

Design + Sustainability Advisory Panel Meeting Report – Date 28 November 2024

## **Item 5 – 12-14 Gladys Avenue FRENCHS FOREST NSW 2086**

### **PANEL COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### ***General***

The site has a long planning history including previous proposals for Seniors Living Development – 20 dwellings in 2018, 18 dwellings in 2020, a subdivision into 6 lots in 2021 and a subdivision into four lots in 2022.

Key challenges of the site have been serviceability, topography and the relationship of each proposal to the existing natural outcrop on site and the neighbouring land.

The proposal in front of the panel is a completely new design for a seniors housing development of 19 units. The design is an improvement when compared to previous submissions.

The Panel notes the absence of north-points on plans, making the drawings difficult to read.

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

The site is located in an R2 zone and relies on SEPP Housing for permissibility. The proposal has a non-compliant FSR at 0.56:1 or 2641m<sup>2</sup> which is over the permissible 0.5:1 by 428sqm.

The site is within 200m walking distance of the new Frenchs Forrest Town Centre which is undergoing densification and urban transformation. The current, immediate surrounding context is characterised by 1-2 storey dwellings. Redevelopment of land is starting to occur in the surrounding area. Immediately adjacent to the site at 16 Gladys Avenue a two-storey boarding house development has been approved. A small three-storey Seniors Living development is under construction at 8 Gladys Avenue.

There is strategic merit for greater density than single dwelling houses on site.

The SEPP requires any proposal to justify how it fits with either an existing or changing context. The documents provided by the applicant include a site plan but a more detailed analysis of the changing nature of the area is needed.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Prepare an urban context analysis to provide strategic and built-form justification for the proposal.
2. As part of this analysis prepare a detailed 3D context model (to assist with visualisations) capturing the site's complex topography, existing natural landscape features and the constraints associated with intensification of development on the site (including but not limited to building footprint and excavation) and in particular by placing a large-scale building form within an area of low-scale housing.

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

The siting strategy is generally supported, in particular, buildings A and B which are appropriately well-scaled forms. Building C steps down the hill, presenting a much bigger scale and façade.

The key SEPP Housing control of a maximum height of 9.5m assumes a 3-storey built form. Due to the substantial excavation, a whole floor appears to be below ground (refer to sections), combined with the sloping nature of the site, the rear of the development (building C) presents as 4 storey form (5 when viewed against the other Buildings [A and B] in the development). This presents an excessively high building elevation to the adjacent single-storey dwellings to the north, which the Panel does not support.

In his presentation, Peter Smith, the architect, noted an intention to “interact minimally with the rock face” and “respect the topography”, as well as that the proposal “generally presents a two-storey form”. The

Panel supports these intentions but does not accept that they are completely evident in the design proposal as documented in the drawings.

The relationship of the building mass to the rock outcrop and the extent of excavation remains unclear but would appear to involve substantial removal and/or alteration of this natural site feature. The Panel is of the opinion that the outcrop is a significant topographical feature - bisecting the entire site and adjoining sites – and it is worth preserving. In this regard, the Panel supports the opinions expressed by Council's landscape architect. The proposal seems to cut into the outcrop for a substantial distance (more than half of the site) and the Panel considers the degree of the disturbance as presented in the submitted sections is unacceptable.

### **Recommendations**

3. The proposed 3D model should capture the outcrop in its existing form and clearly show the volume of rock to be removed.
4. Consideration should be given to a reduction in overall building bulk, scale and excavation. In particular, attention should be given to the removal of one complete floor (bottom-most level) of building C. This would help to resolve FSR non-compliances and provide a better contextual fit. It will also reduce the amount of excavation and disturbance of the sandstone outcrop.
5. Alternatively, consideration might be given to a reduced footprint for building C to give greater visual and spatial presence to the rock outcrop and to potentially allow it to become part of a more centralised and equally accessible communal open space. A reduction in the size of the building footprint of building C would also help to deliver a better design outcome – one that is more appropriate for a development of this scale in the R2 zone.
6. Stated design intentions (e.g. respecting the topography and presenting a two-storey form) need to be more fully realised in the drawn documentation and design detail.

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

As a battle-axe lot the site has a long driveway from Gladys Avenue to reach the two basement levels under building A. The RL at the boundary is 156.4. The RL of the lowest basement level is RL146.8. Pedestrian access is provided separately and adjacent to the entry driveway. The driveway narrows to a single lane where pedestrians cross which will ensure that cars slow down to look for oncoming traffic.

Due to its geometry and topography the site has longer travel distances to get from the property boundary to the carpark and individual unit entries. The main courtyard which is a great asset to residents is at bottom and rear of the site and not accessible by lift or compliant accessible ramps.

### **Recommendations**

7. As part of the review of Building C explore if a main courtyard and key communal open space can be accessible.

## ***Landscape***

The proposed development is quite expansive with many separate buildings in part to accommodate the terrain of this steep site. In some areas there is very little room between the buildings which create some deep channels with little sunlight and these areas would be prone to developing moss and mould on the surfaces making them slippery which is not ideal for a seniors development.

Previous Pre-Lodgement meetings and landscape referral responses have indicated non-support for developing over or within the rock escarpment as this is contradictory to elements of the DCP and shows a disregard for this landscape feature to be thought of as a site opportunity and not a constraint.

