

24th August 2022

23-27 Harold Street and 53 Sorrell St North Parramatta Consideration of Heritage Interface with the Sorrell Street HCA

Background

Paul Davies Pty Ltd have been engaged to provide heritage analysis of the relationship of potential development on the subject site in relation to the adjacent heritage item (Currawong, 53 Sorrell Street, on the corner of Sorrell and Harold Streets and the Sorrell Street heritage conservation area. The proposal that has been developed is for an 18 storey development at 23-27 Harold Street North Parramatta. An earlier scheme was developed with a height of 25 storeys (drawings by Cox architects).

The request for this analysis is to advise on the heritage principles relevant to the subject site and consider whether a built form of larger scale than the adjacent predominantly 1-3 storey buildings in the Heritage Conservation Area (HCA) may be appropriate and integrate with the character and form of the area. Various reports and analysis have taken place in the past to explore the massing of built form that may occupy the narrow strip of properties between the HCA and the rear of the Church Street commercial and retail properties. These have been reviewed in the preparation of this short report that has informed the design process.

The proposal is to construct a residential building that has an interface with the adjacent precinct to ensure that the heritage values of the area are retained. To do this, it is necessary to understand the character of the HCA and how it relates to the adjoining site in Harold Street. It is then necessary to consider how new development and older heritage buildings and sites can interface to create new urban and public spaces.

This analysis also works on the basis that the adjoining heritage item at 53 Sorrell Street, the two storey former residence called Currawong, will form part of the overall development site.

The Sorrell St HCA

The HCA is based around a number of Victorian dwellings that vary in character and age. However, the HCA contains a very broad range of buildings with the predominant built form as late twentieth century apartment buildings of two to four storeys in scale. In the two adjoining blocks to the proposed development between Albert and Fennel Streets (that forms the effective extent of the visual catchment within the HCA for the proposal) the buildings within the HCA comprise:

4 heritage items (coloured red on the attached plan)

- 50 Sorrell Street: c 1880s dwelling, now used for commercial use
- 52 Sorrell Street: c 1880s dwelling, now used for commercial use
- 54 Sorrell Street: a major stone Victorian house set in large grounds,
- 53 Sorrell Street: a two storey Victorian dwelling, now used for commercial use

1 church complex (modern)

6 apartment buildings (cross hatched on the attached plan)

3 non heritage listed dwellings.

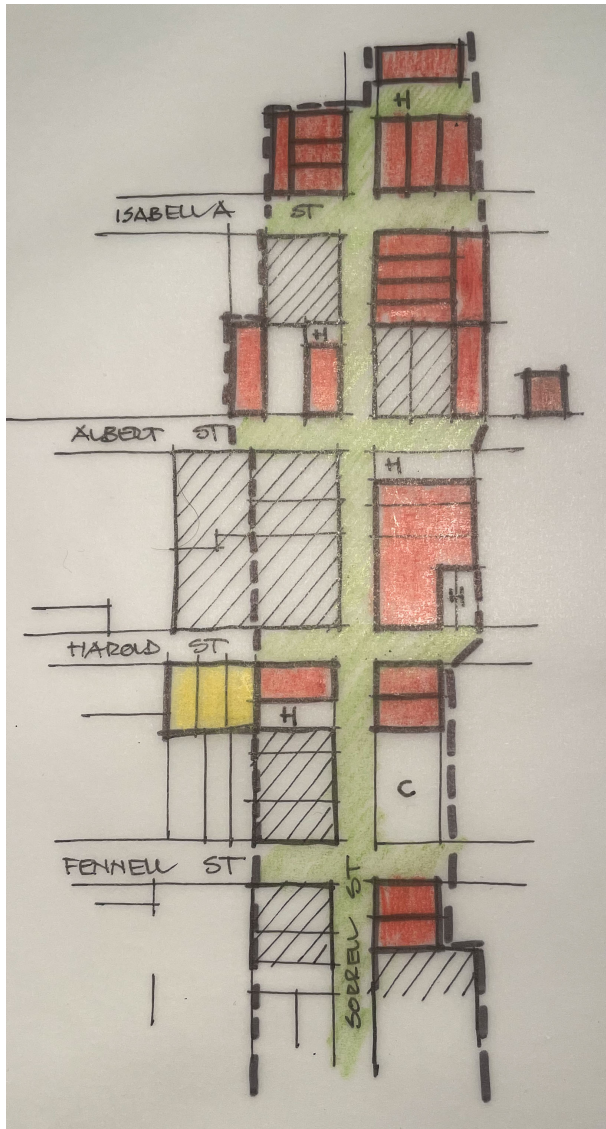


Figure 1: Overlay plan of site and the immediate heritage items, HCA and other building types. Yellow is the subject site, the heavy dotted line is the outline of the HCA, heritage items are red and apartment development sites are cross-hatched, H indicates an individual non-heritage listed residential site.



