

SWITCHING STATION SITE JURY REPORT

GENERALLY

This site is very constricted. To satisfy the Brief requirement for 300 rooms yet achieve a development that “mediates between the existing Casino buildings and the lower adjacent built form of Union, Pyrmont and Edward Streets” is, in itself, a great challenge. To achieve these goals, and also satisfy the urban design challenges at street level, requires a very careful analysis of the often conflicting demands presented in the Brief. Of the three proposals, only one dealt well with these issues, but the Jury had reservations even with that proposal.

HASSELL SCHEME

This scheme involved a roadway that connected the Casino porte cochere with Edward Street, running parallel to Union Street. This new road provided drop off for the new hotel. However it resulted in serious compromises in many other key areas --- an unworkable two level lobby with poor street exposure, a dangerous and unattractive vehicular intersection at the important Union/Edward corner, and poor street level activity along Union Street. The Union Street colonnade, with it's diagonal support structure, also further masked any sense of 'active edge'. The green wall above, with southern exposure, was also considered a marginal proposition. Set back 12 metres, the hotel tower plan was very inefficient, and the trapezoidal plan form exaggerated the visual bulk of the building from surrounding viewpoints. The building height was excessive, as was the FSR.

COX RICHARDSON SCHEME

In this proposal, vehicular drop off involved alterations to the southern end of the Casino porte Cochere. The hotel lobby then became almost a second 'street' running parallel to Union Street, a grand top-lit space with entrances from Pyrmont, Union and Edward Streets. Union Street was activated, and the retail arcade was reconfigured and extended to relate in a meaningful way to the new hotel, the existing facilities, and the new development to the east. The planning at these lower levels had great clarity and legibility, and dealt very well with all urban design considerations. The hotel tower was set back 20 metres from Union Street (greater than the other schemes), and had a very simple and efficient floorplate. Rooms on the Union Street side were parallel to the street, but those on the northern side formed a gentle curve that responded to the curved forms of the Casino buildings. Some Jury members considered the hotel tower to be a little 'ordinary', but others felt it had the potential to deliver a memorable building, although they had concerns regarding height.

2/1/12

4
11

SWITCHING STATION

- Star City pushing for a new hotel tower, with 300 rooms, which would be 66 metres high – the same as the existing apartment tower. This is an important factor – it would no higher than the existing buildings on the casino site.
- The Planning Department favours a shorter, squat building – they want to take a couple of levels off the height
- The design competition did not resolve the matter. They recommended that the parties “mediate between the existing apartment tower and other buildings in the area”
- The jurors said this should be resolved during the D.A process (The jurors comprised the Govt Architect, an independent architect and a representative from the Department of Planning)
- Star City argues that, to provide 300 rooms (with most of them having some views) we need to build up to the height of the apartment tower. Otherwise the Lyric fly tower and the existing apartments will simply obscure the view
- The master plan for the area proposes a squat building – similar to the American Express building across the road . This would actually block the view from Union Square, Pyrmont. Other government officials (Steve Cameron from Premiers office) who have looked at the American Express building agree it is ugly and totally impractical for a hotel.
- Star City believes that we can provide a much more slimline hotel which would enable a line of sight from union square through to the other side
- It would have a “fast moving” shadow – because it is thinner than the surrounding buildings
- Parking details still being sought.

There were other concerns regarding the inevitable high maintenance demands of the planting boxes on the northern façade.

An alternative reduced height proposal was included, refer later.

BUCHAN SCHEME

Vehicular drop off is solved in this proposal by extending the roadway of the existing Casino porte cochere into this site, in the form of a circular 'cul-de-sac'. Planning at ground level has similarities to the Cox Richardson scheme, but without the same degree of clarity. Some areas of congestion result in the hotel lobby, together with some rather ill-defined spaces. The Pyrmont/Union and Union/Edward corners are marked with large entry structures, considered unnecessary and out of character by many Jury members.

The hotel tower is a unique, squashed elliptical form, with a triangulated, coloured, glazed surface, that seemingly floats above a podium base. Whilst some Jury members were excited by the attraction of its "look-at-me" iconic form, the majority felt it was completely out of character and scale with its location. Because of its form and the fact that the hotel rooms occupy only 70% of that form, the building bulk becomes 50% larger than it need be to provide 300 rooms - ie, it is visually the equivalent of a 450 room building, and way too high. It certainly does the opposite to mediating between the Casino buildings and the adjacent Pyrmont scale. Forms such as this require open space in which to sit, and here such space is not available - it is severely cramped on this site. The relationship of this form to the podium base was also poorly resolved, both visually and structurally. Even if the form of the tower was reduced in size, as was suggested, all these concerns would remain.

WINNING SCHEME

The Cox Richardson scheme was the winning scheme, but with reservations. Two judges saw the Buchan proposal as a very narrow winner, but the other four all gave the Cox Richardson scheme a big winning margin. The Cox Richardson scheme is already very well resolved at the lower levels, and the Jury reservations related primarily to the tower height. Half the Jury members felt that, in the context of the adjoining Casino buildings and Pyrmont skyline, it was too high as submitted, and did not mediate between the Casino buildings and the adjacent Pyrmont area, as required by the Competition Brief.

Cox Richardson did submit an alternate scheme, which reduced the height by two floors. The same Jury members still felt that a further one floor reduction was necessary to achieve an acceptable

contextual response. Their concern related particularly to views of the tower from the north to the east. (The current definition of building height includes planrooms, and these were ignored in this scheme, so could further complicate consideration of height.) There was some agreement that a step in the building height should be investigated, as it may help to achieve the necessary mediation between Casino buildings and Pyrmont, yet still allow greater height adjacent the Casino buildings.

With the planning modifications as shown in the Cox Richardson alternate proposal, a three-floor reduction (in lieu of two) would result in a total of 280 rooms. There is a further possibility that, with a lengthening of the curved plan form on the northern side of the tower (lengthen external “circumference”, not plan length along Union Street), an extra one room per floor could be achieved, lifting the total to 290.

The other half of the Jury expressed the view that the proposal, as submitted, formed part of a group of buildings with the existing Casino towers, as a result of its curvilinear form, overall scale and aligned height. In addition, they considered that the podium, treated as an element separated from the main building mass by the internal “street”, and at 15 metres in height, addressed the issue of pedestrian scale, and sufficiently related the development to the adjacent context. Furthermore, they felt that the 20 metre setback of the tower from the street frontage was sufficient to identify the podium as the point of reference, rather than the tower. Discussions were held which proposed further modelling of the tower and possible ways of addressing the apparent building mass when viewed from the north.

RECOMMENDATION

It was agreed that the Cox Richardson scheme was the winning proposal, but they be asked to undertake further studies of the tower, to review the impacts of the building mass on the skyline of Pyrmont and to review its role in the mediation between the existing Casino buildings and the adjacent Pyrmont area, particularly when viewed from the east and north. At the same time, provision of Plant Room space should be addressed, and consideration given to a northern façade treatment that did not include the planters. A 3D model of this proposal in the context of the surrounding buildings should be prepared, allowing the illustration of various massing options that might satisfy the Brief.

Jury Members -
Keith Cottier(Chairman), Craig Garvin, Peter Mould, Margaret Petrykowski, Tony Pieris, Simon Swaney