



# Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel

## Meeting Minutes & Recommendations

Site Address:	40-76 William Street Leichhardt
Proposal:	A Stage One concept development application for an adaptive reuse proposal to convert an existing warehouse building to a residential use.
Application No.:	DA/2021/0437
Meeting Date:	27 July 2021
Previous Meeting Date:	31 January 2020 (at a previous Pre DA stage), and 15 September 2020 (at a previous DA stage)
Panel Members:	Matthew Pullinger – Chair, Jon Johannsen, and Diane Jones
Apologies:	-
Council staff:	Vishal Lakhia, Niall Macken, Rachel Josey, Chirag Bhavan, and Iain Betts
Guests:	-
Declarations of Interest:	None
Applicant or applicant's representatives to address the panel:	Paul Buljevic - Architect

### Background:

1. The Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel reviewed the urban design report, architectural drawings and landscape drawings, and discussed the proposal with the applicant through an online conference.
2. As a proposal subject to State Environmental Planning Policy No 65—Design Quality of Residential Apartment Development (SEPP 65), the Panel's comments have been structured against the 9 Design Quality Principles set out in SEPP 65.

### Discussion & Recommendations:

#### Principle 1 – Context and Neighbourhood Character

*"Good design responds and contributes to its context. Context is the key natural and built features of an area, their relationship and the character they create when combined. It also includes social, economic, health and environmental conditions.*

*Responding to context involves identifying the desirable elements of an area's existing or future character. Well designed buildings respond to and enhance the qualities and identity of the area including the adjacent sites, streetscape and*

*neighbourhood. Consideration of local context is important for all sites, including sites in established areas, those undergoing change or identified for change."*

1. The Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel restates a series of comments made since its first review (31 January 2020) and notes that as well as design issues, there are statutory planning considerations accompanying the proposed development, which directly relate to the planning pathway currently being pursued by the proposal.
2. The Panel notes that the Inner West LEP and DCP establish floor space incentives for the adaptive reuse of the identified warehouse buildings beyond the nominal FSR applicable to the site. This incentive is contingent on any additional floor space being 'generally contained within' the envelope defined by the existing warehouse volumes.
3. Although some flexibility may exist in the application of the DCP, the Panel restates its view that the extent of proposed new additions within the concept DA are clearly situated well beyond the volume of the existing warehouse forms and for this reason the proposal departs from the intent of the Inner West LEP and DCP, and cannot be supported by the Panel.
4. Exceeding the volume of the existing warehouses to the extent proposed creates a range of design issues discussed further in this report.
5. The Panel has previously indicated that a Planning Proposal may be a more appropriate planning pathway for a proposal seeking such an increase in building volume - although the Panel also notes an alternate planning pathway is not an automatic guarantee the site's development capacity might increase.
6. The Panel is concerned that the volumetric exceedance beyond the original buildings' volume - particularly in prominent locations - serves to diminish the significance and legibility of the original buildings. The Panel recommends any proposed volumetric additions should be recessive in terms of bulk, mass and visibility from the surrounding public domain. Impacts accompanying additions beyond the current envelopes should be shown in 3D views from surrounding streets, the rear of existing adjacent properties and the wider precinct.
7. If the stage 1 DA pathway continues to be pursued, the Panel recommends a considerable reduction in building mass to ensure the proposal is 'generally contained within' the existing volume of the warehouses, particularly those parts of the site with direct street frontages.
8. Additionally, the Panel would encourage the applicant to explore opportunities for lot amalgamation with adjoining sites, as this may alleviate some of the urban design issues related to site address and access, and permit further improvements relating to site planning.
9. Finally, the Panel understands that an alternative planning pathway such as a Planning Proposal would allow the applicant to give consideration to the inclusion of affordable housing within the proposal, which may assist in a planning justification for increased floor space (as a bonus).

## **Principle 2 – Built Form and Scale**

*"Good design achieves a scale, bulk and height appropriate to the existing or desired future character of the street and surrounding buildings.*

*Good design also achieves an appropriate built form for a site and the building's purpose in terms of building alignments, proportions, building type, articulation and the manipulation of building elements. Appropriate built form defines the public domain, contributes to the character of streetscapes and parks, including their views and vistas, and provides internal amenity and outlook. "*

