

30 August 2021

Ethos Urban reference: 218986

Mr Brodie McHutchison  
Director  
Carmichael Tompkins Property Group  
Suite 14.04, Aurora Place  
88 Phillip Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Brodie

**RE: ADDRESS OF VISUAL IMPACT MATTERS, MARIST CATHOLIC COLLEGE NORTH SHORE**

Thank you for asking Ethos Urban to address the Response to Submissions document (RtS) issued by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) in relation to visual impact matters for alterations and additions to the Marist Catholic College North Shore proposed under SSD-10473.

This response constitutes an update to the Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) previously prepared by Ethos Urban and dated 17 December 2020 in the form of an addendum. In this regard, it is to be read on conjunction with this earlier document. It also should be considered together with the updated Heritage Impact Statement prepared by Weir Phillips Heritage and Planning.

**Background**

The Sydney Catholic School has lodged a SSDA (SSD-10473) with DPIE seeking development consent for alterations and additions to the Marist Catholic College North Shore located at 270 Miller Street, North Sydney. Of note for visual impact matters, the proposal includes the following new built form:

- **The Miller Street building:** comprising a three (3) storey building housing new auditorium, childcare centre, performing arts learning spaces, ideation centre and roof top recreation
- **The Carlow Street building:** comprising a four (4) storey building accommodating administration and staff facilities, library, general learning spaces, specialist learning

spaces for science, undercroft space for covered recreational activity and roof top recreation.

Following public exhibition of the proposal, on 29 March 2021 DPIE issued the RtS. The RtS included the following matters relevant to visual impact:

## **Item 2. Built form and key views**

- The Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) report is to be updated to consider the visual impacts that would eventuate from the proposed setbacks and the bulk and scale of the proposed buildings on the site's surrounding heritage items
- Further consideration should be given to the potential to provide natural screening for the site in order to reduce the bulk and scale of the proposed building. This may require consideration of street tree planting, if there is not sufficient space within the site
- Consideration to further articulate the façade on Miller Street and stepping the building down following the slope of the land should also be considered.

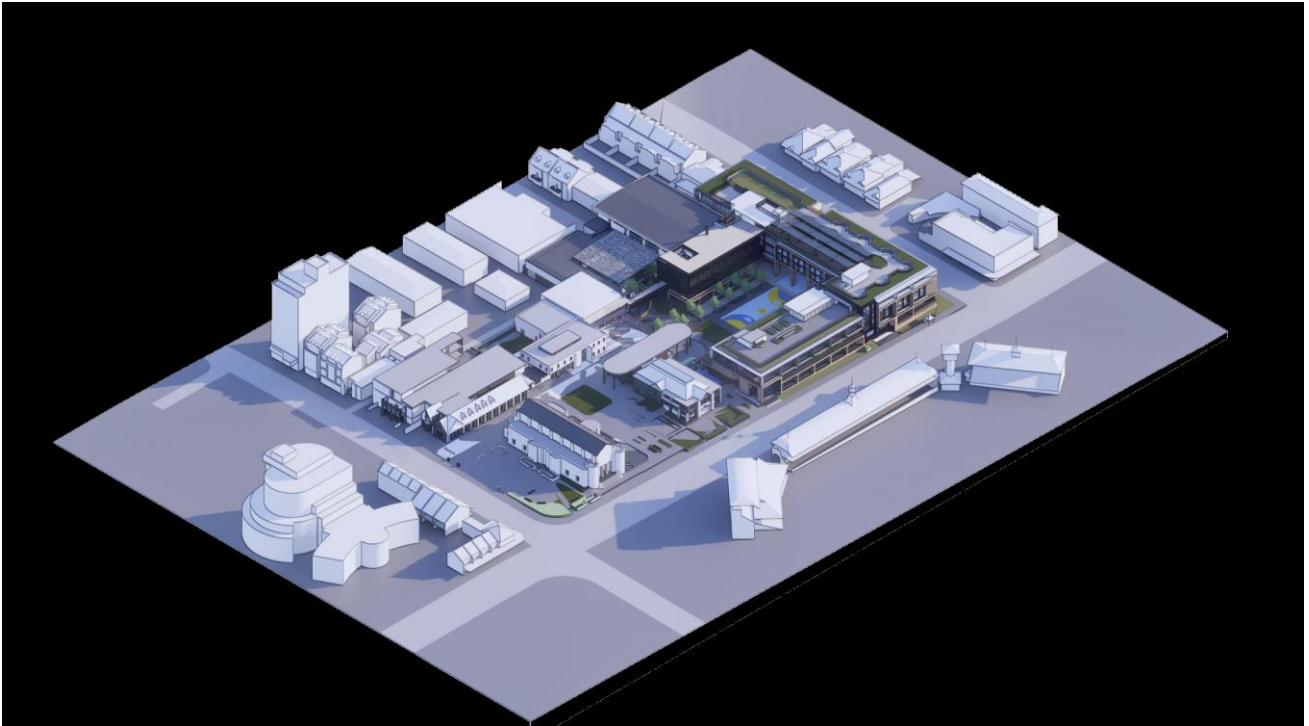
In response to this RtS, Sydney Catholic School has made a number of amendments to the proposal. The main amendment is removal of the upper level of the Miller Street building. The amended proposed is shown in **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**.

