



# Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel

## Meeting Minutes & Recommendations

Site Address:	138-156 Victoria Road Rozelle
Proposal:	State Significant Development Application (SSDA) - Mixed use development involving - the demolition of existing buildings and construction of a maximum 16 storey mixed used development comprising: basement car parking; commercial and retail uses across a shared non-residential podium (including the Balmain Leagues Club tenancy); three interconnected residential apartments; and a 2-3 storey building with live/work units and apartments. A total of 240 residential dwellings, with 15% to be dedicated to affordable housing.
Application No.:	EXT 2024 0006
Meeting Date:	15 October 2024
Previous Meeting Date:	6 July 2024, 21 February 2023, 31 January 2020, 12 November 2019, and at previous reviews as part of the (former) Architectural Excellence Panel (AEP)
Panel Members:	Diane Jones (chair) Peter Ireland Tony Caro
Apologies:	-
Council staff:	Vishal Lakhia Eric Wong Delia Galao Iain Betts Martin Amy Sinclair Croft
Guests:	-
Declarations of Interest:	None
Applicant or applicant's representatives to address the panel:	The applicant's team was invited by Council to meet with the Panel and discuss their proposal. The applicant's representative (Mike Turner) briefly attended towards the end of the scheduled meeting time, to provide a project overview to the Panel.

## Background:

1. The Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel reviewed the architectural drawings and discussed the proposal with Council's assessment team through an online conference. The project has a long history of being reviewed by the Panel on multiple occasions as part of the planning proposal, predevelopment application, development application and the subsequent modification application stages.
2. The Panel was informed at the meeting that the applicant's team was invited to attend the meeting to present and discuss the proposal with the Panel. However, they did not join the online session other than the applicant's representative (Mike Turner), who briefly joined towards the end of the scheduled meeting time to provide a project overview to the Panel.
3. The Panel acknowledges that the proposal is subject to Chapter 4 – State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) Housing 2021 - Design of residential apartment development - and the NSW Apartment Design Guide (ADG) applies to the proposal. Additionally, the Panel reviewed the proposal in terms of design excellence as required by the Inner West Local Environmental Plan 2022 – Clause 6.9.
4. The Panel understands that this application is lodged as an amending State Significant Development Application (SSDA) as it seeks consent for a mixed use development with an estimated cost exceeding \$75M, increased basement footprint and carparking, modified residential floor plans to revise the apartment mix and increase in the total number of dwellings, with subsequent modifications to the architectural forms. The Panel notes that an additional 80 apartments with 59 new affordable dwellings (for a minimum 15-year period) are proposed by this amending SSDA.
5. The Panel is mindful of the lengthy process and complexity with this development, and notes that the previous approval was for a 11/12 storey residential building of 147 residential apartments. The amending SSDA increases the heights to 14/15/16 storeys with a total of 227 apartments. The Panel was informed at the meeting that the proposed height of 14 to 16 storeys excludes double height and mezzanine spaces, so the overall height outcome is potentially much greater than an additional four storeys.

## Discussion & Recommendations:

1. The Panel's focus was on the impacts from the additional height and floor space ratio uplift to a *maximum* of 30%. This is directly attributable to the NSW state-government recent affordable housing bonuses made available to developers to mitigate the current housing supply crisis. In the Panel's view, the proposal appears completely 'out-of-character' with its existing Rozelle context, including both along Victoria Road and particularly Darling Street with its lower scaled and heritage fabric.
2. The applicant's strategy of simply extruding the form for an additional four levels has diminished the design quality of the approved scheme. The resultant 14-16 storey form appears excessively bulky and too high in its context. The relative merits of alternative strategies have not been tested comprehensively. For example, there may be an opportunity for a higher built form at the northern corner of the site (while maintaining consistency with the NSW ADG building separation distances), and to step the heights step down towards the Darling Street and along the western edge of Victoria Road. An uplift of less than 30% may be appropriate in urban design and amenity terms.
3. The Panel notes that while the Victoria Rd street frontage is not part of this submission, the design quality of its public domain is exceedingly poor. The frontage is dominated by inactive uses, including above grade parking, service and carpark access, utility services provisions, fire escapes and plant areas. While all of these provisions are required, as they are on all urban projects, in this instance the entire block will be sterilised as a pleasant pedestrian experience and environment for the foreseeable future.
4. The Panel notes that there are significant shortfalls in terms of building separation distances measured along the side boundaries. A minimum 12m setback is called for by the NSW ADG Part 3F Visual privacy for residential components over 9 storeys. Only 6m is provided from both side boundaries in the proposal.

5. While the Panel is supportive in principle of the state government's strategy for density uplifts to meet required housing targets, the proposed extent of additional bulk and scale in this context is not an appropriate urban design outcome for this site. Furthermore, based on the Panel's understanding and appreciation of the history of this project, the proposed built form and scale will not align well with the community's aspirations for the Rozelle area.
6. In return for the greatly increased yield the proposal does not offer any additional amenity, sustainability, community and public benefits. For example, the open space/plaza, communal open space, deep soil zone, and inactive frontage to Victoria Road remain as in the approved scheme. Only the height and floor space ratio are maximised.
7. The applicant's previous approved design created a long 'slab' building with minor indentations. This was eventually accepted by previous Council panels, with reservations. The long 'slab' form is now 16 storeys in the current proposal, changing the built form typology to an excessively large bulky 'tower' form. This same form then extends around to the Darling Street southern frontage. The minor articulations in the otherwise co-planar façade do not ameliorate the extensive increase in built form. Such bulky, connected tower forms are a new urban pattern, and not considered appropriate to Sydney's urban character and climate. Towers need more compact floorplates, with adequate building separation distances to successfully manage natural light, overshadowing, public amenity and their visual impacts. Moreover, tower forms, designed for high density living also need to be supplemented with high pedestrian amenity in terms of quality public open space and street activation.
8. The Panel further notes that the 30% uplift is a maximum control and achievable when the urban design impacts are clearly articulated and acceptably resolved by the proposal.

## **Conclusion:**

1. Noting its independent and advisory-only role, the Panel does not support the proposal in its current form and configuration. An alternative proposal should be developed that responds to the recommendations made in this report.
2. The Panel reiterates that the NSW state government affordable housing strategy is supported. The applicant is encouraged to provide well-designed affordable housing utilising the uplift provisions, while ensuring that the amended design maintains the same degree of compatibility with the urban character of the area as in the approved design. Further, the ground and street level amenity, sustainability, community, residential and public benefits should be addressed and maximized commensurate with the proposed increase in floorspace and height in the amending SSDA.