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THE PANEL'S ADVICE

NATIONAL CAPITAL DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Blocks 8 and Section 43 Turner – First Session
91 Northbourne



Australian Government
National Capital Authority



ACT
Government

NATIONAL CAPITAL DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

THE PANEL'S ADVICE

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Project: 91 Northbourne

Review date: Wednesday 9 December 2020

Meeting location: Meeting held online via Microsoft Teams

Site visit: No site visit conducted due to COVID-19 social distancing measures

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Proponent: Dexar

Observers: Representatives from the:
Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD)
City Renewal Authority (CRA)
National Capital Authority (NCA)
Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS)

Conflicts of interest: None

Confidentiality of the Panel's Advice: Design review considers concept proposals at various stages throughout the design process that are frequently subject to change and improvement in relation to feedback from the NCDRP. Throughout this time a commercial in confidence status is maintained for proposals that engage with the NCDRP.

In accordance with Section 139 of the Planning and Development Act (2007) (the Act), prescribed development proposals are required to provide a copy of the 'Panels Advice' and the proponent's 'Response to the Panels Advice' in writing when the Development Application when is submitted. Section 30 of the Act identifies the design advice and the proponent's written response to that advice as associated documents, therefore the most recent Panel's Advice and the proponent's response become publicly available once a Development Application is publicly notified for community comment.

MEETING SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Property address: 91 Northbourne Avenue (Blocks 8 and 9 Section 43) Turner ACT

Proposal: The site is located at the corner of Northbourne Avenue and Gould Street in Turner ACT. The site encompasses two blocks (Blocks 8 and 9 Section 43) of almost equal size that form an overall site area of 2782m².

The site is zoned CZ2: Business Zone under the Territory Plan (2008) and is subject to the Northbourne Avenue Precinct Code and the Commercial Zones Development Code. The site is also subject to the MAAR: Main Avenues and Approach Routes overlay and the National Capital Authority's (NCA) National Capital Plan (NCP) Amendment 91 - City and Gateway Urban Design Provisions that also gives legal effect to the City and Gateway Urban Design Framework (CGUDF).

A commercial office building is located to the north of this site and multi-unit residential housing is located to the west. A sewer easement also exists along the western boundary. Havelock House, a 1950's brick building now used to provide supportive housing, is located on an RZ1: Suburban Zone block across Gould Street to the south. The Elouera Street Light Rail stop is located directly adjacent to the site on Northbourne Avenue.

The proposal is for a 9 storey multi-unit residential development comprising approximately 122 apartments. The typical floor plan of the proposed building adopts a central, internal corridor that services 14 apartments. The proposal includes a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom unit type apartments that are generally a corner unit or single aspect arrangement. The building includes two lifts and two fire stairs. The proposal includes a rooftop terrace area with barbeque areas and a plunge pool.

The main pedestrian entry to the building is proposed to be located on Gould Street. The vehicular entry point is also located on Gould Street with the proposed driveway continuing along the western boundary with an exit on to Northbourne Avenue proposed to be for waste truck management.

The proposed materiality at this stage is a combination of concrete and glazed elements, with metal balustrades. A high proportion of vertical landscaping is also envisaged for the proposal.

Proponents' representative address to the panel:

The proponent, represented by Elisabeth Judd of Judd Studio, commenced the presentation by providing an overview of the site context, highlighting the location and walkability to the city centre, proximity to Haig Park and adjacency to the Elouera Street Light Rail stop. The proponent noted the existing development typologies that surround the subject block, including multi-unit residential, commercial office and the RZ1: Suburban Zone block across Gould Street where Havelock House is located and currently used to provide supportive housing.

An axonometric massing diagram that displayed a snapshot of built form massing along this section of Northbourne Avenue was presented by the proponent, explained to provide a visualisation of the contextual building

footprints and heights. The proponent noted that most buildings in this section are currently between 4-8 storeys.

