Design + Sustainability Advisory Panel Meeting Report – Date 02 February 2023

5 - DA2022/2181 - 69 Melwood Avenue FORESTVILLE

PANEL COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General

The site is zoned R2 Low Density Residential under the Warringah LEP 2011. The application is made pursuant to the provisions of *State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing) 2021.*

The application seeks consent for demolition works and the construction of a four-storey seniors housing development containing 7 self-contained units. The development consists of one building and includes: 5 x 3 bedrooms units; 2 x 2-bedroom units; 13 on-site parking spaces (12 resident, 1 visitor)

Adjoining and surrounding development is characterised by one to two storey residential dwellings of varying architectural styles. To the west of the site is the Forestville playing fields.

Strategic context, urban context: surrounding area character

The proposal is a substantial increase in building bulk and density compared to the neighbours. Finding ways to mitigate the bulk and scale is important. This could be done with greater side setbacks, a more slender built form and through the use of landscaping to soften the façade as well as reduce visibility from neighbouring sites. The apartments could be more efficiently designed to reduce the size of the building and incorporate more northern aspect to some of the apartments.

Recommendation

1. Reduce the overall building bulk and place the building in a landscaped setting to create a development that is more compatible with the existing context

Scale, built form and articulation

The building largely complies with the required building envelope for 3 storey buildings. These parts of the building are 3m – 3.7m from the side boundaries at ground level and 5.95m to 6.07m at 2 storey height (U101). These are acceptable side setbacks. However, there are no side setback controls for the 2 storey high parts of the building, where Units 202 and 203 are 1.72m and 4.435m from the side boundaries at the closest points. The 1.72m setback along the northern boundary should be a minimum of 2.5metres, so that a 5m separation between built forms would be created if the 2.5m setback were repeated in the future redevelopment of the adjoining site.

The proposal could be made more slender in plan by reducing gaps between parts of the building and undercroft areas of open air at the entry and inefficient interior planning. The Panel does not support the FSR 0.64:1 (909sqm, an excess of 198.3sqm more than the GFA for 0.5:1 FSR of 710.7sqm) on this site.

The building is set back further from the road than the neighbouring properties and will overlook adjoining rear yards. As noted, this is the result of the planning and can be avoided. The amenity of the open-air entry at ground level is questionable and will be addressed separately.

The panel strongly supports the proposed articulation of the build but notes that this should not be at the cost of efficient internal planning or result in an excessive building volume.

A more rational, compact plan could be achieved based on the following:

Ground Level

Storage Space - inefficient planning renders storage units small at the expense of extravagant circulation space. Corridor area should be reduced and allocated to storage.

G01/G02 - unit entries are remote from living areas leading to circuitous, inefficient corridors to bedrooms. Location of stair and lift creates inefficiency and relocation should be considered.

Level 2

U201 - Circuitous dog-leg entry would be enhanced if the front door led direct to Living Area reducing corridor space which could then be utilised more discrete laundry or reduction of unit footprint.

U202 - excessive corridors and bedroom areas absorb some 70% of apartment, could be reduced resulting in and increased northern boundary setback. Entry would be better located adjacent to living area with reduced circulation in bedroom wing.

U203 - separation of dining room from kitchen and living room is not desirable. Once again, location of lift and service riser creates awkward entry location.

Level 3

U301 should be rationalised as it is 139 sq.m.(including lift stair lobby) plus a 74 sq.m. balcony which is not accessible from any of the bedrooms. Attention should be given to providing direct access to the living areas as a mezzanine above the entry with bedrooms at the northern end may be a more compact.

Recommendations

2. Given the unnecessary impacts on neighbouring properties floor space in excess of 0.5:1 is not supported and internal planning should be rationalised with more of the floor area and floor places towards the street
3. A comprehensive re-design is required
4. Consideration could be given to reducing the voids on the ground level entry and reducing the depth of the entry lobby

Access, vehicular movement and car parking

The Panel understands that the traffic and car parking has not yet been assessed. The Panel has no comment other than to say that the side entry and location towards the front of the site is supported.

Landscape

Landscape Area delivers 54% site landscape area as opposed to min. 30%. Likewise deep soil is at 29% vs the required min. of 15% which are good outcomes.

