



Design + Sustainability Advisory Panel Meeting Report – Date 07 October 2021

## 6. DA2021/1039 - 16 Wyatt Avenue BELROSE

### PANEL COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **General**

The proposal is for a Boarding house comprising 62 boarding accommodation rooms across two buildings of 2 and 3 storeys in rise, both with basement car parking.

The subject site falls within the Deferred Lands pursuant to the Warringah Local Environmental Plan 2011, meaning that that whilst Boarding House development may be permissible on the site, there are no specific planning controls applicable to the use, save the C8 Character statement. In the absence of specific planning controls, the panel have placed greater emphasis on the design quality of the proposal and it's consistency with the planning objectives.

The applicant draws comparison of the proposal to LEC approved boarding house on adjoining site (14 Wyatt Avenue). The panel acknowledge that whilst there are clear similarities between the proposed upper building to 14 Wyatt Avenue, the lower (rear) building is subject to significantly different site constraints and as such, any comparison is not relevant, and in no way should the approval for 14 Wyatt be considered to establish a 'precedent' for the lower building.

Notwithstanding, the Panel have considered the proposal as a whole.

The Panel have considered the degree to which the design responds to site conditions and have identified a number of aspects of the design which are incomplete and/or unresolved.

The design requires significant alterations for it to meet a minimum acceptable functional standard for it's intended purpose, let alone achieve positive and socially responsible accommodation.

The Panel also notes that the material lodged was inadequate in that it did not clearly identify key site constraints, did not adequately describe aspects of the proposal including roadway and stormwater infrastructure, and contained several errors, and inconsistencies.

#### **Strategic context, urban context: surrounding area character**

It is not the role of the Panel to comment on the permissibility of the land use. However, in commenting on the 'quality' of the design, the Panel should and does consider the fit with the context, the site, and the desired future character of the area as well as the objectives of the planning controls.

In other words, the question of whether or not the land use is permissible can be separated from questions of whether the design, built form and arrangement of buildings achieve the planning objectives.

In the Panel's view, development standards are formulated to ensure these objectives are met.

It follows that in considering design quality, the Panel expects a proposal to demonstrate how the planning objectives have been met if it does not comply with the development standards (irrespective of the permissibility of the land-use).

The objectives for the site are quite clear as expressed in the 'desired future character statement':

*The present character of the Belrose North locality will remain unchanged except in circumstances specifically addressed as follows.*

***The natural landscape including landforms and vegetation will be protected and, where possible, enhanced. Buildings will be grouped in areas that will result in the minimum amount of disturbance of vegetation and landforms and buildings which are designed to blend with the colours and textures of the natural landscape will be strongly encouraged.***



***Development will be limited to new detached style housing conforming with the housing density standards set out below and low intensity, low impact uses.***

The proposal involves significant disturbance of the site. Excavation exceeds 6m depth, site levels are altered significantly and an access driveway is designed to vary from existing site levels by almost 4m, presenting as an overbearing civil structure on the site. Existing rock outcrops would be disturbed, destroyed in part and obscured. Almost all trees on the lot would require to be removed. The proposal clearly does not *protect or enhance the natural vegetation and/or landform* and resulting development could not be considered to have *low impact or low intensity use*.

The proposal comprises two buildings circa 50m and 60m long respectively and which would house up to 124 occupants.

Reading the objectives for the locality, it is the Panel's view that this scale of development (regardless of whether it contains dwellings) was not anticipated by the applicable density control of 1 dwelling per 20 hectares. Likewise, the scale of development is considered inconsistent with the desired future character statement in that it is neither low impact or low intensity in use.

Whilst boarding house development may be permissible on the site, the Panel questions the suitability of the site for such a high density of accommodation in this location given the permissible uses on adjoining and nearby sites such as animal boarding or industries.

Conversely, there will be considerable impacts associated with this number of residents upon neighbouring residents and School operations including comings and goings, waste presentation, privacy etc.

There is also the question of whether the development poses a negative public benefit, especially relating to the following items which may be considered individually and in their aggregate:

- Traffic and parking availability
- Landform and vegetation degradation
- Additional demand upon limited public transport
- Impacts upon adjacent land held by Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council.

All of these considerations have informed the comments and recommendations that follow.

These notes and recommendation should not be interpreted as an acceptance of the current scheme. A comprehensive re-design is required, including the deletion of the entire lower building, but the Panel also notes that there are many detailed aspects that also require resolution in any revised scheme.

### **Recommendations.**

1. Any development should be limited to the upper plateau at the southern end of the site to protect natural vegetation and landform

### ***Scale, built form and articulation***

Two buildings are proposed. The upper building is located at the southern end of the site, adjacent to Wyatt Avenue, is 3 storeys in height and approximately 50m long. The lower building is located centrally on the site, between 100m and 160m from Wyatt Avenue, is 2 storeys in height and approximately 60m long.