Figure 2: 50 and 52 Sorrell Street, heritage items.



Figure 3: 54 Sorrell Street, a large stone house and outbuildings, heritage item.



Figure 4: The corner of Sorrell and Harold Street with 53 Sorrell St on the right and 52 on the left.



Figure 5: 56 Sorrell St, a contributory building in the HCA.



Figure 6: 51c Sorrell St, an altered Californian Bungalow that is not contributory. At 47A and 53A beyond the house are apartment buildings.



Figure 7: The church complex at 46 Sorrell St with an associated Interwar residence.



Figure 8: Typical apartment building in the HCA.



Figure 9 : Typical apartment buildings in the HCA.

There is a greater concentration of heritage items within the HCA north of Albert Street but they are outside the visual setting of the site.

There are also almost no contributory items along Sorrell Street within the HCA and there are none within the visual catchment of the Harold/Sorrell Street corner. This is unusual as HCA's are usually established to manage contributory buildings as heritage items are already protected under the LEP provisions.

The subject site is also adjacent to nos 51 and 51A Sorrell Street, a house and an apartment block that do not have heritage significance.

The key heritage buildings within the context of the proposed site are the cluster of 4 heritage buildings that occupy three corners of the Harold and Sorrell St intersection. A view from the intersection towards the subject site is set out below.

Much of the HCA is tree-lined and apart from oblique views at intersections the area is a quite contained linear viewscape. The most open part of the area in terms of views is around the Harold Street intersection looking west.



Figure 10: The Sorrell/Harold St intersection looking towards the subject site with higher development along Church Street in the background.

53 Sorrell Street

The two storey former dwelling is now used for commercial purposes. It is a two storey Victorian residence with a strong corner presence. Originally face brick it is now painted an unfortunate grey colour. It however remains fairly intact in external form. The site has undergone change principally seen in inappropriate fencing to the streets and the rear carpark that removed former garden and service areas. An early brick wall marks the boundary between this site and the subject site. A large oak tree occupies part of the rear yard and is a feature of the area.

The house would be conserved as part of the proposal.



Figure 11: Rear yard of 53 looking towards the subject site (yellow dwelling is on the site) with oak tree in the centre of a now gravelled carpark. The yard level is below adjacent road level.



Figure 12: The rear corner of no 53 looking east along Harold Street showing the brick wall bounding the subject property and a metal fence at the street. The rear of the house and the tree can be seen above the fence. Presumably the brick fence once extended along Harold Street.



Figure 13: Street view of the Harold St frontage of no 53 with the subject site to the right of the photo.

It is noted that the current proposal includes no 53, allowing the space between the buildings to be designed as an integrated garden and landscaped space that includes sections of the early brick wall and which can also interface with the Harold Street frontage.

Consideration of Height, Scale and Form

The key aspect of this report is to consider what form and scale of building can be designed on the subject land, particularly in relation to the heritage items and adjacent HCA. There are a number of different approaches to the question of how to manage new and old and how to successfully design with differing scales of development.

There are three principal approaches:

1 Maintain low-scale development

The various council studies explore options 2 and 3. It is not proposed to use low-scale development on the site. While maintaining single or two storey forms may move the interface between the HCA boundary and higher development to the west, the interface remains and will form the backdrop to the HCA, even though at a slightly greater separation.

2 Use transitional or stepped forms of development

The use of transitional or stepped forms can work in a situation such as this but often results in a larger apparent overall massing of built form as building footprints become larger to achieve floor space. This is particularly the situation when larger development beyond forms part of the viewscape.

Stepped development forms rarely work as good design solutions to interface with heritage buildings and are not characteristic of good urban outcomes in response to heritage settings.

3 Introduce larger scale and form

Larger forms, if proposed, need to be carefully designed so that they are contextually appropriate. If built forms that are higher and of greater scale are proposed (whatever the overall scale and height) there are a number of principles that need to be considered.