### **Recommendations**

8. Retention of the entire rock escarpment and blending it into the overall building design as a feature should be considered in accordance with the Warringah DCP, Part E6 Retaining unique



environmental features "Development is to be designed to address any distinctive environmental features of the site and on adjoining nearby land."

9. More areas between buildings should be dedicated to deep soil planting with less hard paved areas.
10. Tree retention and protection
  - Trees 4, 5, 6, 7, and 11 are all trees worthy of retention with T7 - *Angophora costata* is classified as an AA1 significant tree with a 20-metre height and a 20-metre spread. If not properly protected and managed during the construction period, this tree could undergo irreparable damage requiring its removal. There will be a significant amount of truck movements into and out of the site which needs to be considered.
  - The project Arborist should write a specific management statements with clear methodology of tree protection measures for each of these trees to help to ensure their ongoing health and vigour.
11. Water sensitive design
  - Rainwater should be used to water the gardens and a permanent and automatic irrigation system should be set up for use within all of the proposed garden beds.
12. Plant selection
  - a. The planting scheme should favour plant selections from the threatened Duffy's Forest Plant Community which would have been prominent in this area.

## **Amenity**

The units including individual rooms and the private open space are generous with most units facing north for outlook and excellent solar. The pavilion nature of most buildings ensure that units typically have three external facades easily enabling cross ventilation and good solar access, as well as a range of outlooks. There are a couple of single aspect units on the lower levels of Building C sitting within the excavated rock which may be improved by reduction of exaction and rethinking of Building C.

## **Recommendations**

13. The Panel is mindful that the constraints of the steep site, and the inaccessibility of some existing landscape at the lower levels and the practical difficulties of offering full, direct, at-grade lift access, might inhibit access to all communal open space. However, these less accessible spaces should be considered supplementary features of the open space and proper provision should be made elsewhere for compliant, well-designed and accessible communal open space.

## **Façade treatment/Aesthetics**

The proposal includes good consideration of materiality. The size of openings and breakdown on individual facades provide an appropriate scale for a low scale residential development.

## **Recommendations**

Nil

## **Sustainability**

As the impacts of climate change become more obvious, the need for action becomes more paramount. With the international built environment responsible for up to 40% of emissions, the opportunities to cost effectively contribute to reductions while delivering social benefits are huge.

In line with this, as the grid is decarbonised, the importance of embodied carbon is finally being realised in Australia. The SEPP for Sustainable Buildings and NABERS are both starting the journey of requiring calculations around this carbon that is realised up front at the beginning of projects. Targets to address this large amount will be set soon. While this is not required now, design excellence is never driven by what is required – it helps set the direction. Leading designers are now showcasing how to embrace this positively.

The Panel commends the Proponent and Architect in their commitment to all electric services and other sustainability ideas, including the significant number of apartments oriented to the north.

## Recommendations

The following aspects of design and servicing can be easily and cost-effectively considered for inclusion:

### 14. Decarbonisation of energy supply

As noted by the proponents, all services are to be electric. The proponent should update the BASIX certificate to reflect this.

Heat pump systems for providing electric hot water need adequate space for their proper ventilation. The storage of hot water can be considered a de facto battery if heated by PVs during the day.

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

Locations for PV panels and associated equipment should be clearly indicated on the plans.

### 15. Passive design and thermal performance of building fabric

Engage a fabric first approach to ensuring amount of energy required for heating and cooling can be kept to a minimum. This can be enhanced with appropriate orientation, smart built form, good insulation and sealing, well designed natural ventilation, external shading devices and appropriate planting.

Consider investing in higher than the minimum Section J requirements in preparation for the changing climate we are experiencing.

The inclusion of ceiling fans to all rooms will provide comfort with minimal energy while reducing the need and energy required for air-conditioning.

### 16. Water use minimisation

Harvest rainwater from roofs and ensure the tank is connected to the toilets to maximise reuse. This will also reduce the size of tank required because the water will be used constantly.

All fixtures and appliances should be water efficient

Landscape design and planting should support biodiversity and be water tolerant and suitable for the microclimate – see comments under Landscaping.

### 17. Embodied carbon

Consider the following approaches to reducing the embodied carbon of the project:

Retention and reuse of the existing building materials in the design:

reuse of bricks if they can be cleaned

use of ground masonry into aggregate for concrete or larger fragments for gabion walls, either on site or elsewhere

Finding new homes for any equipment, fixtures, materials etc that are no longer required in the new work

Simplified structures and reduced spans to reduce the amount of steel reinforcement and concrete required

Simplified building envelopes with minimal steps in facades and minimal fixings

Keeping small and optimising the quantity and quality of space required

Dematerialising wherever possible (e.g. bare concrete floors, reduced tiling etc)

Designing for long life for the overall building and how to address different time frames for structure, envelope, services, fitouts etc.

Consideration of using biogenic materials such as timber for structure

Using low embodied carbon concrete, recycled steel and recycled materials wherever possible

## **PANEL CONCLUSION**

**The Panel does not support the proposal in its current form.**

**Whilst the Panel supports the general approach to site layout, amenity and materiality it does not support the extent of excavation, the impact of the proposal on the rock outcrop, as well as the design of building C presenting as a 4-storey building to the rear of the site. The Panel is of the view that the proposal represents an over-development given the surrounding R2 neighbourhood context.**

**The substantial removal of the sandstone outcrop is not supported and the impact on the privacy of surrounding dwellings (and in particular their private open space) remains a concern. Reductions to the bulk and scale of the development, as viewed from the north – are sought.**