Both buildings have basement parking located beneath, partly above ground and partly below ground. In the case of the upper building, the basement is approximately 6m below ground at the southern end.

Each building is articulated into three major volumes and fenestrated with repetitive window bays. En-masse, and combined with the hardscape proposed, the built form presents as monolithic and relentless. This is exacerbated by the similarity of the approved adjacent building.



Despite the size and topography of the site, the buildings are configured in such a way that the pedestrian circulation paths, and boarding rooms do not benefit from the bushland setting and rather, the experience is of a hard, vehicular infrastructure dominated place with compromised privacy.

Proximity of windows to access driveway/walkway compromises privacy and amenity.

The upper building is not compliant with required side setbacks. On the western side, a strategy of angling views is a successful response, however, the eastern setback is compromised by the proximity of windows to the proposed driveway as well as by the resulting minimal landscaping in the side setback zone.

### **Recommendations.**

2. Layout of buildings and driveways should be configured to maximise landscape opportunities and improve pedestrian amenity and connection with bushland setting
3. Wherever driveway is in close proximity to accommodation rooms, shutter views to eliminate overlooking and glare.

## ***Access, vehicular movement and car parking***

### **Pedestrian Access and Address**

The upper building enjoys direct street access via pathway in the front setback zone.

The only means of pedestrian entry to the lower building is via a narrow, steep pathway located directly adjacent the entry driveway. The path of travel from the boundary to the front door of the building is 'non-accessible' and approximately 145m in length. The Panel considers this to be a particularly undignified access solution, especially as a large proportion of residents have been presumed to enter and exit on foot daily.

Furthermore, this configuration creates ambiguity of address in circumstances such as when food might be delivered to residents.

### **Egress**

The Panel notes that the design relies upon a large list of fire engineered solutions, which in some areas have been used to good effect in providing natural light to common areas etc. We bring attention to the matter so that confidence can be gained in the safety of the design i.e., the Panel questions whether safe exit from rooms 21-26 in the event of a fire in the central fire compartment of the ground level of the same building.

### **Vehicular Access and Car Parking**

As mentioned above, driveway is configured to form a significant imposition on the site, requiring a high intensity of civil works including deep cut and fill. The driveway is also positioned adjacent and above room windows, so will subject rooms to overlooking and headlight glare, particularly relevant to shift workers whom have been identified as likely residents.

The Panel questions the driveway configuration and whether vehicular access could be shared with the adjoining lot to minimise vehicular infrastructure.

Acknowledging that parking will be required for many of the residents due to the nature of the location, the panel questions the ratio of parking to residents and makes the suggestion that some parking might be located on grade to reduce excavation of the site.

### **Recommendations**

4. Following recommendation 1. delete vehicular access ramp to lower portion of the site to minimise imposition of vehicular infrastructure
5. Following recommendation 1. restrict any development to where access may be conveniently and equitably gained from the street
6. Provide any boarding house development on the site with a clear address to street



7. Share vehicular access with adjacent site to maximise opportunities for landscaping on site and reduce imposition of driveway on rooms
8. Consider a reduction in the amount of underground parking and potentially integrate on grade parking to reduce excavation
9. Seek advice prior to re-submission in order to gain confidence in any fire engineered solutions proposed.

## **Landscape**

As much of the site has previously been cleared and so cannot be 'kept as natural bushland', 50% of the site must be landscaped with local species. The landscape plan is not compliant in this respect. Furthermore, the siting of buildings and roadways has resulted in a degree of site level alteration well beyond what could be considered 'minimal'. The Panel considers that the landscape design is not consistent with Appendix C, WLEP2000

The landscape areas provided are overwhelmed by vehicle infrastructure and without clearly identified uses. Pedestrian pathways are narrow and tedious and despite the site's elevation and setting, do not respond to take advantage of these site features.

OSD Detention basin would not be functional in the location indicated without significant (6m) alteration to the land form. Any required land form alteration has not been designed or indicated, so design is not considered to be functional. It may be that no suitable location exists without significant re-planning of the built form.

## **Recommendations.**

Note: these recommendations refer to the upper building and surrounds. The Panel assumes that the lower building should not, and will not proceed.

10. Landscape at least 50% of site with local species - noting the likely requirement for an APZ, select species with manageable fuel load.
11. Utilise more of site for higher amenity, functional landscape spaces and connections which relate to bushland setting
12. Provide design with coordinated, functional OSD solution

## **Amenity**

In addressing amenity, the Panel has considered the need for accommodation of this type as well as the requirements of the residents to live with access to reasonable levels of amenity.

The design of the buildings has resulted in most common areas including corridors and stairs having access to daylight and natural ventilation which is to be commended. Further, common rooms have been located in locations which enjoy high levels of solar access and views which is preferred.

Several rooms are in close proximity and either at or below eye level to entrance driveway and walkway, so will be subject to overlooking and headlight glare.

Outlook of many rooms is dominated by roadway and associated retaining structures.

