



Urban Design Peer Review

815 Pacific Highway , Chatswood

Six Degrees Urban

.....
URBAN DESIGN, STRATEGY, RESEARCH
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Issued : 5 June 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

Six Degrees Urban acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this project is located, the Cammeraygal people of the Eora Nation, and the land on which we live and work, the Gadigal of the Eora Nation, and pay respects to their elders past and present. We also acknowledge that this and other lands in our nation always were never ceded, always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

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Photo: Max Dupain

Executive Summary

Purpose of this Peer Review

This report has been prepared as an Urban Design review of the current HDA proposal for a mixed-use residential development located at 815 Pacific Highway, Chatswood. The proposal seeks approval for a mixed use development of approximately 490 residential apartments, of which 76 will be delivered as affordable housing for 15 years, managed by Evolve Housing. The building is proposed as a 60 storey + plant tower on a nine storey podium containing retail/ commercial and residential uses.

Summary of the Proposal

The proposal is to demolish an existing 14 storey commercial office tower, known as the Panorama Building, built in 1972, with average floorplates of 550 sqm GBA. When it was built, it was the tallest building in Chatswood, located on the highest point in the centre, so a rooftop restaurant accessed by an external glass lift was an architectural gesture celebrating the height and amazing views. The office tower is now classified as providing B or C grade office space, and at over fifty year old, is considered past its commercial life. There are also signifcant drivers from a public realm perspective to encourage its renewal, including the potential to contribute to an expanded walking and cycling path along the Pacific Highway, with a generous landscape setback as outlined by Willoughby Council in a CBD strategy creaed in 2020. These public domain improvements and the provision of affordable housing are directly enabled by the scale and configuration of the development.

Key Matters

A number of issues were raised in the SDRP 02 feedback letter dated 19 December, 2025. The FJC document has responded to issues listed under the headings Connecting with Country, Residential Amenity and Affordable Housing. Matters more directly related to Urban Design were listed under the headings, of Streetscape and Public Amenity and Massing Strategy and Built Form.

Urban Design comments on those aspects of the proposal follow.

Streetscape and Public Amenity

The Chatswood CBD Planning and Urban Design Strategy 2036 outlined a long term desire to achieve two rows of trees running along either side of the Pacific Highway. The area of Chatswood CBD west of the train line consists of mainly commercial towers designed and built with the ground plane character of a business park. Most commercial buildings have a landscape setback from the street, creating what we would describe now as non-active edges. This proposal provides a significant upgrade to the streetscape, providing a widened pedestrian zone to mitigate the challenges of the existing narrow footpath on the hostile edge of the Pacific Highway. The setback and canopy strategy are presented as fully integrated urban infrastructure not an optional enhancement.

Continuous Tree Canopy and Expanded Public Domain

The SDRP 02 letter states “Noting the complexities of underground services, a minimum of one continuous corridor of connected canopy should be provided, with an additional zone of generous landscape”.

Whilst generous tree planting is not necessarily accepted best practice urban design for centres where we are trying to achieve street edges activated by retail, in this case it is a sensible option given the Pacific Highway is a busy six lane arterial road. It continues the existing dominant character of landscape setbacks and adds to the improvement of the public domain. The challenge is to strike a balance between a landscape setback significant enough for the trees to thrive whilst providing adequate activation and exposure to passing pedestrians for the retail tenancy(s).

The FJC design has responded to this challenge with a sophisticated curved facade on the lower levels of the proposed tower. This creates a sweeping space that includes the trees, with a deeper area in the mid-block which curves back towards the footpath edge as it moves towards Help Street. This curve could be interpreted as a nod to the current 1960’s office building with its curved facade. It also delivers a condition where the retail is closer to the boundary at the corner of the quieter Help Street, improving activation and retail tenancy viability. Overall a clear net benefit is delivered by this proposed scheme.

Deep Soil Planting

Deep soil is a challenge on this highly constrained site, however the FJC scheme proposes a continuous strip of soil, deep enough based on Arborist advice and ADG guidelines, to sustain appropriate medium sized trees and provide a significant improvement to the existing conditions and a continuation of the Pacific Highway green spine.

Expanded Active Frontages

Delivering tree planting on the street edge of a private site, whilst expanding active frontages is to some extent working at odds with each other, as the planting creates a barrier to some active retail and other uses, particularly on a complex site. The FJC scheme looks to solve these issues by bringing the business park landscape atmosphere along the front of the site whilst providing an active retail space that aligns directly with the footpath on Help Street, and at the corner of the Pacific Highway.