The scope of this assessment is to consider the amended proposal in relation to the visual impact matters raised in the RtS.



**Figure 1: Proposed site plan**

Source: WMK Architecture



**Figure 2: Visualisation of proposed site plan**

Source: WMK Architecture

## Heritage

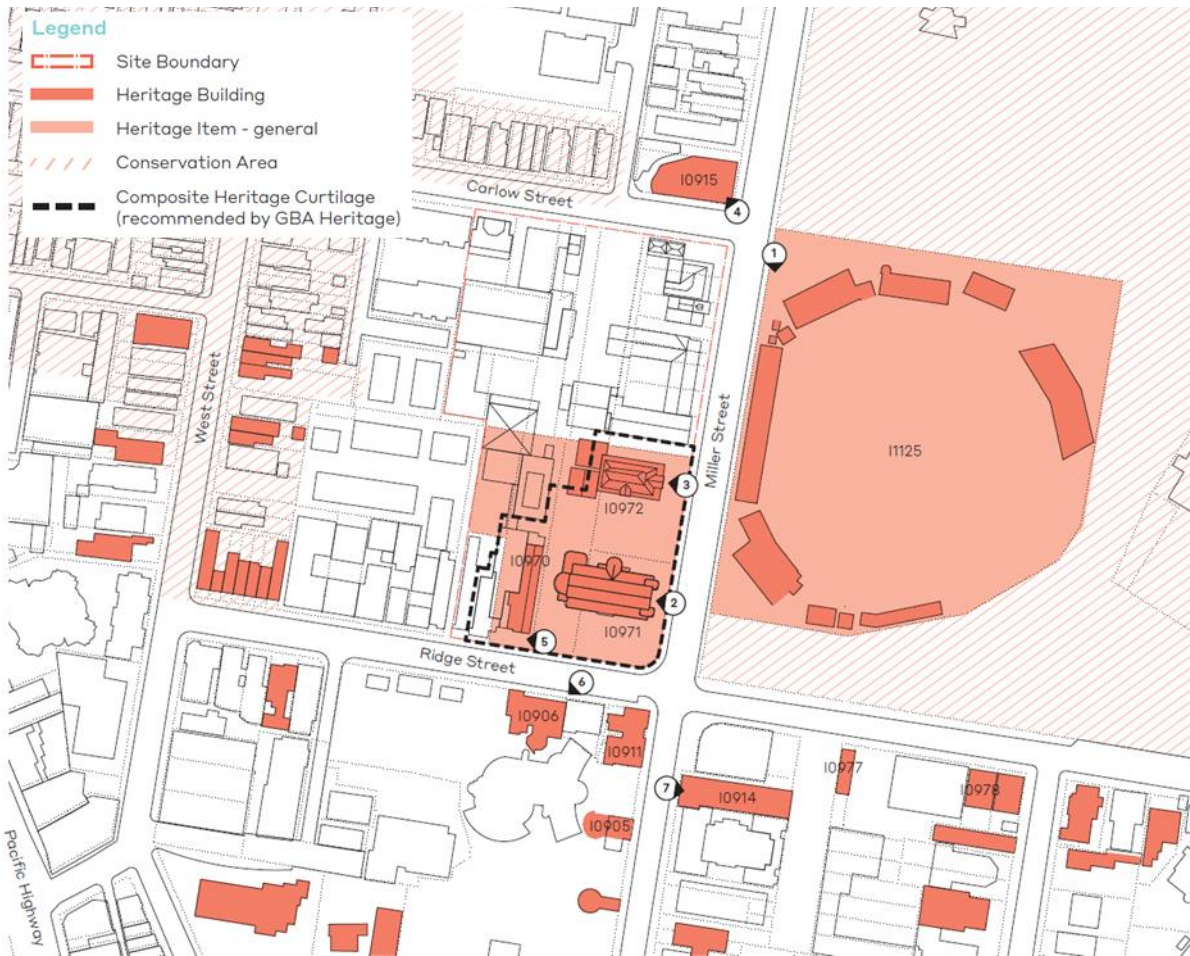
The Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) report is to be updated to consider the visual impacts that would eventuate from the proposed setbacks and the bulk and scale of the proposed buildings on the site's surrounding heritage items

As is shown in **Figure 3**, the proposal is located close to the following local heritage items listed under the North Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2013 (NSLEP2013):

- adjacent to the St Mary's Catholic Presbytery
- opposite Carlow Street from the North Sydney Hotel
- opposite Miller Street to the North Sydney Oval.

