

## 12 December 2019 Meeting - Item No. 2

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<b>Date of Panel Assessment:</b>	12 December 2019
<b>Address of Project:</b>	118A Soldiers Point Road, Soldiers Point
<b>Name of Project (if applicable):</b>	N/A
<b>DA Number</b>	18-2019-64-1
<b>No. of Buildings:</b>	One building across three stages
<b>No. of Units:</b>	68
<b>Declaration of Conflict of Interest:</b>	Nil
<b>Attendees:</b>	<u>Applicant</u> Kelly O'Connell - Architect Matthew Brown - Planner Erin Daniel – Planner Simon Lack – Client Nick Sovechles – Client  <u>Port Stephens Council</u> Rean Lourens – Planning and Developer Relations Coordinator

## Background Summary

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The proposal was presented to the panel in an early Pre-DA form, with a view to receiving feedback in relation to possible support for an application for a revised Site Compatibility Certificate. The Certificate would replace the current version, which permitted an existing development approval, obtained in 2014 for the site. Blocks A and B have been constructed under the current approval, but the owner has commissioned advice in respect to possible alternative layouts, in the light of the presence of extensive areas of hard rock that would be required to be excavated for construction of the remainder of the approved design.

### 1. Context and Neighbourhood Character

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The site is located on the eastern side of the Soldiers Point peninsula and has freestanding single residences to its northern and western boundaries. To its south is a tourist park, consisting primarily of freestanding short-stay cabins. Immediately to the site's east is the open, at-grade car park of the Soldiers Point Bowling Club,



beyond which is the Club itself. The scale of buildings in the area is primarily of one or two storeys.

The existing approval is for an additional three long blocks of 2/3 storey residential units that are closely situated to each other, and are primarily orientated to the north. To the eastern edge of the site a further two smaller blocks are proposed to be situated on the edge of the Club car park. The ground plane surrounding the approved dwellings is largely taken up with driveways and exposed car parking that continues under the eastern two-thirds of each block. There is very limited opportunity for any landscaping between the approved blocks due to the presence of driveways and open car parking.

The site rises quite steeply towards its north-western corner, and the approved but unconstructed units rise with the topography of the site, to a maximum roof ridge level in the order of RL 26.4m. The close proximity of the approved blocks to one-another, coupled with the fall of the land, create substantial overshadowing of other units on the subject site, with the exception of those closest to the northern boundary.

## 2. Built form and scale

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The proposed seven storey building is quite a different form to the primarily lower-scaled buildings in the immediate area, although the Salamander Shores hotel is within the broader visual catchment, and is also a comparatively tall building, the perceived height of which is exaggerated by its being situated on a small knoll. While a single, tall block with apartments facing east and west is not a form that might be expected as an initial response to the context, it was considered by the panel to have a range of positive benefits as compared to the approved development. These identified benefits are considered to go to both residents in surrounding dwellings to the west, and to existing and future residents on the subject site. Substantially increased separation distances can be achieved by the new development from residences in Ash Street and Grandview Close to the west and north of the site. The concentration of dwellings in an apartment building also allows retention of existing trees on the higher part of the site, and a more attractive and generous area that offers good potential for an attractive landscape treatment for residents.

The maximum height of the proposal is 4.4m higher than the maximum roof height of the northernmost approved block. However, the proposal is viewed at a substantially increased distance from the residences above the site in Ash Street and Grandview Close, and the retention of existing trees and the potential addition of landscaping will add to a leafy outlook. The architect tabled some block diagrams that she had prepared for her own background information, that examined view impacts from three existing residences in Ash Street, one in Grandview Close, and from the completed Block A on the subject site. Though not intended as a presentation document, the block renderings appear to confirm that from these locations, the retained visual aspects from these nearby existing dwellings are clearly more appealing than would occur if the closer approved development were constructed.



### **3. Density**

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The panel was advised by the proponent that the number of dwellings achieved under the revised model would be slightly less than that achieved under the approved development. The panel indicated that any possible forthcoming support for the revised concept would be contingent in there being no additional floor space to that already approved.

### **4. Sustainability**

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Although the majority of the approved dwellings are orientated nominally to the north, the close proximity of one block to the next, and the fall of the land greatly reduce the opportunity for desirable northern sun. The proposed single block is orientated such that its water-view apartments face just north of east, meaning that the “garden-view” apartments on the other side of the corridor face slightly south of west, which would result in a greater summer afternoon sun exposure and less winter sun. It will be important to provide orientation-specific sun shading for openings to reduce summer sun impacts.

