

29 June 2020

Re. No 13-23 Gibbons Street Redfern

GM Urban Design and Architecture (GMU) have been engaged by Wee Hur Holdings Pty Ltd to provide advice and recommendations relating to the proposed development located at No 13-23 Gibbons Street Redfern (the site).

GMU were engaged to provide guidance to the project team regarding urban design matters relevant to the site. During this process, we have attended team meetings and liaised with the design team from Allen Jack + Cottier (AJ+C) and other consultants to achieve compatible built form outcomes in terms of the bulk and scale of the development. We have discussed numerous design solutions for details such as building footprint proportions, the scale and grain of the streetwalls, building setbacks and separation as well as responses to the emerging block pattern in the Redfern Centre.

In 2011, GMU prepared urban design guidelines for the block on behalf of the Redfern-Waterloo Authority (RWA). The guidelines apply to sites located within the Redfern Centre and were intended to supplement the RWA's Built Environment Plan - Stage 1 and the State Environment Planning Policy (Major Development 2005). The guidelines prepared by GMU were intended to inform future development for the state significant sites within block, located within Redfern Centre, complementing the emerging Station Precinct plans for the expansion of Redfern Station.

The objectives for taller developments sought outcomes to transform, celebrate and acknowledge Redfern's status as the southern gateway to the Sydney CBD. The guidelines were informed by analysis of the existing and likely future context as well as relevant state policies and guidelines applicable at the time. Since then, we understand that new LEP controls have been adopted for surrounding areas and the Residential Flat Design Code (RFDC) has been replaced by the Apartment Design Guide (ADG).

At the time GMU prepared the urban design guidelines for RWA no towers were approved within the subject block in 2011. Since the work was completed however, a number of approvals have occurred nearby which informs and changes the context that was evident when the guidelines were prepared.

As part of design development, GMU and the design team have undertaken comprehensive site and context visits and review of the controls. We have prepared a block analysis to understand the current context and site constraints including investigations of the emerging massing and rhythm of towers within the block created by these new buildings and approvals, streetwall heights, prevailing setbacks, building alignments, tower footprint proportions and building separation.

Through this analysis, we have found that the approved developments on adjacent sites do not strictly conform to the guidelines and their recommendations for streetwall heights, setbacks and tower separation. These new towers therefore create different relationships for these blocks and the precinct making a number of the original guidelines for the block now no longer appropriate as a response. In particular, we found that the setbacks above streetwall height and tower separation approved in the new developments do not reflect the guidelines and nor are they in accordance with the ADG. Therefore, the relationships established in the design of this development design reflect the new desired character that is evolving in the precinct- with a similar response and therefore lesser setbacks than sought by the guidelines or advocated within the ADG.

The proposal is for a Student housing Development Application under the AHSEPP. It accommodates 419 rooms and is located at the corner of Gibbons Street and Margaret Street at the southwestern corner of the block. To the southern side of Margaret Street, the land falls within Sydney LEP and different controls apply to the sites.

The proposal responds to the evolving and existing context as follows:

Building footprint proportions

The length and depth of the proposed tower building footprint is consistent with the proportions of other towers in the block, presenting a tower form frontage of approximately 25m to Gibbons Street and 24m to Margaret Street. The tower footprint is smaller than several of the approved towers in the block with more rectangular proportions, resulting in a form that is orientated to both street frontages in response to the site location. The bulk and scale of the proposed tower form is considered to be appropriate, complementing the emerging development pattern within the block. The relationship between the proportions of the podium and the tower footprint assist in differentiating the individual building components so the building 'base' reads as a separate component to the tower form when seen in the round.

Podium and streetwall

The podium building line follows the street alignment of both Gibbons Street and Margaret Street to provide definition and containment to the surrounding streets in accordance with the objectives of the Urban Design Guidelines.

To the northern site edge, the podium provides a nil setback to the boundary adjoining No. 11 Gibbons Street to the north. In this location, the streetwall scale ranges from one to three storeys providing increased setback for levels 2 and 3 where rooms are orientated north.

To Gibbons Street (west), the podium is built to boundary. In this location, the streetwall scale is stepped from a 3 storey scale to the north, aligning with the podium height of the approved development to the north at No. 11 Gibbons Street, to 3.5 storeys the south to align with the parapet of No 1 Margaret Street on the opposite corner. The urban design guidelines seek a 3 storey streetwall scale fronting Gibbons Street and Margaret Street but given the existing streetwall scale of adjoining development, the variation is considered reasonable as it responds to the alignment of adjacent sites and the sloping topography.