Sarah Watts of Spacelab then discussed the statutory planning frameworks applicable to the site, in particular the provisions of the NCP's Amendment 91 and the pending Territory Plan Draft Variation 368 (City and Gateway South Northbourne Avenue Corridor) and explained that the scheme is being designed to be compliant with the Draft Variation rather than the existing planning controls.

Nathan Judd of Judd Studio continued the presentation and discussed the design proposition. He noted that Northbourne Avenue is typically characterised by big block forms and that forecourts for waste trucks tend to dominate the frontage. For this proposal, the proponent explained that the site servicing will be directed around the west and northern perimeter instead of fronting Northbourne Avenue. The proponent also noted the existing substation that is located on Gould Street and explained that this proposal would seek to integrate the substation into the building.

The proponent explained that the design proposition intends to take advantage of the corner site and that to support adjacent developments, the building has been sited close to the southern boundary to create more space to the north. The proposal was considered by the proponent to be of good-neighbour qualities and sitting well in its context.

The proposed built form was described by the proponent to feature articulated façades and to incorporate a landscape character through vertical planting. The proponent noted that the intention is to create something that is quite unique for the area. Solar performance was also noted to drive the design outcomes for the built form.

Vehicular access to the basements was explained by the proponent to be from Gould Street, which was explained to reduce verge crossings from Northbourne Avenue. The main pedestrian entry foyer for the proposed building was also noted to be from Gould Street.

The proponent described the typical floor plate to comprise a central corridor with units flanked around the lift core. The proponent noted that the provisions of NCP Amendment 91 permits no more than 9 apartments from a single lift core and explained that the corridor can be bisected to meet this. The proponent however noted that in the event of a lift being out of service, the proposal does not restrict one side of the building to stair-only access. The units were described by the proponent to be flexibly designed so that 3 bedroom units could be created through consolidation of two smaller units to meet potential market requirements.

The proponent explained that the solar access period is indicated from 8:30am to 3:00pm on the winter solstice, as Northbourne Avenue is not aligned with due north. The proponent also considers the solar impost on the neighbouring property to the west to be minimal.

Brendon Hill of Spacelab then discussed the landscape approach. He noted the dominance of the planting area that faces Northbourne Avenue and the Light Rail stop and considers this to be a large area of permeability. He then described the concept of taking this planting area and wrapping it up and around the building as vertical landscaping or 'green walls'. The proponent

described the green walls to be aromatic and noted that they will screen the western façade. He also noted that areas reserved for plant/mechanical services will also provide service areas for the green walls.

The rooftop terrace was presented by the proponent with the intention to create a green canopy on top of the roof was highlighted, said to be achieved through a mix of trees and green infrastructure (i.e. pergolas with vertical planting). The rooftop terrace was described to comprise of zones, including plunge pool, play areas and barbeque facilities that are allocated for their access to views.

Recommendation: The Panel thanks the proponent for presenting the proposal to design review at this early concept design stage. Engaging early with the Panel has provided the opportunity for a meaningful discussion about the key elements of the proposal and to identify how the design concepts could be further enhanced for the benefit of the proponent, future residents and the broader community. The Panel advises that as a non-regulatory body it makes no comment as to the appropriateness of the proponent's interpretation of the current planning framework. As such, the panel requests that the proponent liaises with the planning agencies to ensure that the proposal is compliant with the relevant planning frameworks prior to the next design review session.

Based on the documentation provided prior to the design review panel session on Wednesday 9 December 2020 and the proponent's presentation, the Panel requests that the proposal is further developed in response to the key issues and recommendations provided below and that it returns to design review prior to the lodgement of a Development Application.

The Panel welcomes the written aspirations that have been earmarked for this proposal and is encouraged by the ambitions within the overall vision regarding the architecture, landscape, sustainability and amenity. The Panel is however unconvinced that the proposal exemplifies the aspirations as intended. The Panel recognises the symbolic and appealing site location and considers that the aspirations lend to highly desirable outcomes and therefore recommends the proponent continues to develop the design response to match the aspirations befitting of the prominent location on the important approach route into the Nation's Capital.