Massing Strategy and Built Form

The FJC proposal outlines an intensification of form on the site, driven by a number of factors, including the need to maximise the yield to create a viable development that includes a substantial number of market and affordable apartments. This proposal would help achieve the broader strategic objective of increasing the mix of uses in the centre by delivering a significant number of residential apartments on the edge of the commercial core. This level of intensity, appropriately on a gateway site provides that mix whilst assisting in retaining 70% of land as commercial to cater for long term job capacity, as per the Draft Sydney Plan Centres Policy. The design creates a podium line via a facade setback and planting level around the level of the adjacent neighbouring building on the corner of McIntosh Street and the Pacific Highway.

Conclusion

This proposal replaces an outdated commercial building with a significant number of new homes, including 76 affordable homes, public domain improvements, tree planting, large landscaping beds, active retail edges and a strong gateway statement for the centre. It provides an exemplary model for the ongoing transformation of Chatswood into one of Sydney’s most dynamic, vibrant and connected mixed use strategic centres.



Proposed active ground plane design - source FJC 3

Introduction

This Report

This report has been prepared as an Urban Design review of the current HDA proposal for a mixed-use residential development in the form of a 60-storey tower and podium, located at 815 Pacific Highway, Chatswood.

The Site

The site at 815 Pacific Highway, Chatswood is currently occupied by a 14-storey commercial building, known as The Panorama Building, with its main entry located on the corner of Pacific Highway and Help Street. The site has an area of 1750sqm, with a 56m frontage to the Pacific Highway, 40m to Help Street. The site shares a 60m boundary to the east with a commercial office building site, one of a line of three office buildings with plaza setback entries on Help Street, and serviced at the rear from McIntosh Street. The triangular shape of the site creates constraints, which need to be overcome in order to deliver the public benefits along the Pacific Highway.

Existing Building & The Rise of Chatswood

The Panorama Building opened in 1972, as the tallest building in Chatswood, with a rooftop restaurant above twelve stories of offices and retail uses at ground level. The site is located on a ridge line, at the highest point in Chatswood, and therefore a prime location for a tall building. When it was built, views would have extended to the Sydney CBD, and across the Lane Cove river towards the Blue Mountains.

In 2026, over fifty years later, the building is classified as B or C grade office space, with small floorplates of around 550 square metres, whilst the restaurant on the top floor closed in 1982, as has been used as office space since. In the context of the Chatswood office market, these floorplates are much smaller than contemporary buildings, and generally not in demand. The building has reached the end of its life as a viable commercial office tower. The ground level of the building is built up to the western boundary, creating a narrow footpath along the Pacific Highway. Willoughby Council have a proposal for all buildings along this edge of the Pacific Highway to be setback four metres in order to create a safer walking and cycling path, and to allow trees to be planted along the street.

Documents Reviewed

- Documents reviewed for this report include:
- FJC Studio State Significant Development Application - Design Report for 815 Pacific Highway, Chatswood, Issued April 16, 2026
 - SLR Wind Tunnel Study for 815 Pacific Highway, Chatswood, issues 10 April 2026
 - Visual Impact Assessment, 815 Pacific Highway, Chatswood, by Urbis, April 2026

Scope and Methodology

This Urban Design Peer Review examines the broad strategic context of this development proposal, including the Greater Sydney Regional Plan, the North District Plan, important historical precedents and frameworks and relevant local planning frameworks including the Willoughby LEP, DCP and Chatswood CBD Planning and Urban Design Strategy, September 2020.

The information has been reviewed against a broad understanding of the current political, economic, social and environmental challenges facing Greater Sydney, with a particular focus on the current housing crisis. All this has been reviewed against a backdrop of best practice analysis and delivery of contemporary urban design.



Site Location



Site at the western gateway of the Chatswood CBD

Regional Planning Context

A Metropolis of Three Cities

The current over-arching strategic plan for Sydney is the Greater Sydney Region Plan – A Metropolis of Three Cities. This plan sets out Ten Directions, described as a liveability, productivity and sustainability framework to guide the future of Greater Sydney. Underneath these directions are 40 strategic objectives for Greater Sydney.

The site at 815 Pacific Highway is located in the strategic centre of Chatswood, within the North District of the Eastern Harbour City. There is a more detailed Northern District Plan that explores ways to create more liveable and active centres, including Chatswood, which is the main strategic centre in the Willoughby Local Government area, along with part of the St Leonards centre, located further south.