The reduced area proposed for exposed driveways and open air car parking is considered a more sustainable approach, and it is highly desirable that shade trees be introduced into the existing car parks of both the Club and the residences to reduce what appears to be a considerable expanse of heat-absorbing hard stand.

### **5. Landscape**

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The retention of the open space and the associated increase in deep soil area between the western façade and boundary is positive outcome of the new design, as is the potential for retention of existing vegetation.

The panel commented that the opportunity exists to provide a better interface between the ground floor and the green space by avoiding following the basement line and integrating a more naturalistic transition for the courtyards and communal terrace.

Considering the extent of hard surface with the combination of the carpark and the eastern façade, it is highly recommended that appropriately scaled shade tree planting be integrated into the carpark to provide shade, improve the outlook for residents and visually soften the view to the façade.

### **6. Amenity**

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The panel expressed concern in relationship to how one approaches the residential area through the Club car park – both by car and particularly as a pedestrian. This



applies equally to both the approved design and the revision. A minimal setback of a few metres is proposed between the tower's eastern side and the eastern boundary of its lot – which corresponds approximately with the car park's western edge. This needs further consideration both of terms of how the building appears, its opportunity for landscaping on the eastern side, and to its ongoing viability as a residential building should the Club land be in the future developed or sold. The Apartment Design Guide requires a 9m setback to the boundary for a building of this height, and it is important that a mechanism be applied – such as a boundary adjustment or an addition to the land title of the Club that provides an enduring assurance that a future development does not occur at an inappropriately close proximity to the residential building. In addition to this, a pleasant, safe, landscaped walkway needs to be defined allowing a pleasant, shaded approach to the residential area from Soldiers Point Road. This should be accompanied by car park landscaping with shade trees, to reduce the heat-island effects and provide a more appropriate foreground to a large residential building.

The nature of the long internal corridor was questioned by the panel, particularly in the absence of the ADG required natural light and ventilation to the corridor at multiple locations along its length. Access along the corridor should not be interrupted by any need to traverse fire stairs.

Consideration should be given to noise impacts of later stages of the development – particularly from mechanical noise transmitted through party walls. It may be an option to create a modest sized space (say 3m) between stages, with a glazed section of corridor joining them. This would also provide some needed articulation to a long, unbroken façade, and would potentially introduce some needed cross-ventilation.

## **7. Safety**

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The design is still in a schematic form, and pathways and landscaping have not yet been considered. Way-finding, fencing, security and the resolution of potential pedestrian/ car conflicts need to inform the ongoing design.

## **8. Housing Diversity and Social Interaction**

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The apartment mix appears appropriate.

The impact of the development on surrounding residents needs to be carefully considered. The panel was advised that multiple presentations of the proposal by the Club had received very positive feedback from local residents, which is considered to be an important aspect to any consideration of the proposal. As the site does not have a height control, and as the proposal is of greater height than the immediate surrounding development, it is considered important that a high level of local acceptance / support can be demonstrated for the proposal.



The potential for a very attractive landscape outcome on the residential site was acknowledged, and opportunities for resident activity – such as walking trails, seating, and possibly some simple exercise stations or activity points can be explored, as well as an attractive soft landscape scheme. The upper level common room was supported, as were smaller casual seating spaces on each floor.

## **9. Aesthetics**

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The treatment of the building exterior is currently in preliminary form, but the inclusion of primarily solid balcony balustrades and adjustable screens on balconies was strongly supported, as were the colours and finishes generally. Some additional articulation of the façade, and the roof was considered desirable – which might well go to inserting some breaks in the long form of the building.

The location of the building, and particularly its presentation from the east as it is approached from the street, need additional consideration, with the overall combined site being taken into account.

The building's visual impact from outside the site should also be considered, including views to it from surrounding streets.

## **Amendments Required to Achieve Design Quality**

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It is acknowledged that the design is in its fairly early stages, and to date the architect's brief limited to the area of the current Site Compatibility Certificate. The brief needs to be broadened to take in the club site, and an urban design consideration of the overall development in relation to pedestrian access and movement, and how the development is perceived from outside the site.

## **Recommendation**

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The panel sees merit in the proposal, and subject to design development along the lines discussed under the headings above, and subject also to ongoing local community support, the proposal offers the prospect of achieving a positive built outcome for its residents and the community - particularly when considered in comparison with the current approved design – which has a range of shortcomings.