To Margaret Street (south) the podium provides 1m setback to the boundary. The 3.5 storey streetwall scale is continued around the corner from Gibbons Street, stepping down from the alignment of the parapet of No. 1 Margaret Street to the south, to 3 storeys further east. The proposed streetwall scale is considered appropriate as it correlates to the 3 storey scale of the development to the south at the corner of Margaret Street and William Street.

The scale is also consistent with the likely future streetwall at the adjacent site to the east at No 116 Regent Street where the Urban Design Guidelines seeks 3 storeys. The stepped streetwall reduces perceived bulk, transitioning to the lower developments to the south. The stepped profile provides transition to the residential area to the south and is sympathetic to the proportions of the heritage listed church. The podium façade is articulated with a fine grain expression to the pedestrian environment reflecting the traditional lot pattern and shopfront widths found in the area.

To the eastern interface, the setback provided to the eastern boundary varies from approximately 6m closest to the northern site edge to 11m closer to Margaret Street. The generous setback accommodates a pedestrian through-site connection to link Margaret Street to William Lane improving the permeability of the block and the active movement network to and from the planned new Redfern station entry at the end of Marian Street.

A 3 storey streetwall is provided to the new laneway. The 3 storey scale of the podium facing the laneway aligns with the scale of the approved podium to the north. GMU support this outcome and consider the through-site link to be contributory to the relationships within the block.

Tower setbacks and separation

The Urban Design Guidelines require a 4m setback above podium level to Gibbons Street and Margaret Street.

To Gibbons Street (west), the proposal provides a secondary setback of 5.1m at Level 04 and the tower form above is setback 4m from the western boundary, creating a 'waist' at level 04 to articulate the tower form as separate from the podium and reinforce the streetwall scale.

To Margaret Street (south), the secondary setback varies from 4m to 7m due to the geometry of the tower footprint and to the angled alignment of the tower form (which is not parallel to Margaret Street). GMU considers this an appropriate response as it accentuates the corner location and improves solar access to development along Margaret Street due to the greater setback provided to the western corner.

The urban design guidelines require minimum 13m separation between buildings up to 8 storeys and minimum 18m separation for towers exceeding 8 storeys in height, requiring a 9m setback to be provided to the northern boundary.

To the northern site edge, a varied setback of 4.4m to 6.4m is provided above the 3 storey streetwall. Given that the recent approval at No 11 provides lesser setbacks than sought by the guidelines and informs the emerging rhythm of tower forms established within the block and the block to the north, GMU find the proposed setbacks to be a reasonable outcome, resulting in simplified tower form, balanced streetscape proportions while ensuring minimised amenity impacts to future occupants.

To the eastern interface, the tower form is set back at Level 04. The setbacks to the eastern boundary (Level 04) ranges from 7.8m (north) to 12.6m (south), continuing the 'waist' treatment of the streetwall from the western elevation and visually expressing the tower form. Similar articulation is provided by the approved development to the north, facing the laneway above podium.

Above Level 04, the tower provides a varied setback ranging from 7.7m (north) to 11.2m (south) to the eastern boundary. The tower form provides definition to the through-site link. It aligns with the central bay of the tower form at No 11 to the north in the location where the laneway is widened (to the south), terminating the line of sight looking south along William Lane. Windows facing east are re-orientated away from the boundary to ensure outlook is focused in a northern and southern direction.

The design team has, in consultation with GMU, tested in principle layouts for the adjoining site at No 116 Regent Street (east). This work has been undertaken to ensure the proposal will allow a reasonable redevelopment potential for residential uses on the adjacent site. Based on the above, GMU find the outcome to be an appropriate response to the context.

Therefore, based on the emerging character and key relationships as well as the likely development outcomes surrounding the site GMU believes that the proposal complements the context as follows:

- Improved connectivity through the creation of a through site link;
- Improved pedestrian and neighbourhood safety and amenity through further activation and increased passive surveillance to the public and private domain;
- A vibrant landscape concept to the new laneway extension, to enhance the urban character of the precinct;
- Delivers uses appropriate to the commercial core to complement the vision for the area in proximity to a major transport hub, parks and recreational areas and major educational facilities;
- Development which encourages active transport;
- A built form which responds contextually appropriate in terms of bulk, scale and built form proportions;
- Streetwall scale and articulation to strongly define the street edges;
- Streetwall scale which is respectful of the heritage fabric in the area and transitions to adjoining residential uses;
- Development which responds appropriately to the corner location;
- Development designed to be seen 'in the round';
- A built form that contributes to the recognisable skyline of Redfern Centre when seen from other areas of the city as sought by original plans and guidelines for the area.