The proposal does not impact on State or Commonwealth heritage items.





**Figure 3: Adjoining, adjacent and nearby heritage items**

Source: Ethos Urban

The following documents have previously addressed the proposal's impact on these heritage items:

1. Heritage Impact Statement prepared by Weir Phillips Heritage and Planning and dated December 2020
2. Visual Impact Assessment prepared by Ethos Urban and dated 17 December 2020.

The Heritage Impact Statement concluded that the proposal will have a minimal impact on heritage items surrounding the site, including St Leonards Park.

The VIA concluded that the proposal will have an acceptable visual impact and can be supported on visual impact grounds.

## **St Mary's Catholic Presbytery**

The proposed Miller Street building will have the greatest visual impact on this heritage item.

The following findings of the Heritage Impact Statement are relevant to visual impact:

- the proposed works will have no impact on the ability to understand the significance of the group of religious buildings on the site
- the proposed works will have no impact on the existing setting and curtilage of the of heritage items on the site and their relationship to each other. The proposed contemporary school buildings are appropriately distanced from the heritage buildings on the site
- the primary significance of the site is the external presentation of the religious buildings to Miller Street, which is retained
- the proposed materials and finishes of the proposed building adjacent to the heritage items are recessive to the heritage items
- the contemporary architecture of the proposed works will be clearly read as new work and recessive to the more ornate and decorative style of the heritage items
- there is no particular significance to the existing landscaping. It does not provide evidence of how the site was
- the removal of the carpark and the proposed landscape work and piazza between the St Mary's Church and Presbytery will enhance and restore the heritage curtilages and settings of these building.

These findings are considered valid.

As has been explained in the design report and acknowledged by the State Design Review Panel, the proposed strategy of consolidating massing in the north-east corner of the site is an intentional and logical response to key site constraints, including a desire to minimise impact on the heritage listed religious cluster of buildings at the site's southern end and residential area adjoining the site's western boundary.

As has been established by the NSW Land and Environment Court in *Tenacity Consulting v Waringah* [2004] NSWLEC 140, siting and design matters of this nature are important considerations when determining the reasonableness of visual impact.

## **Setbacks**

The proposed Miller Street building has a similar setback to the Presbytery (10.5m) to the existing building on this part of the site.

As can be seen in **Figure 4**, this setback enables the Presbytery to be seen 'in the round', enabling it to be seen in full as a separate landscape element. This is a key, positive visual impact outcome.

In addition, the proposal landscaped ground plane between the Miller Street Building and the Presbytery represents a significant visual improvement to the existing bitumen paved access lane.



**Figure 4: Visualisation of proposed Miller Street streetscape**

Source: WMK Architecture

### **Bulk and scale**

The footprint of the existing building on this part has a U shape. As a consequence, the three storey (3) southern building has its long elevation adjoining the entire length of the Presbytery.

As can be seen in **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** the proposal rearranges this footprint to create a L shape. As a consequence, that part of the Miller Street building facing the Presbytery now only extends for approximately half its length. This is considered to allow for an improved visual appreciation of the Presbytery.

In addition, Sydney Catholic Schools is proposing to remove the entire third storey of the Miller Street building. As can be seen in **Figure 5** and **Figure 6**, the reduced height is consistent with that of the Presbytery. In addition, the proposal also responds to the Presbytery's parapet and ridge height. The additional height of the Miller Street building is rec

While the proposal will not be seen in views from the adjoining public domain together with the entirety of the religious complex, **Figure 6** nonetheless shows its relationship with the western side of the Miller Street streetscape between Carlow Street and Ridge Street. As can be seen, the maximum height of the proposal, which is reached at its northern end by the Carlow Street building, is consistent with that of St Mary's Church being the visually dominant element in the religious complex in Maximum height of the structure.

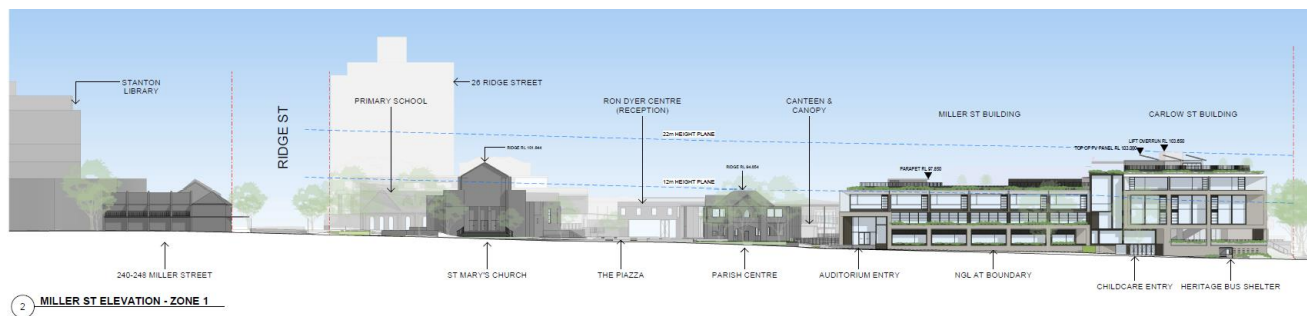
In addition, the re-arrangement of windows facing Miller Street from a square pattern to a rectangular pattern, creates an increased perception of horizontality which further reduces the appearance of building height.