There is also an important Draft Sydney Plan, released in December 2025, that will supersede the Metropolis of Three Cities Plan. This plan is not in effect however it does provide a sense of the main policy drivers that are likely to guide Sydney’s strategic planning over the coming years. The major shift in focus between the Draft Sydney Plan (Dec 2025) and the Metropolis of Three Cities is a significant increase in the supply of well located and affordable housing. The plan has seven priorities that outline the main directions of the plan and then twelve responses, or key actions, of which four are directly related to the provision of housing.

Cities around the world are responding to what has become known as *the housing crisis*, in attempts to reduce the costs of renting and buying homes, particularly when compared to average wages in those cities. In Sydney, these challenges are exacerbated by rising construction costs and other factors that have limited the areas where new medium and high density development can be feasibly delivered.

The report referred to on the next page shows that there are relatively few areas in Sydney where development of new mid rise and high rise residential buildings are viable.

Redevelopment

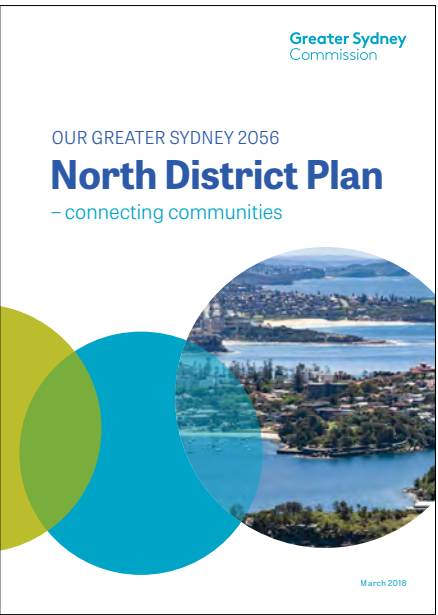
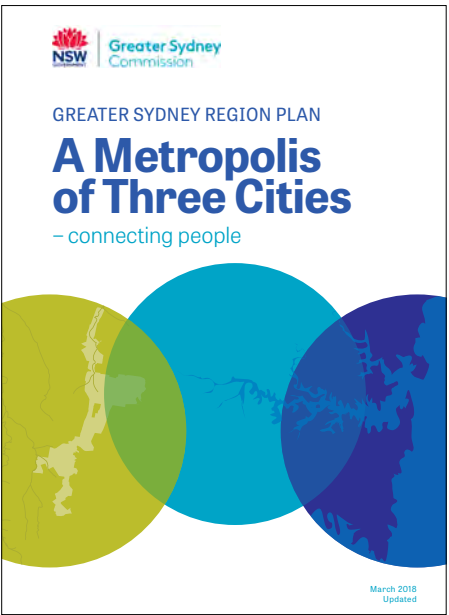
The site at 815 Pacific Highway is zoned E2 - Commercial Centre. Chatswood rose as an important secondary office market in the 1980s, in line with trends around the world for Suburban office centres which could reduce commute times for the staff and offer lower rents than the primary CBD. Chatswood grew quickly through the 1980’s, however vacancy rates were significant in the early 1990’s due to *the recession we had to have*, as Paul Keating, the then Federal Treasurer described the financial downturn.

In following decades, Macquarie Park became another important suburban office market, with the strategic advantage of an adjacent university campus enabling potential research collaborations, and lower land costs. The combined centres along the north shore train line of St Leonards and Crows Nest also grew the supply of office space in part due to the proximity of the major North Shore Hospital and the associated research and services cluster. Parramatta also grew, as the now designated River City and second CBD of Greater Sydney. Chatswood is now ranked the sixth largest office market in Sydney, similar in size to the Sydney CBD fringe according to JLL and Colliers office market reports 2024-25.

Chatswood CBD will continue to perform an important role as a Commercial Centre for the north shore, however as it is not one of the primary office locations, it is highly unlikely that it will be viable to redevelop an old office building like 815 Pacific Highway into a new Premium/ A Grade office building.