The Panel recognises that a highly resolved design solution is required to mediate the scale from Northbourne Avenue to the adjacent residential buildings. The Panel sees opportunity in the proposal responding to the urban characteristics of this site and encourages the proponent to explore opportunities for non-residential uses that may assist in mediating the scale and celebrating the urban characteristics of its context. The Panel therefore requests that the proponent further develops the proposal in response to its engagement and interfaces with its context at the pedestrian scale.

The Panel considers that a proposal that is formal and inherently residential to be appropriate for an apartment building in this location however requests that the proponent undertakes further development of the design language including further development of the residential amenity outcomes for this proposal. The Panel also considers that there is an opportunity for the spatial planning of apartments, private open space and

communal areas to be developed with rigour and looks forward to viewing a more detailed iteration of the scheme at the next design review session.

Key Issues and Recommendations

The *Key Issues and Recommendations* provide detail advice to the proponent, consistent with the above recommendation.

To achieve the best possible design outcome for the proposal, the proponent is encouraged to consider the following issues through the next stages of the design development:

1.0 Context and character

- 1.1 The Panel is encouraged by the aspirations provided at design review and recommends that the proponent continues to develop the scheme so that the design proposition delivers the aspirations and grounds itself in the site context. The Panel is however concerned that the design proposition does not celebrate the opportunities offered by this site noting the urban characteristics such as walkability to the city, adjacency to light rail stop and its prominent location on Northbourne Avenue. The Panel acknowledges the early stages of the design and looks forward to seeing further development of the proposal so that the design response is befitting of its significant location one of National Capital's main approach routes.
 - 1.2 Mediating the scale from the grand boulevard that is Northbourne Avenue to the private courtyards of the ground floor apartments was identified as a challenge by the Panel at design review. The Panel also recognises the highly pedestrianised character of the Northbourne Avenue frontage due to the adjacent Light Rail stop. The Panel is therefore interested in design strategies and principles that address this transition in scale and character (e.g. landscape, built form modulation, entry gestures, courtyard walls, access gates). At the next design review session the Panel requests that the proponent develops the design response at this interface and provides details regarding how the proposal sensitively interacts with Northbourne Avenue.
 - 1.3 The commercial character of the proposal is considered by the Panel to be inappropriate for a residential building on Northbourne Avenue. The Panel also notes the CGUDF strategic goal to "*create an identifiable approach, which increases in formality as it gets closer to the city centre and Central National Area, and which clearly signifies the symbolic and functional roles of the National Capital.*" and therefore recommends that the proponent reconsiders the expression of the built form to provide a more formal composition in response to the noted objective.
 - 1.4 The Panel acknowledges the main pedestrian entry from Gould Street and sees opportunity to further develop the urban design response along this frontage. The Panel recognises the early design stage of this proposal and looks forward to seeing further development of this interface at the next design review session.
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2.0 Landscape

- 2.1 Aspirations for a highly 'greened' building through the provision of vertical planting or 'green walls' is acknowledged by the Panel. While green infrastructure is encouraged, the Panel recommends that green walls be positioned in viable locations (i.e. avoiding south facing or highly shaded areas) for the Canberra climate. The Panel notes that green walls provide an opportunity to shade to east-west facing glazing and therefore recommends that the locations of green walls are rationalised to provide optimised outcomes for the proposed building and viability for the planting.
- 2.2 Concern regarding the ongoing maintenance for the proposed green walls was expressed by the Panel at design review and it was questioned whether this expense will be passed on to the future residents. The Panel requests that the proponent provides a robust strategy for the implementation and ongoing maintenance of the green walls to ensure this landscape strategy can be realised and is enduring for this proposal throughout the lifetime of the building.
- 2.3 The Panel acknowledges the early design stage of this proposal and appreciates that the proponent is beginning to embrace the landscape character along Northbourne Avenue. The Panel however notes that the landscape response as presented requires significant development and at the next design review session the Panel anticipates the presentation of a landscape response that is befitting of the national significance of the Northbourne Avenue corridor. The Panel recommends that the landscape response is guided by the CGUF.
- 2.4 The proposed extent of hard surfacing created by the driveway is of concern to the Panel as it is considered to limit landscape opportunities, particularly the absence of deep root planting zones outside the Northbourne Avenue landscape buffer. At design review it was unclear as to whether the proponent has identified the established trees on the site or verges and whether they could be retained. The Panel therefore requests that at the next design review session, the proponent provides clarification regarding existing vegetation on the site and a robust landscape response for the ground plane including the provision of additional deep root planting zones where possible.

