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Redevelopment Master Plan Epping Park, Mobbs Lane Summary of Heritage Issues

Background

This summary of heritage issues is concerned with the proposed redevelopment of the Channel 7 site, being 61 Mobbs Lane, Epping. The land is currently occupied by approx. 25,000 sq.m. of offices, studio and production facilities, together with infrastructure including an 800-space car park, helipad, refueling facilities and satellite communications centre. The subject site has an elevated position and is in close proximity to both Federation and more modern housing styles, and can be accessed from Epping and Eastwood railway stations. Nearby is a series of reserves with creeks that filter through to the Parramatta River by means of the Lane Cove River. On the site itself, Terry's Creek flows through Mobbs Lane Reserve, abutting the western boundary of the property. Its real property description comprises Lot 4, DP 219907, Lot 2, DP 570891, and Part Lot 2, DP 219907.

Statutory Controls

The subject site is not an identified heritage item on the Parramatta LEP and does not form part of a Conservation Area, but the Epping/Eastwood Conservation Area, identified in the Parramatta Heritage DCP, is in close proximity. This Conservation Area is characterized by the landforms and plateau edge, views of the city from its higher points, mixed allotment sizes and a good range of single storeyed brick bungalows dating from 1910 to 1940, together with a smaller number of intact Federation residences. This Conservation Area is considered significant by Parramatta Council, for being:

An intact residential suburban area in the first quarter of the twentieth century developed alongside the railway and from earlier villa estates. It includes a variety of houses in size and style, with Federation houses and 'between the wars' bungalows predominating. Mature trees, on private and public land (including remnant native trees), combine with the natural terrain to provide views, which are an integral part of the character of the area.

The Director-General's requirements for the Mobbs Lane site, with regard to heritage issues are:

Assessment of heritage impacts. The study shall consider the cultural significance that the site has and how to best capture it. It is expected that the study will offer options for how to best interpret the current land use in context of the cultural significance.

This directive therefore specifies the need for a Cultural Heritage Assessment of the site, a Heritage Impact Statement evaluating the proposed redevelopment, and an Interpretation Strategy to incorporate key heritage features and themes into the design.

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Historical summary

Prior to its present-day use, the site was utilized in the early part of the twentieth century for orcharding and as a nursery. The land has historical associations with the Mobbs family enterprise, which is remembered through the alignment and name of Mobbs Lane. Former convict William Mobbs and other family members, acquired substantial land holdings that extended from Pennant Hills Road to Midson Road. These land parcels were planted with orange trees initially sourced from Rio de Janeiro, and formed the basis of a successful family business.

With the decline of the orcharding industry, and following postwar subdivision in the western suburbs, the site formed part of the general breakup of the older villa estates and land holdings. The land was purchased for use by Amalgamated Television Sydney (ATN 7), with its opening in December 1956 centering on the completion of Studio B, as the rest of the structures were incomplete. Since the initial studio construction, the site has been more intensively developed to facilitate expanded usage, including on-site amenities, helipad, car park and outdoor film locations. By 1972, additional studio space had been added to the northern boundary, and more intensive development in the late 1970s, together with construction of a new office building in 1996, resulted in the existing site structures. To the east of the site, a small loading dock has been added in recent years, as well as a series of demountable buildings scattered across the site. The existing television studio unit comprises five large television studios surmounted on the northern and southern elevation by two additional levels of offices and production rooms. In conjunction with the other structures already outlined, a satellite receiving station is present, adjacent to Mobbs Lane and forming a highly visible presence along the property boundary.

Proposed Redevelopment

The proposed urban design concept for the existing site entails the construction of a parkland residential community across the property. The summary of the design concept, supplied by Architectus/PTS/Context for Sydney Broadcast Property Pty Ltd, identifies:

- Replacement of the current privatized nature of the site with parkland effectively expanding Mobbs Lane Reserve and the Terry's Creek open space corridor
- Removal of the negative traffic and other impacts of the present Channel 7 use of the site will provide for improved local traffic management and support of public transport services
- Provide a pathway system that links through the site to surrounding areas
- Expansion in the availability of community services including a child care facility and re-integration of the site with the surrounding public domain
- A mix of high quality residential environments with a variety of housing choice and high quality living environments
- Placement of buildings to provide neighbourly interface with surrounding properties
- 4.5 star energy rating for all buildings
- Fulfils metropolitan planning objectives of urban consolidation and reuse of major under-utilised sites.
- Conserve the majority of trees on the site within open spaces and building setback areas

Heritage Issues

The key issues relating to the site's heritage can be identified as twofold, being the historical pattern of use prior to the 1950s, and the activities carried out since the construction and initial operation of the Channel 7 studios. In any proposed redevelopment of the land, both phases of use have some cultural significance and should be taken into account, with regard to both surviving landscape features as well as intangible social values.

The old alignments around the property, together with established pathways and landscape features relative to the parcel of land such as Terry's Creek, should be respected in future redevelopment scenarios.

A second consideration relates to the elevated position of the Channel 7 site. Historically, the land has enjoyed 270 degree views through to the City of Sydney and the Blue Mountains. View corridors should be considered as part of the redevelopment process, so that this feature is not unduly encroached upon.

The heritage links with the Channel 7 use of the site are both tangible and intangible and relate to the land's postwar function and its socio-cultural significance through its relevance within the wider community. The land therefore has links with personalities and productions affiliated with Channel 7. The physical fabric of the site does not necessarily have architectural or particular historical significance but its role in the creation of, and participation in, the cultural images and events of the NSW community has cultural heritage value. The cultural values related to television production in the public mind are more closely related to the broadcast output and the public promotional identities of the television personalities. The nature and detail of the actual production facilities are essentially ephemeral for each production, and are subject to periodic technological and physical upgrading.

Assessment of Proposed Redevelopment

The proposed redevelopment is appropriate in heritage terms for the site. It retains the open nature of the Mobbs Lane Reserve and allows for greater public access through the site. The concept has acknowledged the need for heritage consultation and provides the opportunity for the implementation of heritage interpretation strategies. Its design responds well to the topography of the landscape in an appropriate and culturally responsive fashion, using the terraced landscape as a basis on which a tiered redevelopment combines open space with residential and community structures. The proposed residential use, as outlined in the design concept, is consistent with the greater pattern of use in the vicinity, meshing the new use with the established pattern of development in the wider context and continuing an historical pattern of development. This connected interrelationship is achieved through a concept design that is sensitive to key areas such as Terry's Creek and historical boundary alignments, and does not erode the visual qualities, impede views or overwhelm the nearby Epping/Eastwood Conservation Area.

Summation

It is apparent that the site has the potential for a well-crafted redevelopment. The design concept prepared by Architectus/ PTW/Context for the Mobbs Lane site allows for the incorporation of the history and character of the land to produce a unique, sensitive outcome that is respectful of its cultural contribution and its role within a wider Sydney perspective. Elements of the site containing heritage value can readily be incorporated into redevelopment scenarios for the Parklands without endangering key aspects of the design. Public domain art and related interpretation strategies will enable the visitor, as well as future residents, to comprehend and appreciate the unique character of the place. Redevelopment of the site will not detract from existing Conservation Areas in the wider vicinity nor impact on identified heritage items within that Conservation Area.

Recommendation

Having assessed the proposal, Graham Brooks and Associates considers the concept acceptable in cultural significance terms, providing matters of tangible and intangible cultural heritage significance are adequately addressed in the final design and presented in an Interpretation Strategy that is appropriate to the place.

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