1. The Panel restates its view that the proposed floor space ratio of approximately 2.17:1 significantly exceeds the maximum permissible floor space ratio of 0.5:1, which is a consequence - at least in part - of the significant additions beyond the envelope of the existing warehouse buildings. The Panel also notes that the floor space ratio of the existing warehouse buildings on the subject site is estimated at approximately 1.5:1. The proposed built form results in building form, massing and density impacts that are considered to be significantly greater than the site's capacity.
2. The Panel also discussed the resultant visual impacts of the proposed massing on the immediate public domain to the north and west, and associated overshadowing impacts created by the central sawtooth roofed building upon the townhouses located further to the south.
3. The Panel notes that only a small portion of the southern building is retained, effectively the perimeter walls, and there is significant new work proposed within the retained perimeter walls of the original building. The Panel considers this design strategy is not adaptive reuse of the original building and therefore further departs from the spirit of the LEP and DCP incentive clauses for adaptive reuse of warehouse buildings.
4. The Panel considers that the new infill built form addressing North Street, with a part 4-5 storey height, does not create an appropriate built form transition to the adjacent 2 storey townhouses further south along North Street.
5. The Panel notes the building located in the central southern portion of the site accommodates a significant proportion of the total number of proposed apartments. However, this building is isolated from both William Street and North Street and consequently has poor address. The address, entries and access to these apartments risk being disconnected from the public domain, and potentially create legibility and safety issues for residents and visitors alike.
6. It is noted that the proposal now includes some improved address via a proposed connection adjacent to the infill building on North Street, which partly responds to the Panel's concerns. However, the Panel restates its view that further widening of this connection, or the removal of this infill building altogether, could begin to improve connectivity and street presence of the southern building. In principle, the Panel is recommending an extension of the public domain (as a pedestrian lane or mews) into the site to provide public address to the central southern building. The proposal should include a thorough CPTED analysis.
7. The Panel restates its earlier concern for a significant number of apartments located within the buildings addressing William Street and North Street which are disconnected from the basement carpark proposed in the southern part of the site. Without convenient basement access to each building the extension of a safe, legible public domain within the site becomes more important.
8. The Panel expressed concern for the proposed building separation distances established by the central southern building, particularly where primary outlook for new residential uses is created across side boundaries to existing neighbours, and recommends proposed separation distances be consistent with the guidance provided in Part 2F Building Separation and Part 3F Visual Privacy of the NSW Apartment Design Guide.

## Principle 3 – Density

*“Good design achieves a high level of amenity for residents and each apartment, resulting in a density appropriate to the site and its context. Appropriate densities are consistent with the area’s existing or projected population.*

*Appropriate densities can be sustained by existing or proposed infrastructure, public transport, access to jobs, community facilities and the environment.”*

1. The Panel notes the permissible FSR for the site is 0.5:1. The proposal seeks 2.17:1. A range of indicators of excessive density are apparent in the proposal and have been discussed elsewhere in this report.

## Principle 4 – Sustainability

*"Good design combines positive environmental, social and economic outcomes. Good sustainable design includes use of natural cross ventilation and sunlight for the amenity and liveability of residents and passive thermal design for ventilation, heating and cooling reducing reliance on technology and operation costs. Other elements include recycling and reuse of materials and waste, use of sustainable materials, and deep soil zones for groundwater recharge and vegetation."*

1. Sustainability was not specifically discussed, however the Panel would expect that key targets established within the NSW Apartment Design Guide for solar access and cross ventilation should be met. Similarly, the Panel would strongly encourage further sustainability targets for water, energy and waste efficiency, and the investigation of further communal amenities and initiatives.

## **Principle 5 – Landscape**

*"Good design recognises that together landscape and buildings operate as an integrated and sustainable system, resulting in attractive developments with good amenity. A positive image and contextual fit of well designed developments is achieved by contributing to the landscape character of the streetscape and neighbourhood"*

*Good landscape design enhances the development's environmental performance by retaining positive natural features which contribute to the local context, co-ordinating water and soil management, solar access, micro-climate, tree canopy, habitat values, and preserving green networks. Good landscape design optimises usability, privacy and opportunities for social interaction, equitable access, respect for neighbours' amenity, provides for practical establishment and long term management."*

1. The Panel notes a lack of generous, centrally located communal open space able to equitably serve residents of all buildings within the proposal. Given the scale of the proposal, the Panel recommends a significant increase in communal open space of a scale appropriate to the overall density of the proposal.
2. Consistent with this point, the Panel suggests a more significant, consolidated communal open space could be provided between the northern and southern buildings, and this open space could extend for the full width of the site from the eastern boundary to the rear of the western building addressing North Street. This communal open space might also serve to improve the access and public address for the central southern building as discussed in Principle 2 above.
3. Additionally, the Panel suggests the northern and southern ends of the central southern building (infill Building C) could open up to maximise the outlook and sense of open space available to residents.
4. A greater extent of deep soil should be provided to create improved environmental and landscape benefits, allowing planting of trees with large canopies. These deep soil areas should ideally be co-located with the recommended central communal open space and along the side boundaries to adjacent properties to improve both visual privacy and amenity across site boundaries.
5. The Panel recommends the perimeter of the basement be adjusted to optimise these suggested deep soil areas. And an additional basement level may be considered to accommodate the required parking spaces within a smaller footprint.
6. The Panel discussed the purpose and treatment of the area to the west of the site [marked (A)]. This area appears to be hardstand, constrained by easements for access benefiting adjacent buildings. The Panel notes its configuration is ambiguous and needs further resolution and refinement.
7. The Panel also notes this area could potentially be landscaped and linked to the suggested central communal open space and further to North Street in order to improve the east-west permeability of the site and further improve building address for the otherwise isolated building set deep within the site. Any revised scheme should ensure that pedestrian amenity and connectivity is achieved in the landscape design, whilst maintaining access required for the adjoining terraces.