The proposed height quality detailing, including materiality, provides for more visually appealing and sympathetic elevations when seen together with the Presbytery.



**Figure 5: Originally proposed Miller Street extended streetscape elevation - south**

Source: WMK Architecture



**Figure 6: Proposed Miller Street extended streetscape elevation - south**

Source: WMK Architecture

## North Sydney Hotel

The proposed Carlow Street building will have the greatest visual impact on this heritage item.

The following findings of the VIA are relevant to visual impact:

- despite reducing the relative visual prominence of the North Sydney Hotel in this part of the Miller Street streetscape, the hotel will nonetheless remain as a distinct and legible element within this and the Carlow Street streetscapes.
- the proposal exists in part of the Miller Street streetscape that does not have a consistent character, having varied heights, types and styles of buildings
- the proposal will assist in redefining the role of this part of Miller Street as a transition between the North Sydney CBD to the south and the more urban residential Cammeray to the north
- in particular, the proposal will create a stronger, more defined corner treatment to the south-west corner of Miller Street and Carlow Street, working with the notable corner



treatments of the North Sydney Oval complex and the North Sydney Hotel to create a gateway or threshold to this segment of Miller Street

- the proposal will only be of considerable visual impact from the eastern end of Carlow Street, which is considered to have an inconsistent character and less sensitive to the nature of change proposed than the central and western parts of the street.

These findings are considered valid.

## **Setbacks**

The Carlow Street building will have a setback of 3m to Miller Street and between 4.4m to 6.6m to Carlow Street. This creates a built form relationship to the corner of Miller Street and Carlow Street similar to the North Sydney Hotel.

As is detailed in the Oculus landscape report, this setback is proposed to be well landscaped.

This setback pattern combines with the width of Carlow Street to achieve a separation distance of approximately 26m to the North Sydney Hotel.

As with the Presbytery, and further enabled by the strong landscape element of Carlow Street itself, this enables the North Sydney Hotel to be seen in full as a separate landscape element.

## **Bulk and scale**

As can be seen in **Figure 2**, the proposals massing is greatest at the site's north-east corner adjacent to the North Sydney Hotel. When seen from Miller Street, this creates a streetscape pattern that accentuates the two western corners of the intersection of Miller Street and Carlow Street.

While of greater height and bulk to the North Sydney Hotel, as is shown in **Figure 7** and **Figure 8**, this is not considered to constitute a visually unacceptable relationship. The height difference will be read as approximately 1.5 storeys. As shown in **Figure 8**, it is noted that a similar height already exists in the Miller Street streetscape nearby and to the north of the site. The length of the Carlow Street building to Miller Street is also not considered to be visually excessive when read together with the North Sydney Hotel.

The street facing elevations of the proposal have been heavily broken up into smaller elements, and features considerable glazing and other details that further reduce the appearance of building scale and bulk.

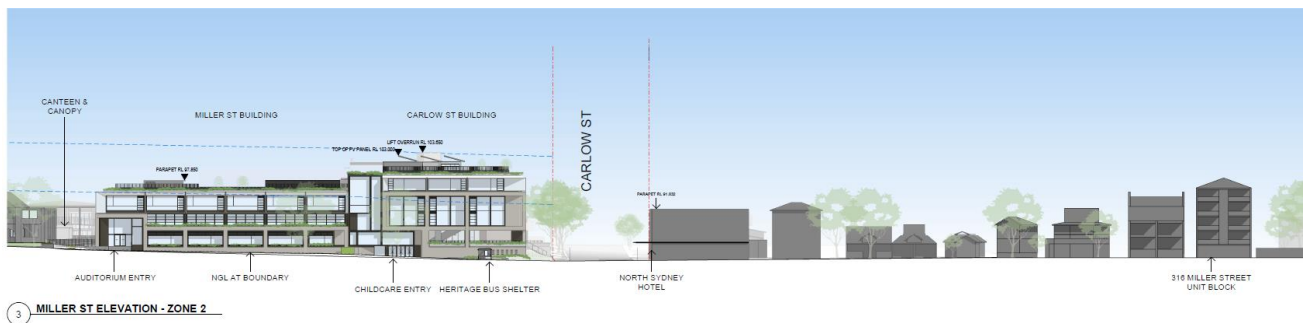
Critically, the North Sydney Hotel has a number of attributes that make it a distinct landscape feature. In particular, the nil setback to both Miller Street and Carlow Street provides a visually assertive interface with the adjoining ground plane. This is compared to the recessed and landscape interface created by the proposal. The cantilevered awning

separating the ground and first floor is also a visually strong element. In addition, its architectural style, repetitive upper level arched forms, part brown brick materiality and extensive detailing further contribute to this effect.