The earlier Cox proposal for the site was for a reasonably tall building (25 storey limit) that fits into the context of the site and the adjacent heritage elements. The current proposal is for an 18 storey building.

Where a larger built form is proposed its design and siting are important factors. Design considerations that affect how a new built form can relate to a smaller heritage building are set out following:

Setbacks and Creation of setting and public space

Ensuring that good setbacks to heritage elements or precincts is achieved is a key design element. In this case, with the heritage item forming part of the site there is the ability to use the rear former garden area of the heritage item in combination with a side setback on the site of the development to create a significant landscaped garden space that can include elements such as the major tree and parts of the early brick wall to create scale and form fronting the new building and the rear of the heritage item and address Harold Street. The setbacks in the earlier Cox proposal are well resolved and achieve a good heritage and urban outcome.

This provides a substantial public benefit and the opportunity to design a subtle and landscaped based interface between new and old.

Form of the building

Designing a larger built element in the proximity of heritage buildings requires a different design approach to the often-cited model of podium and tower. While the podium form can work in some situations to reduce apparent scale, particularly if a building is built to a street edge, a more sophisticated and refined form is to design new buildings so that the form is grounded and simplified in massing. This is more characteristic of how heritage buildings are designed and grounded, including large buildings.

Excellent examples of this are early warehouse buildings, often of 8-10 storeys that use well-balanced façade and envelope design and shifting scale over the height of the building to create good urban form. While some of these buildings add detail, new design can provide similar techniques to manage form and apparent scale.

Height

There are several approaches to managing height in relation to changing contexts of height such as this site. If a built form is to exceed the heights of adjoining (in this case heritage) buildings, the height can either be nominally different or significantly different. There is a height at which the character of the site changes from low scale to high scale and the actual number of floors plays relatively little part in achieving good design or impacts the visual setting.

By way of example a development of say four storeys could be argued as consistent with the scale of the apartment buildings in the vicinity that characterise the area. They are not desirable forms but they set a current height framework. A building of say six or seven storeys changes the height framework even though not much higher than the apartment buildings. It could be considered a transitional height but the height change is significant. A height above six storeys, assuming that all of these scenarios are well-designed, does not necessarily significantly change the visual impact or setting. Once a built form moves beyond the scale of three or four storeys it assumes a different relationship in the urban form of the area and while there is a difference between say 10 or 15 storeys, the impact on the immediate areas around it are not affected by the actual height but by the quality of the building, its setbacks, design, etc.

A built form in the vicinity of eighteen storeys that is appropriately designed and sited will not have an adverse impact on the heritage item or HCA provided it is designed to form a backdrop building.

Building orientation

While the subject site is not a corner site, a new building will need to address both Harold Street and the HCA with principal facades. A larger than usual setback from the east boundary will assist with this as will the combination of the three lots in Harold Street with the site of the heritage item. Ideally a built form would be an 'in-the-round' design with all facades as designed facades avoiding the commonly used blank side walls that may or may not be built against in the future.

Materiality and façade design

The materiality and façade form then becomes a critical element to allow the built form to be seen as a building in its own right but also a backdrop building. Good design can involve façade articulation and break up, use of solid and void, limits on glazing and generally not using curtain wall systems, avoiding highly reflective materials and facades, designing the building in the round without bare blank walls, creating an activated ground plane, perhaps of greater scale but which interacts with human scale, landscape and civic form.

There are no set materials but the use of curtain walls, extensive pre-cast panels, highly modular forms and blank and plain materials would not be appropriate for the site

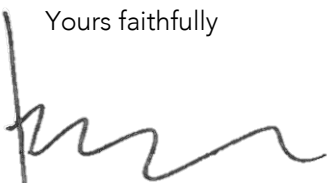
Summary

Having regard to the principles above, the resulting and proposed built form that incorporates the adjacent heritage item as part of the site is capable of achieving a high quality design and urban outcome for the location with minimal heritage impacts on the HCA or the adjacent heritage item. The intensification of development along the Church Street corridor will see a significant shift in height of buildings that form the backdrop to the HCA to the west. While there are limited views for most of the HCA in Sorrell Street to that backdrop due to the vegetation and scale of many of the buildings, it is important that development to the west is well-designed and has a relationship to the HCA.

The design, materiality and siting of new built forms are key elements. The height is a secondary consideration given the overall change of context that is taking place.

The concept proposal by Architectus achieves a good heritage and urban outcome for the site and area.

Yours faithfully



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