## **Principle 6 – Amenity**

*“Good design positively influences internal and external amenity for residents and neighbours. Achieving good amenity contributes to positive living environments and resident well being.*

*Good amenity combines appropriate room dimensions and shapes, access to sunlight, natural ventilation, outlook, visual and acoustic privacy, storage, indoor and outdoor space, efficient layouts and service areas, and ease of access for all age groups and degrees of mobility.”*

1. The second bedrooms of approximately 87 (out of 181) apartments within the central southern building rely on frontage to gallery access/common circulation corridors for outlook, natural light and ventilation, which creates potential visual and acoustic privacy issues within the proposal.
2. The Panel also notes that the NSW Apartment Design Guide offers guidance for establishing separation distances from any gallery access circulation areas. The Guide describes gallery access circulation as habitable space, and notes separation distances should be measured from the exterior edge of the circulation space to the adjacent bedroom.
3. The Panel considers that alternative building planning and configuration strategies should be examined to mitigate against, reduce or avoid such issues.
4. The Panel notes the detailed architectural drawings are now presented as an indicative design accompanying the Stage 1 envelope DA.
5. In any case, the Panel restates that drawings should clearly identify those elements of the existing warehouses proposed to be retained, reinstated, altered, demolished or added to. In their current form, the architectural drawings appear to contain ongoing discrepancies, errors and inconsistencies regarding the integration of existing and proposed new works within the warehouses.
6. The Panel has also identified conflicts between the internal space planning of the proposed new apartments and the location of existing structural columns and external walls and openings within the northwestern corner warehouse building.

## **Principle 7 – Safety**

*“Good design optimises safety and security, within the development and the public domain. It provides for quality public and private spaces that are clearly defined and fit for the intended purpose. Opportunities to maximise passive surveillance of public and communal areas promote safety.*

*A positive relationship between public and private spaces is achieved through clearly defined secure access points and well lit and visible areas that are easily maintained and appropriate to the location and purpose.”*

1. The Panel notes that fire egress from individual buildings to the surrounding public domain needs further resolution. The Panel also questioned the strategy for emergency vehicle access to the site, and noted that access to the western wing of the central southern building appears problematic.
2. As noted above, a detailed analysis of any public through site access should be undertaken with CPTED principles in mind.

## **Principle 8 – Housing Diversity and Social Interaction**

*Good design achieves a mix of apartment sizes, providing housing choice for different demographics, living needs and household budgets.*

*Well designed apartment developments respond to social context by providing housing and facilities to suit the existing and future social mix. Good design involves practical and flexible features, including different types of communal spaces for a broad range of people, providing opportunities for social interaction amongst residents.*

1. The Panel notes the mix of unit sizes and types appears appropriate, but encourages consideration of both affordable housing and potentially also limited non-residential uses (retail or commercial) to improve the diversity and activation offered by the proposal.

## Principle 9 - Aesthetics

*Good design achieves a built form that has good proportions and a balanced composition of elements, reflecting the internal layout and structure. Good design uses a variety of materials, colours and textures.*

*The visual appearance of well designed apartment development responds to the existing or future local context, particularly desirable elements and repetitions of the streetscape.*

1. The Panel notes the fundamental issues and indicators of excessive density referred to throughout this report. Setting these concerns aside, the Panel also notes that the indicative/illustrative renders accompanying the Stage 1 DA suggest the architect is capable of delivering an acceptable architectural character and expression. The Panel observes however, that a high quality architectural expression alone is not sufficient to compensate for the shortcomings resulting from excessive floor space and density.

## Non – SEPP 65 matters – General Discussion

N/A

## Amendments

See **Discussion & Recommendations** for details

## Conclusion

The Panel notes the fundamental issues of density, site planning, building form and mass associated with the proposal. As discussed within this report, the impacts resulting from these issues are considered to be excessive and are not supported by the Panel.

It is recommended that any revised proposal be accompanied by a more detailed urban context analysis and consider various alternative building envelope options. Each would focus on a reduced building mass and supported with sketch model 3D diagrams (in lieu of elaborate CGI imagery) to support a revised strategic site planning approach.