**Figure 7: Visualisation of proposed Miller Street and Carlow Street intersection**

Source: WMK Architecture



**Figure 8: Proposed Miller Street extended streetscape elevation - north**

Source: WMK Architecture

## North Sydney Oval

The proposed Miller Street and Carlow Street buildings will have a visual impact on this heritage item.

The following findings of the VIA are relevant to visual impact:

- the proposal will create a stronger, more defined corner treatment to the south-west corner of Miller Street and Carlow Street, working with the notable corner treatments of the North Sydney Oval complex and the North Sydney Hotel to create a gateway or threshold to this segment of Miller Street
- the proposal will work with the O'Reilly Stand to better define and enclose this segment of Miller Street
- the proposal references the nature of Block A which it replaces, as well as existing features in the Miller Street streetscape such as the O'Reilly Stand and St Mary's Church
- the proposal will be compatible with the prevailing setbacks and landscaping within this part of Miller Street and Carlow Street.

## Setbacks

The proposal will have a 3m setback to Miller Street. This setback is consistent with that of the existing building on this part of the site, and complies with the requirements of the North Sydney Development Control Plan. The setback will be extensively landscaped.

When combining the width of the setback with Miller Street, the proposal will achieve a separation distance of approximately 28m to the North Sydney Oval.

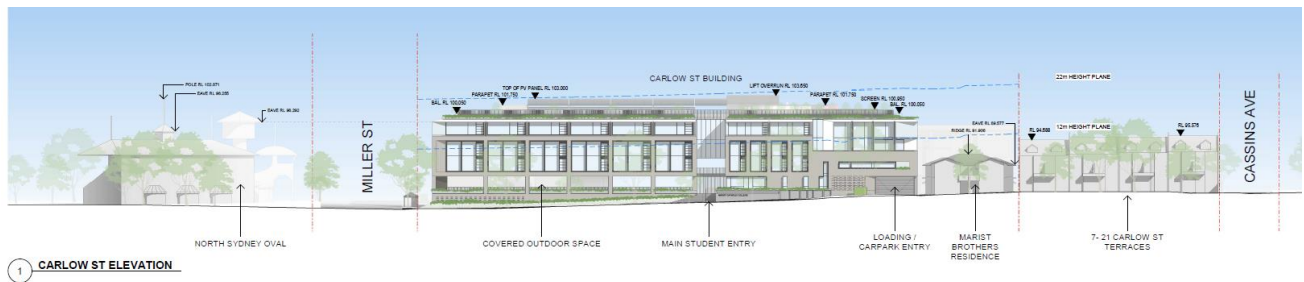
## Scale and bulk

The Carlow Street building is of greater height to the North Sydney Oval. However, as is shown in **Figure 9**, the height difference will be read as one storey. This storey will be largely glazed, featuring large, long horizontally oriented windows and capped by roof top vegetation. This will have the effect of reducing the appearance of height. It is also important to note that the full length of the Carlow Street building will not be seen in most views in which the North Sydney Oval is visible.

The bulk of the proposal is largely massed horizontally along Miller Street. This massing is consistent with that of the North Sydney Oval.

As can be seen in **Figure 10** and **Figure 11**, the street facing elevations of the proposal have been heavily broken up into smaller elements, and features considerable glazing and other details that further reduce the appearance of building scale and bulk.

As with the Presbytery and the North Sydney Hotel, the North Sydney Oval is also visually distinct. Its form is clearly read as a sporting facility, and it The Colonnade presents a visually strong interface with Miller Street.



**Figure 9: Proposed Carlow Street extended streetscape elevation**

Source: WMK Architecture



**Figure 10: Proposed Miller Street elevation**

Source: WMK Architecture



**Figure 11: Proposed Carlow Street elevation**

Source: WMK Architecture

## Natural screening

Request for further information item:

- Further consideration should be given to the potential to provide natural screening for the site in order to reduce the bulk and scale of the proposed building. This may require consideration of street tree planting, if there is not sufficient space within the site

Oculus has provided a response to this item.

As can be seen in **Figure 12**, most existing and larger street trees in Miller Street and Carlow Street are proposed to be retained. The mix of trees within the site that are compromise the built form massing strategy are proposed to be removed.

As is seen in **Figure 13**, the setbacks to Miller Street and Carlow Street will be extensively landscaped. This includes parallel layers comprising low mix, hedging and planters along edges of the undercroft space. In response to the RtS, further tree planting is now proposed within the Carlow St setback in addition to the existing Tallowwood tree TQ97 which is being retained.