Laundry facilities are located in basement, outdoor drying areas have not been identified.

Kitchens have not been provisioned for within accommodation rooms, meaning residents do not have the option of preparing food autonomously and cannot opt out of social interaction. The submitted plan of management prohibits preparation of food within rooms.

The Panel is aware that the principal reason for not providing individual kitchens is to circumvent the planning control that limit the density of 'dwellings'.

This may be acceptable if adequate communal kitchen facilities were provided, however, only 1 kitchen of 4.7m length has been provided in each building, with no provision for communal refrigeration. In the case of the upper building, potentially 44 residents including the caretaker share 1 cooktop and one sink. In the case of the lower building, potentially 80 residents including the caretaker share 1 cooktop and 1 sink. The Panel consider this a serious flaw of the design and one that would likely be the cause of



social, wellbeing, health and safety issues if it were to proceed. In this respect, the design is not functional and would require significant amendment to meet an acceptable level of amenity. In other words, the current scheme is not realistic.

The Panel refers to similar models of accommodation, such as student accommodation where, even in inner city locations with much greater convenience and access to shops, restaurants and other food outlets, kitchens are typically shared between a maximum of 5 occupants. By extension, this proposal should require to provide in the order of 25 residential sized kitchens for 124 residents.

It appears that has been no research on these or similar types of accommodation to inform the design.

**The Panel is aware that the principal reason for not providing individual kitchens is to circumvent the planning controls that limit the density of 'dwellings' in the locality.**

### **Recommendation.**

13. Maintain access to daylight and natural ventilation to common corridors and stairs wherever possible
14. Maintain communal rooms in preferred locations where sun and views may be accessed at different times of the day
15. Reconfigure design to eliminate any situations where privacy and amenity of rooms is compromised by driveway (ref recommendations 1, 4, 7)
16. Consider locating communal laundry on upper level of building so that laundry space may more readily lend itself to safe incidental social interactions. Locate convenient outdoor drying facilities adjacent to laundry
17. Re-configure some or all rooms to contain kitchens for autonomous meal preparation and/or;
18. Reconfigure design to provide number and size of communal kitchens adequate to provision for rooms without internal kitchens. In other words, provide residential size kitchen per cluster of 2 or 3 rooms to share, or else, purpose designed larger communal kitchens suitable for clusters of 4-6 rooms.

### ***Façade treatment/Aesthetics***

Facade treatments including fenestration elements are highly repetitive and in conjunction with massing and landscape treatments, contribute to a contiguous, monolithic appearance to the built form.

With the exception of the angled windows on the western elevation of the upper building, the design does not appear to relate to the site's unique characteristics

### **Recommendation.**

19. Fenestration and architectural features should be configured to improve privacy and respond more directly to site features and aspect
20. Materiality and form should derive from and respond to the site conditions and bushland setting

### ***Sustainability***

BASIX certificate alludes to the provision of cooktops, fridges and ovens in every room. This is clearly inconsistent with the proposal.

The applicant referred to BASIX certificate not being required, whereas it is the understanding of the Panel that whilst NaTHERS is not required for Class 3 Accommodation, BASIX will be required.

### **Recommendations**

21. Increase PV provision
22. Connect the rainwater to toilets
23. Address inconsistency between proposal and BASIX certificate



24. Clarify matter of requirement of BASIX certificate for Class 3 buildings by providing any supporting official advice

## PANEL CONCLUSION

The proposal is classified as Category 3 in the WLEP 2000 for the C8 locality. The LEP states *“the consent authority **must be satisfied** that the development is **consistent** with the desired future character described in the relevant Locality Statement, but nothing in a description of desired future character creates a prohibition on the carrying out of development.*

In other words, development of the site is possible if the objectives are met.

**The Panel does not support the proposal and advises that the degree of impacts on the landscape including landforms and vegetation is not consistent with the objectives of the locality.**

**It is the Panel’s view that no structure should be located on the lower part of the site as requirements for vehicular access to that part of the site would have an unacceptable impact on the natural features of the site.**

**The Panel advises that this is not related to the building typology that would be permissible, but to the impacts due to the sites topography existing vegetation, natural features and context.**

The overall site masterplan and site layout must demonstrate a solid understanding of how the sites unique assets including trees, vegetation, fauna, topography have been addressed and incorporated into the planning.

In other words, it is the values and characteristics of the site that should determine the eventual quantum of floor space and arrangement of built form.

The overall site master plan requires extensive redesign and needs to demonstrate how the project responds and accommodates people who will reside, visit and work on the site and how the site design responds to the site’s unique landscape and topography.

**The Panel also notes the inadequacy of the kitchen arrangements, that appear to be solely focused on circumventing the density controls, and the poor social outcomes that will result.**

**The Panel recommends that the applicant prepare an alternative scheme which minimises impact on the site’s landform and takes all above recommendations into consideration supported by a thorough site analysis and analyses of similar accommodation to show how food preparation and common areas will function.**