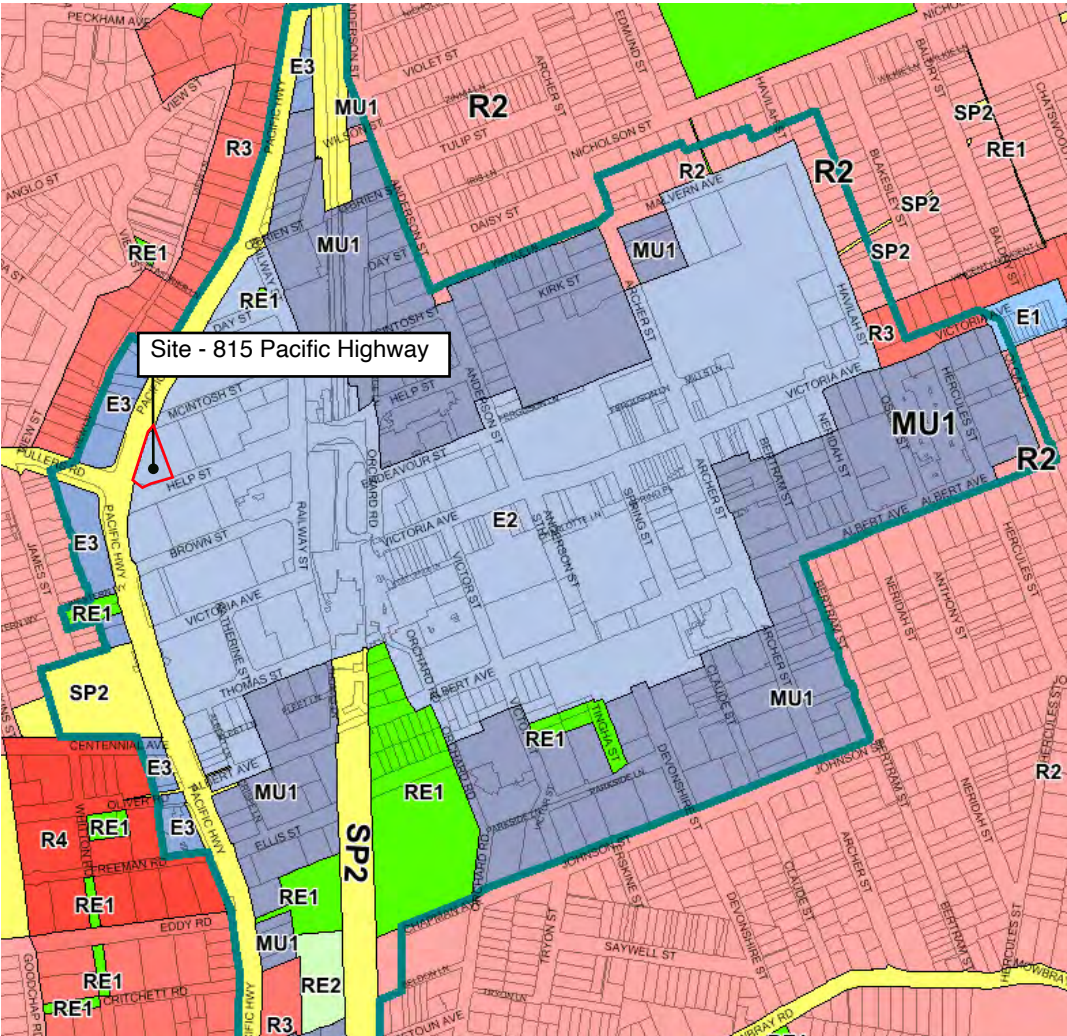
Regional Planning Alignment Summary

The conversion of 815 Pacific Highway from the existing office building to mixed use consisting of mainly residential dwellings is the most likely viable renewal option for this out of date site. That outcome would be consistent with the broader aims of the Greater Sydney Regional Plans around Liveability, Productivity and Sustainability, but also specifically by providing more residential development in the strategic centre of Chatswood, without compromising commercial development.



Zone Key

- MU1 - Mixed Use
- E2 - Commercial Centre
- E3 - Productivity Support
- R2 - Low Density Residential
- R3 - Medium Density Residential
- RE1 - Public Recreation
- SP2 - Infrastructure



Housing Targets and Development Feasibility

Strategic Planning & the Housing Crisis

In 2018 when the Plan for Greater Sydney - A Metropolis of Three Cities was released the housing target for Sydney was set at 36,250 per year across the life of the plan, or 725,000 dwellings over the next 20 years. The Greater Sydney Regional Plan is due to be updated soon, based on a legislated five-year cycle. This is likely to set a new housing target that is significantly higher than the current target, for a range of reasons, including the Federal and Stage Government’s combined responses to the acknowledged shortage of affordable and diverse housing stock in Sydney.