The landscape setback to Carlow Street will be graded up towards the building (apart from around the existing tree) to reduce the extent of blank wall at the base of the building noting that the ground floor level is higher than the street.

The resulting landscape treatment to the corner of Miller Street and Carlow Street is shown in **Figure 14**.

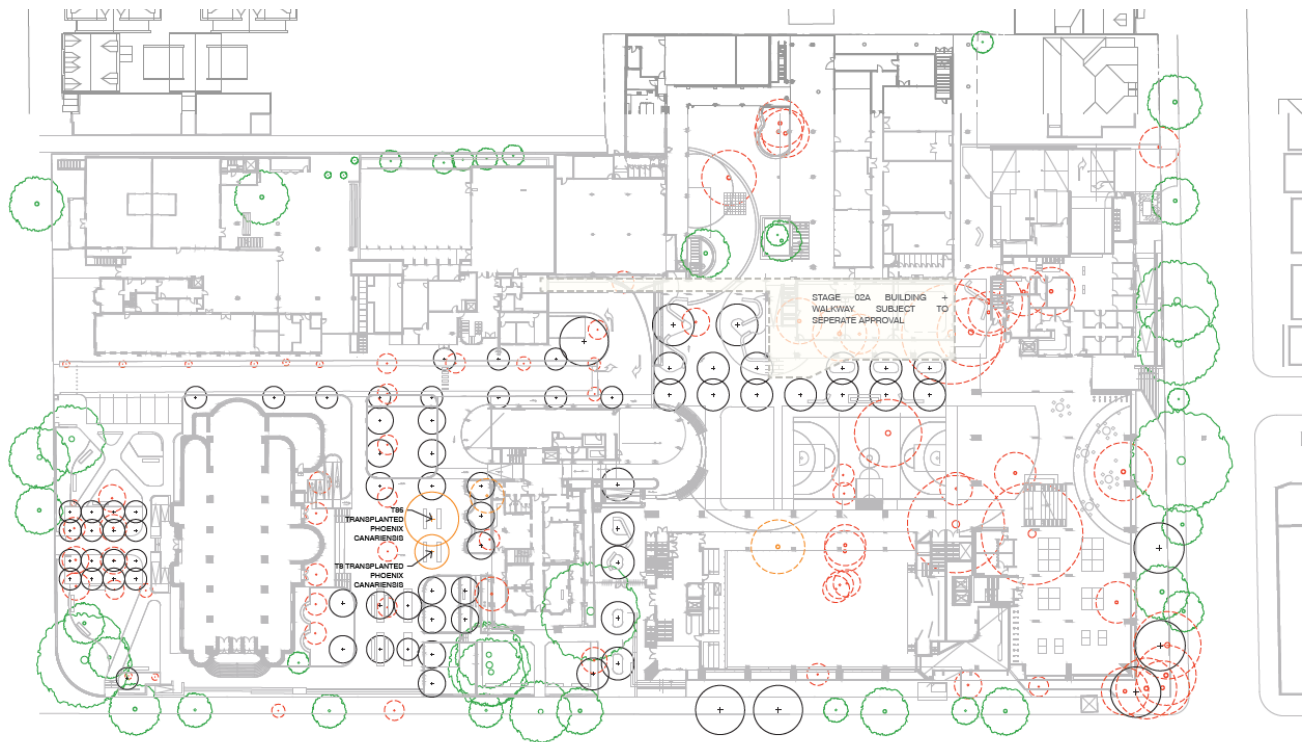
As can be seen in **Figure 15**, the roof is proposed to include extensive plantings.

The planting palette will use a combination of Australian native, locally indigenous and exotic species suited to the locale and the varied situations and microclimates of the different landscape spaces.

The result of this extensive landscaping is to considerably soften the appearance of building bulk and scale. In particular, the horizontal layering of landscaping at the ground plane, which includes street trees, low mix, hedging and planters, and the vertical layering of the ground place and the roof top planting, will ensure that landscaping is a visually noticeable part of the future visual setting.

While council may provide supplementary street tree planting, this is not considered to screen the proposal.