3.0 Sustainability

- 3.1 The Panel is encouraged by the proponent's aspiration to provide a 7.5-star energy rating for the building. The Panel is unclear however at this stage as to how this rating will be achieved and requests the proponent provides robust evidence-based information that supports this sustainability goal.

4.0 Density and connectivity

- 4.1 The Panel is supportive of the proposed mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom unit types and is appreciative of the initiative to include flexible unit floor plans that are designed to be capable of consolidating two smaller units to create larger units as a sound strategy for the scheme.
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- 4.2 In principle, the Panel would support a reduction in car parking considering the proximity to the city and adjacency the Light Rail stop. The Panel however recommends the design proposition supports the active travel initiatives discussed in the presentation material (e.g. providing bicycle parking and an access and circulation strategy for cyclists) at the next design review session.

5.0 Built form and scale

- 5.1 Noting the CGUDF objective to increase the formality of Northbourne Avenue as it approaches the city centre, the Panel considers that a proposal on this site should adopt a robust and formal expression. The Panel is currently challenged by the proposed Northbourne Avenue façade and considers the width of the vertical recesses to reduce the perceived scale of this frontage. The Panel therefore recommends that the proponent further considers the composition of this frontage and develops an expression that suitably responds to the formality and scale required along Northbourne Avenue.

6.0 Functionality and build quality

- 6.1 The recessed balconies proposed for the single-aspect apartments are not supported by the Panel. The Panel is concerned that the narrowness of the proposed balconies and depth of the recess would result in dark and proportionally impractical spaces. In addition to item 5.1, the Panel does not support the configuration of these balcony areas and recommends the proponent revisits the proportions of these spaces to provide functional areas of private open space for its future residents.
- 6.2 The Panel does not support the proposed floor-to-floor height of 2.9 metres. The Panel encourages the proponent to provide a minimum 3.05 metres and recognises this height as a national benchmark towards assurance in achieving the minimum 2.7 metre floor to ceiling height.
- 6.3 The Panel acknowledges the early stages of the design and requests clarification about the unresolved circulation strategies for vehicles and waste vehicles. The Panel questions how the verge crossing, driveway and basement ramp will present to Gould Street. The Panel also notes the opportunity for a establishing a rear-lane arrangement that could service other buildings within this section in future. The Panel therefore looks forward to seeing the resolution of vehicular circulation for this proposal at the next design review session.
- 6.4 Spatial planning outcomes of apartments were questioned by the Panel at design review. The Panel does not support arrangements that demonstrate kitchens located in entry halls, that are detached from living areas or where entries to bedrooms are provided through bathrooms. The Panel also considers that there is an opportunity to provide appropriate storage within each apartment as they currently lack storage as presented. The Panel recommends that the proponent revisited the apartment designs to suit and looks forward to viewing the revised floor plans that are highly functional at the next design review session.
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7.0 Legibility and safety

- 7.1 The Panel notes that the main pedestrian entry for the proposal is currently proposed to be located off Gould Street. The Panel sees the opportunity for the entry to be further developed to increase the legibility and formality of this gesture and suggests that the proponent further develops the design proposition taking into regard the pedestrian experience. The Panel also notes that consideration of this item coupled with 9.1 could assist to promote the legibility of entrances.

