



Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel

Meeting Minutes & Recommendations

Site Address:	1-5 Wetherill Street Leichhardt
Proposal:	Mixed use development including refurbishment of the existing place of public worship, community centre and a boarding house with Manager's accommodation.
Application No.:	PDA/2021/0231
Meeting Date:	10 August 2021
Previous Meeting Date:	None
Panel Members:	Russell Olsson (External Member); Michael Zanardo (External Member); Niall Macken (Internal Member); and Vishal Lakhia (Internal Member) – Chair
Apologies:	-
Council staff:	Iain Betts; and Eric Wong
Guests:	-
Declarations of Interest:	None
Applicant or applicant's representatives to address the panel:	Tone Wheeler – Architect

Background:

1. The Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel reviewed the architectural drawings and 3D views, and discussed the proposal with the applicant through an online conference.

Discussion & Recommendations:

1. The Panel understands the applicant has sought a Pre-DA meeting with Inner West Council and a separate meeting with the Inner West Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel to enable an early discussion regarding the applicant's future vision for redevelopment of the site. The Panel is made aware that the Pre-DA architectural drawings provided for the meeting are preliminary in nature, resulting from a client invitation seeking an opportunity to begin this discussion.
2. The Panel is aware that there are statutory planning issues concerning the current site zoning (SP2) and permissibility of the proposed activities and land use (affordable housing/residential) on the subject site. The Panel notes that there is a significant increase in the overall built form (the proposed building height, setbacks and building depths) and the proposed intensity on the subject site. The Panel discussed that the floor space ratio of the current buildings is approximately 1:1, and the floor space ratio of the proposal is approximately 1.98:1. The Panel considers that the zone permissibility and floor space ratio are both statutory planning matters which directly impact the planning pathway, and discussed whether a Pre-DA or a Planning Proposal should be considered by the applicant.
3. The Panel notes that the subject site is predominantly occupied by the Former Methodist Central Hall which is currently listed as a heritage item. The proposed part-demolition of this heritage item is questionable and not supported by the Panel. The Panel is aware that the subject site

adjoins other heritage listed items such as the Leichhardt Town Hall and the Former Leichhardt Post Office building. The subject site is also located in the Wetherill Estate Heritage Conservation Area (HCA C14).

4. Input at an early stage from a suitably qualified heritage expert is recommended to further develop this proposal, given the heritage listed church hall on the site, and its adjacencies to the surrounding heritage items, and its location within a heritage conservation area. The Panel considers that an acceptable architectural and urban design outcome for the project cannot be achieved unless a thoughtful consideration is given to holistic master planning and preparation of a urban design strategy.
5. The Panel considers a detailed urban design and contextual analysis is essential given the scale, nature and complexity of the proposal. The study area should extend from south of Marion Street, west of Norton Street, east of the Council administration building and north of Wetherill Street. The analysis should be in 2D and 3D, with a 3D model of the context and site being the basis for the proposed design.
6. The 3D model should be the basis for testing of views from many view points, distant and in close proximity to the site (e.g. Wetherill Street, Norton Street, Marion Street, and the surrounding public domain). The relative sensitivities of built form outcomes should be assessed and a desirable building envelope outcome produced. The Panel considers that the 3D views analysis should ensure that visual emphasis and prominence of the roof form, towers and other significant features of the heritage items in the cluster of public buildings located within the vicinity of the site is retained.
7. The master planning options should establish an appropriate built form relationship with the existing low density dwelling houses across Wetherill Street, the former Post Office building and the Leichhardt Town Hall, and the pedestrian and vehicular links adjacent to the site . The building massing, architectural expression and materials palette should be developed using visual cues from the surrounding heritage buildings and their significant building elements.
8. The master planning options should ensure that buildings are sited to maximise the address to the public domain. The built form should create an acceptable 'breathing space' or a curtilage around the heritage church, the former Post Office and the Leichhardt Town Hall. It is also the Panel's preference that the heritage listed church building is entirely retained, given its already established significance.
9. The Panel recommends investigation of other recent examples in Sydney of redevelopment of church sites in urban locations that may provide typological precedent for this type of project.
10. The Panel notes that the presented scheme included aspects of compromised residential amenity such as rooms below ground level, visual privacy issues to entry paths due to the gallery access configuration, the need for screened windows, and constrained outlook. The Panel encourages that future schemes (post-urban design study) give further attention to delivering better quality residential amenity in these respects. Similarly, further consideration should be given to fire egress, kitchen and bathroom provision, and accessibility requirements in future schemes.
11. The proposal should be prepared for discussion at a formal Pre-Lodgement meeting.