a steep site, a more centrally located, multi-functional COS would be more equitable and would promote the development of a sense of community among all residents. Supporting facilities, such as kitchen, ablution and under cover areas should be provided. The relationship between the COS and the ecological assets on and adjacent to the site should be strongly recognised in the landscape plan. Bush-walking, bushland management support and bird-watching (or wildlife observation) opportunities should be exploited to support the health of local ecosystems and the benefits of human interactions with nature. Community gardens should be sited and designed to minimise impacts on water quality and vegetation communities.
Amenity	Pedestrian access is provided to dwellings by a podium level walkway. In some locations walkways providing access to dwellings are also designated as part of the Pedestrian Site Egress path (also the main through-site circulation path) and communal open space. A significant portion of the walkway network is fronted by bedrooms, creating the potential for privacy issues. More space should be provided between building and a clear pedestrian circulation strategy must be developed. - It is recommended that transition spaces (front gardens) should be provided to the entry of each unit. - Active areas of communal open space must be provided away from bedrooms, but still be accessible to all dwellings. - A better pedestrian connection to areas of communal open space must be provided. The majority of dwellings are detached from the street making way-finding extremely difficult. Imagine a pizza delivery man attempting to access unit 4 of building 5. The dwelling is completely detached from any road on the site and the front door consists of a single door located at the far end of a 70m long

	podium. This unit effectively has no front door / meaningful point of pedestrian entry. The bedroom terraces of building 4 are orientated directly towards to bedroom POS of building 3. Building 4 is positioned 1.6m higher than building 3, resulting in the bedrooms and terraces of building 4 looking directly into the bedrooms and private open space of building 3. There is an attempt to address this situation with screening and landscaping (as shown in DA/100). However, both visual and acoustic privacy remain a concern.
Safety	The singular point of vehicular entry raises safety concerns for a development of this scale. If the main entry is blocked (road works, vehicle accident, fire) residents within the development are effectively trapped. Pedestrian access through the site consists of steep narrow paths that twist and turn through the site and are in places obscured from view. This effectively creates spaces to facilitate antisocial behaviour. A clearer pedestrian access strategy must be developed. In some locations steep embankments are located at the perimeter of the loop road. The applicant advised that universal access to the COS at the top of the site (Eagle's Nest Park) would be via the loop road. Safety measure need to be taken to ensure the safety of residents negotiating this road.
Housing Diversity and Social Interaction	The building typology appears too dense and urban for the site and its immediate context, A lower density (smaller groupings of dwellings) approach would be more consistent with this context. There is a lack of connection to the primary area of communal open space (Eagles Nest Park), this will be to the detriment of social interaction on the site. (See above under Landscape.)
Aesthetics	It is envisaged that the proposal aesthetic will change significantly when developed to address the issues raised in this report. The primary concern with the current proposal is that the large, flat footprints of the buildings proposed are at odds with the steep topography of the site. Smaller building forms that can step with the topography of the site should be developed. The establishment of large trees to visually screen the development and contribute to landscape amenity will be problematic in the altered site conditions that will include: - loss of and severe damage to topsoil; - limited dimensions and constrained environmental conditions of deep soil areas among dense built form; - retaining walls, paths, paving and other built structures that will be liable to damage from tree roots and branches; and

	- exposure of trees to physical damage from human activities.
Key issues, further Comments & Recommendations	The significant environmental constraints and visual prominence of this site demands a far more sensitive design approach than is currently proposed. A successful design must respond to and work with the steep topography of the site. Unfortunately, the large flat building footprints currently proposed impose themselves upon the natural topography of the site, creating building forms that appear far to dense and urban for the visually sensitive context of the site and its immediate surrounds. The proposed density also creates potential privacy issues between dwellings and lacks a coherent pedestrian circulation strategy. The Panel does not support the proposal in its current form. It is recommended that alternative strategies are developed for consideration. Alternative strategies should focus on smaller groupings of dwelling that step with the topography.