Landscape plan is considered and provides good screening and amenity. The number of large endemic canopy species could be increased as only one *Angophora costata* is evident.

Recommendation

5. Increase endemic canopy species to at least 3 trees with adequate room and soil volume to achieve full growth potential

Amenity

The Panel strongly supports the overall strategy of orienting windows to the east and west and having a stepped, highly articulated side façades. This approach could be extended to bedrooms 2 and 3 in U101 to avoid overlooking.

The front entry has gaps between the buildings and would generally be supported, however these gaps are narrow and set back deeply from the building face above.

The entry way near the mail boxes is set in approximately 6 m from the south façade of the building face above creating an undesirable undercroft space.

The gap between U201 and U202 is narrow and the entry to U201 is awkward (would it not be preferable to have bathroom opening to the gap between buildings and then being naturally lit and ventilated, as could the ensuite in U202. This also applies to ensuite in U203).

There are many other improvements that could be made to the amenity and efficiency of the designs without losing the character that is aimed for.

It should be possible on a development of this scale to achieve good solar access to all dwellings.

Recommendations

6. In any re-design, aim to maximise natural light and ventilation to bathrooms
7. Aim to achieve good solar access for all dwellings

Façade treatment/Aesthetics

The Panel considers the aesthetics appropriate but suggests that the top level; facing the street have more modulation. This could be achieved by providing shading to the western facing window to the dining and kitchen areas of U301 that is shown as unshared in the current scheme.

Recommendations

8. Further articulate the upper level facing Melwood Avenue

Sustainability

Recommendations

Decarbonisation of energy supply

9. All services should be electric – gas for cooking, hot water and heating should be avoided. Heat pump hot water and Induction cooktops instead of gas
10. Heat pump systems for apartments or other ways of providing electric hot water should be considered
11. The storage of hot water can be considered a de-facto battery if heated by PVs during the day
12. Until technologies for the use of hydrogen are developed and introduced, note the risk of gas reticulation becoming a ‘stranded asset’ and the possibility of additional costs to remove gas and rewire the building
13. The Department of Planning advises that dwellings with electric heat pump hot water systems, efficient reverse cycle air conditioners and induction cooktops can achieve the higher BASIX standard. Accordingly, the Panel recommends that to contribute to design excellence in sustainability, these appliances and fittings be utilised as a sustainability commitment to avoid the use of high emission energy sources such as gas.
14. Guidance is also provided by the Australian Green Building Council https://gbca-web.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/a-practical-guide-to-electrification.pdf

Onsite power generation and storage

15. Unshaded roof space is a valuable resource
16. Using PV to provide shade to roof top common areas will generally be supported by the Panel if there are no additional adverse impacts
17. PVs over green roofs perform better due to the local lower ambient air temperature
18. On site battery storage has benefits for the grid and may be a highly desirable back-up during the transition to a de-carbonised grid

EV charging

19. Provide EV charging points for each unit
20. Allow for bi-directional (2-way) charging of EV battery for powering the building

Passive design and thermal performance of building fabric

21. The Panel notes that higher energy standards are under consideration by the Department of Planning in the document 'BASIX Higher Standards- Proposed changes for feedback'. Available here https://pp.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/draftplans/under-consideration/basix-higher-standards.
22. The Department advises that the higher BASIX thermal performance standards will be at least average 7 stars based on NatHERS rating system. This consistent with what the Federal Government proposes for the National Construction Code for 2022.
23. Reconsider the apartment layouts to include more northern windows in the apartments
24. Maximise natural ventilation of bathrooms

Water management

25. Consider increasing the size of the rainwater tank to at least 10,000L and increase the area of roof that drains to it
26. Consider connecting the rainwater tank to toilets as well and it may remove the need for washing machines or 6L showerheads

PANEL CONCLUSION

The Panel does not support the proposal in its current form. A complete redesign and substantial reduction in the floor area is required.

Rationalisation of the internal planning and reconsideration of some of the voids in the entry should allow the building bulk to be reduced and concentrated more to the west.

The Panel does not support more than FSR 0.5:1 in the current scheme.