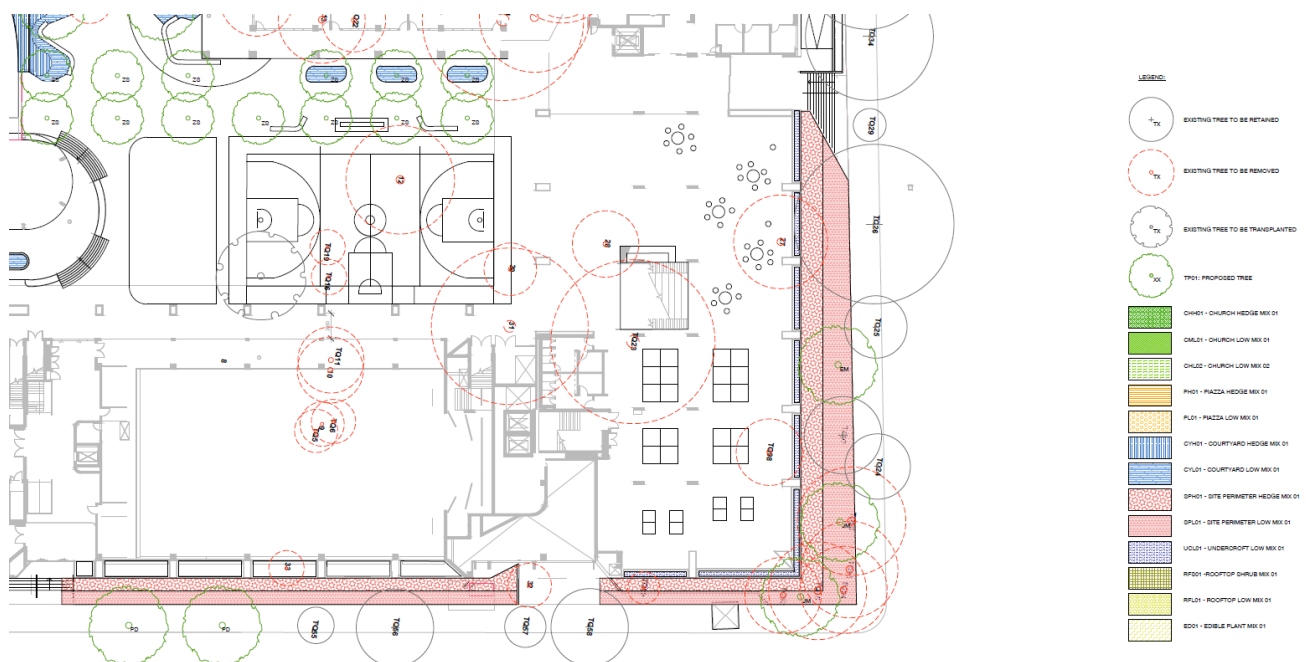




**Figure 12: Trees proposed to be retained and removed**

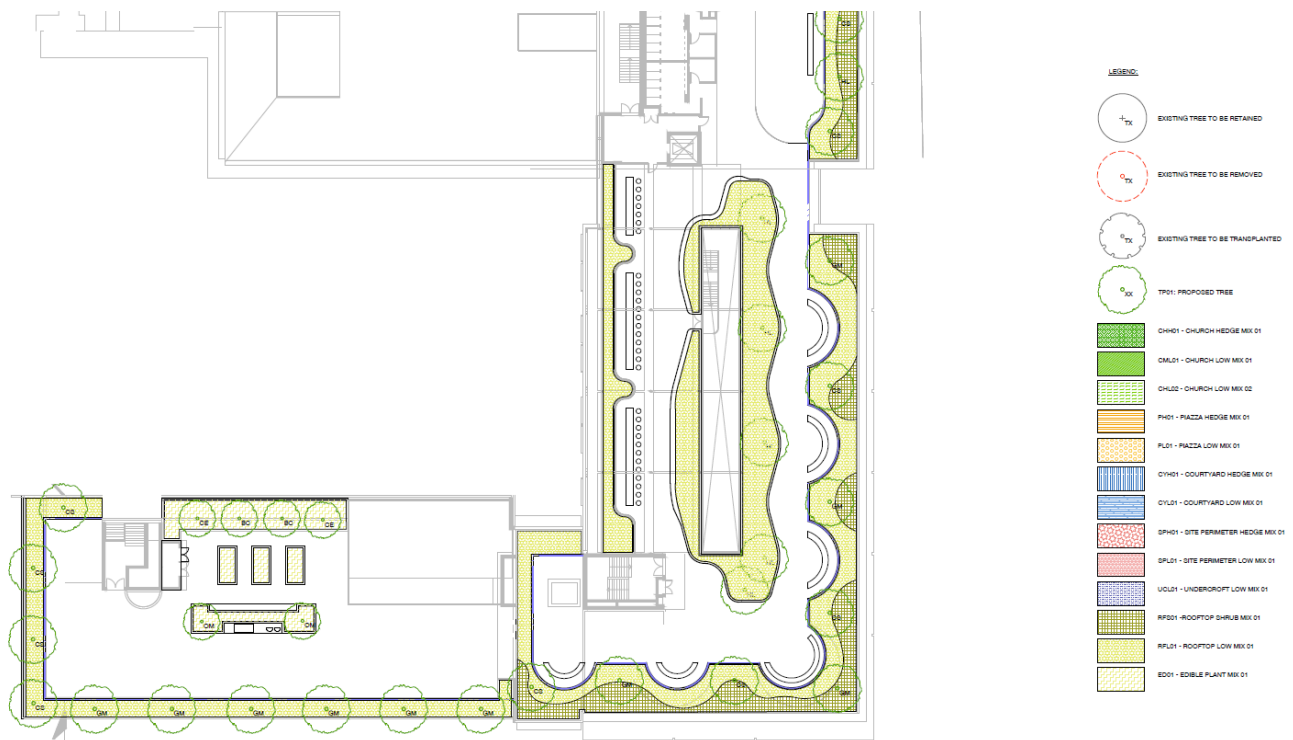
Source: Oculus

Note: trees to be retained are shown in green



**Figure 13: Proposed extent of setback landscaping**

Source: Oculus



**Figure 14: Proposed extent of rooftop landscaping**

Source: Oculus



**Figure 15: Proposed landscaping treatment to the corner of Miller Street and Carlow Street**

Source: Oculus

**Articulation and stepping down**

Request for further information item:

- Consideration to further articulate the façade on Miller Street and stepping the building down following the slope of the land should also be considered

WMK Architecture has provided a response to this item.

The slope of the land is gradual, and is not considered a visual characteristic of the site or immediate context. As such, it is not considered to be a necessary influence of the built form solution. By way of comparison, slope would be a highly relevant consideration should the proposal be located south of Ridge Street where slope is a key contributor to landscape and streetscape character.

As has been shown in the figures in this document, the Miller Street façade has been broken down into two distinct but complementary forms comparing the Miller Street building and the Carlow Street building. When seen from most locations in Miller Street, the Miller Street building will be read a more horizontally oriented element, while the Carlow Street building will be read a more vertically and horizontally balanced element.

In addition to this massing, the elevations of the building have been substantially articulated. A number of finer grain elements than the main structural framing of the proposal contribute to this, including recessing and projecting elements and large windows. The ability to perceive depth at the corner to Miller Street and Carlow Street due to the undercroft nature of the building provides further visual relief.

Materiality is also a key part of the articulation of elevations. The proposal makes heavy use of brick in this regard. Brick creates a considerably more fine grain visual pattern than other, commonly used externally facing materials. The following comments from WMK Architecture are noted in relation to the treatment of brick in the proposal:

- 'Brick is used as the dominant facade material to reference the sandstone materiality of the St. Mary's Church. It defines a solid form which responds directly to the scale of adjacent buildings. Shifts in the brick base are used to highlight key entry points into the school and civic programs such as the auditorium. Brick blade walls follow the structural grid and establishes a facade pattern, alluding to significant structures such as the North Sydney Oval stand. These vertical extrusions act as subdivisions to break up the horizontality of the structure'.

## Findings

The key findings of this assessment are as follows:

- the proposed scale and bulk is an intentional and logical response to site conditions
- setbacks to much of Miller Street are largely consistent with that of existing buildings
- while the setback to the Miller Street and Carlow Street is different to existing built form, it creates a corner treatment that is consistent with that of the North Sydney

Hotel, and together with the hotel and North Sydney Oval functions to delineate the gateway to the North Sydney CBD from residential areas to the north

- setbacks and associated separation distances enable heritage buildings to be seen in full as separate landscape elements
- the setbacks will be softened by landscaping, and in particular the new interface with the Presbytery will be a significant visual improvement on existing conditions
- the scale and bulk of the proposal takes its cue from streetscape elements, and is not considered to be incompatible with adjoining and adjacent heritage items
- the re-arrangement of building footprint to reduce the length of built form directly facing the Presbytery is a positive visual outcome
- while the original height was not considered to have an unacceptable visual impact, the removal of a full storey from the Miller Street building represents a more visually compatible scale to the Presbytery, and a more aligned height with that of the North Sydney Oval
- street facing elevations of the proposal will be broken up into smaller elements, and include considerable more lightweight elements such as large windows. This significantly reduces the appearance of visual scale and bulk when seen in views that include heritage items
- the heritage items themselves are distinct in their own right and also distinct from the proposal. Due to this, they are able to accommodate the proposed degree of change in the landscape due to the proposal without losing an ability to remain distinct landscape elements
- the proposed landscaping treatment considerably softens the appearance of building bulk and scale. In particular, the horizontal layering of landscaping at the ground plane, which includes street trees, low mix, hedging and planters, and the vertical layering of the ground plane and the roof top planting, will ensure that landscaping is a visually noticeable part of the future visual setting. On this basis, there is no need for further screening of the building
- slope is not considered a visual characteristic of the site, and therefore stepping the building down is not considered to be a key response to site conditions
- the proposal has highly articulated streetscape elevations, in particular through the use of brick and finer grain elements such as extensive windows.

The proposed amendments do not change the findings or recommendations of the remainder of the original VIA.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this assessment support those of the original VIA. In addition, the removal of the upper storey of the Miller Street building further reduces visual impact on nearby heritage items. On this basis, the amended proposal is considered to represent an appropriate response to the RtS visual impact items. It is the conclusion of this assessment that the proposal can be supported on visual impact grounds.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Bain', with a small blue dot to the right.

**Chris Bain**

Director – Strategic Planning

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