8.0 Diversity and amenity

- 8.1 The Panel is concerned that the amenity outcomes of the proposed communal areas are not adequately resolved throughout the proposal. The Panel does not support wholly internalised corridors and requests that the proponent considers the provision of daylight and natural ventilation opportunities to these spaces. The Panel also sees opportunity in further developing the lobbies and corridors to include spaces that can encourage passive interaction between residents (i.e. seats, ledges, landings, break-out spaces) that can promote safety and a sense of community for future residents of this proposal.
- 8.2 The aspirations for the rooftop area (e.g. landscaping, plunge pool and barbeque areas) are appreciated by the Panel, however it is noted that the rooftop area is unlikely to achieve thermal comfort throughout the year in Canberra's climate. The Panel also notes the recent changes in work-life arrangements since COVID-19, where a greater number of people have the opportunity to work from home and therefore encourages the proponent to provide communal areas and landscaped spaces in the proposal that will offer the opportunity for respite for residents year-round.
- 8.3 The Panel requires the proponent to provide solar access diagrams that show the outcomes between 9am and 3pm on the winter solstice and directs the proponent to the Environmental Performance requirements of the National Capital Plan – Amendment 91 City and Gateway Urban Design Provisions.
- 8.4 The Panel requires further clarification around the justification for the proposed building setbacks particularly from the southern and western boundaries. The Panel is concerned that the proposal does not equitably consider redevelopment opportunities for the adjacent sites as it utilises the minimum separation distance. The Panel also requires the interfaces to be considered in greater detail (i.e. floor by floor) and requests that the proponent is more finite in their response to setbacks, including the provision of setback dimensions from the site boundaries to present for discussion at the next design review session.
- 8.5 The Panel is encouraged by the proponent team's drive for innovative design solutions for this proposal. However, the Panel recommends that unconventional design strategies should provide balanced and holistically beneficial amenity outcomes. For example, the Panel understands that the adoption of narrow, deeply recessed balconies is a strategy to provide cross-ventilation, however, considers that the
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proposed balconies create 'snorkel-bedrooms' conditions and impractically proportioned balconies. The Panel also considers that vertical landscaping can be beneficial however does not support it in place of deep root planting and functional landscaped zones. The Panel therefore encourages the proponent to continue development of the design concepts to ensure positive amenity outcomes are provided for this proposal.

- 8.6 The Panel supports the removal of air-conditioning units from balconies and commends the proponent for the proposed strategy that consolidates air-conditioning units in a plant area that is screened from view. The Panel is uncertain whether these plant areas should front Northbourne Avenue and looks forward to seeing how these areas are reinterpreted in the next iteration of the façade design.

9.0 Community and public domain

- 9.1 The Panel recognises the opportunities of this site on a prominent corner on the Northbourne Avenue corridor. Noting the non-residential uses (e.g. small retail) may be suitable to include in this proposal. The Panel also suggests that non-residential uses may assist to resolve potential conflicts in that would be considered when mediating the public to private transition as discussed in Item 1.2. The Panel therefore encourages the proponent to explore opportunities for non-residential uses that can celebrate the context of this site.

10.0 Visual appearance

- 10.1 The Panel notes the predominantly commercial character of Northbourne Avenue and considers the opportunity for this proposal to express an intrinsically residential composition. The Panel encourages the proponent to develop a formal character for the expression of the building that is inherently residential. The proponent is encouraged by the Panel to explore a materiality that is more tactile and that takes cues from the historic residential developments in the surrounding context (e.g. Havelock House). The Panel also notes that protection to glazing would change the perception of this proposal and can enable a more residential character for the building. The Panel therefore looks forward to seeing further development of the expression, in response to the residential use, required formality and contextual inference at the next design review session.
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