National Housing Accord

The Federal Government has recently set ambitious housing targets, including through the National Housing Accord, which was established in response to the current housing affordability and supply crisis in Australia. This accord set a target of building 1,000,000 new well-located homes across Australia over 5 years from mid 2024, which was updated in August 2023 to 1,200,000 new homes over the same time frame. The NSW component of this target was set at 377,000 well located homes between 2024 and 2029. Of this number approximately 55,000 are allocated to regional NSW, and 58,600 to the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Central Coast and Newcastle/ Lower Hunter. That sets a target of 263,400 new homes to be built in greater Sydney over the next five years, or an annual target of 52,680. That target is almost 16,500 more homes per annum than the current Regional Plan target.

The Department of Planning currently states that 28,800 homes will be delivered in 2025, which is 23,880 below, or in other words, only delivering 55% of the target of 52,680.

Development Feasibility in Sydney

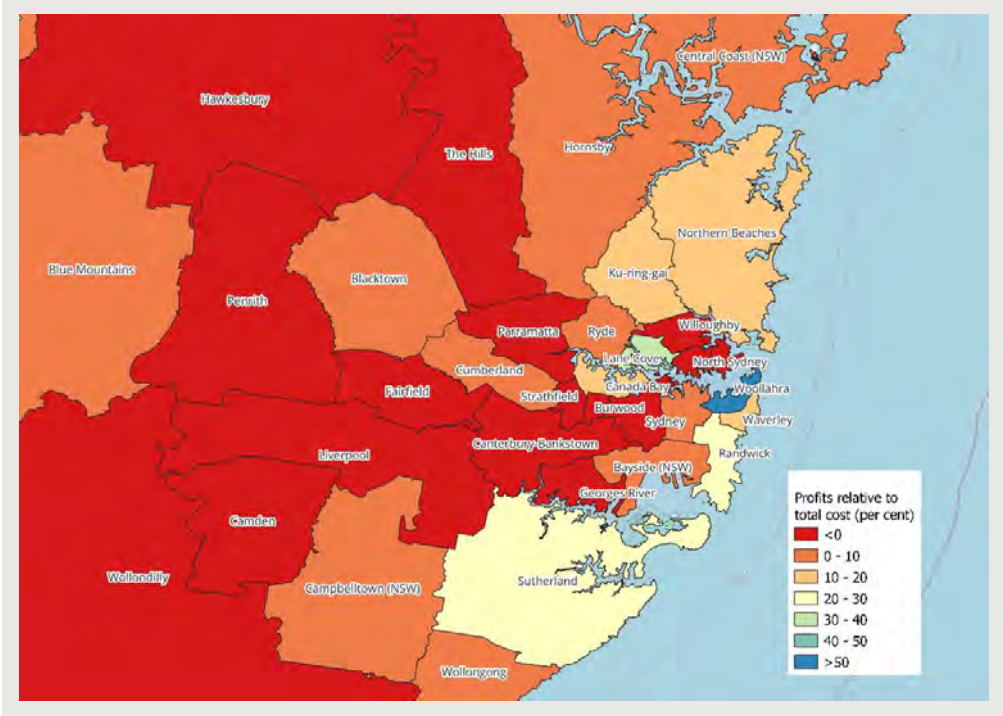
In the context of a housing crisis where NSW is not meeting its stated delivery targets, every additional home that can be delivered in appropriate locations in Greater Sydney is important. An additional challenge to achieving those targets set by the State and Federal Governments was highlighted in a recent report commissioned by the NSW State Government from the Centre for International Economics. Their report, titled: “Cost and feasibility estimates for supplying new residential dwellings in New South Wales” dated 16 August 2024, found that the development of apartments were not feasible in many parts of Greater Sydney, including North Sydney.

This can be seen in the maps shown on this page, with profits relative to total cost for both mid and high rise apartments show to deliver a profit of less than 0 percent for North Sydney, and many of the western Sydney local government areas. Interestingly Woollahra is the one LGA where profits are potentially highest, and only a few areas are able to deliver the profit margin of 20% or more which is considered the base line projected profit for banks to lend money to developers, given the inherent risks and likelihood of unforeseen problems that are likely to impact the profits on a project. The report outlines a number of factors that have caused the viability issues, including increases in construction costs over five years of around 30% and land costs increasing by 50%. This suggests there will be fewer new projects being delivered in the next few years.

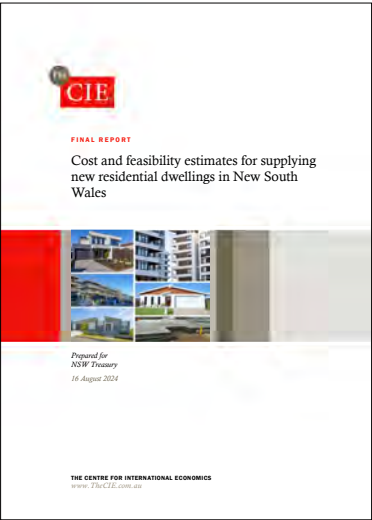
Summary

- Sydney is likely to miss its Housing target by 23,880 per year up to at least 2029
- High rise apartment development feasibility in Chatswood (Willoughby) is noted in that report as marginally viable, with profits of up to 10%, indicating land price and other factors need to be favourable.
- The current market conditions for delivering urban renewal on infill sites for mid to high rise apartment developments are extremely challenging. Proposals such as 815 Pacific Highway, where the site has been owned by the development party for a significant time, are more likely to be able to be delivered. They are likely however to need to maximise height, and yield to be viable.

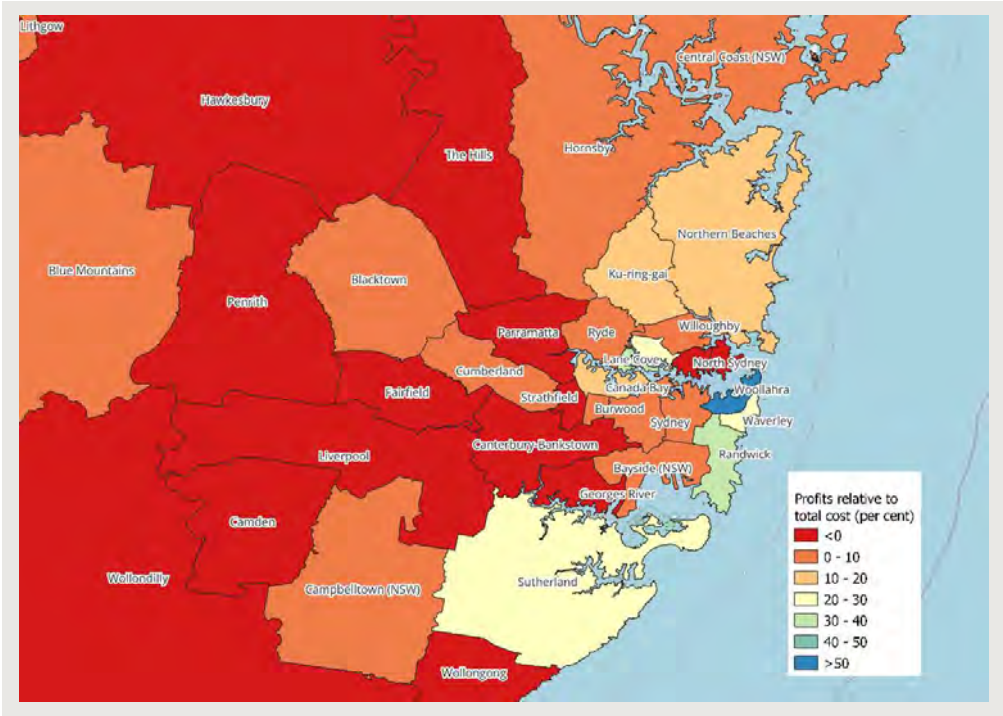
3.7 Feasibility of mid-rise apartments by LGA



Data source: CIE.



3.8 Feasibility of high-rise apartments by LGA



Data source: CIE.

Feasibility of development by suburb across Greater Sydney
Source- Centre for International Economics study

Chatswood - CBD of The North Shore

Ridge Top High Point

The Chatswood centre is an important strategic centre within Greater Sydney, and performs a key role as the primary activity centre on the North Shore. It is located on the ridge between the Lane Cove River and Middle Harbour, which is also the key movement spine along which the Pacific Highway and North Shore heavy rail line run. The new Metro City and Southwest line also services Chatswood, which dramatically improves access to and from the rest of Sydney.

Chatswood is approximately 2km from the Lane Cove River, 4km from Middle Harbour, 6km from North Sydney and 13km from Hornsby, as the crow flies. These distances locate Chatswood at the effective centre of gravity of the north shore. By this, I mean that in terms of the population density and accessibility, particularly with the new Metro Rail operating, Chatswood is physically and culturally increasingly the heart of the north shore, relied upon by residents and workers for many of their major and daily service needs.



Main Ridge Lines and High Points of the North Shore



Chatswood CBD, on the main North Shore Ridge

Ridge Location - Central and Viewed

The topographic map shown on this page with a yellow base, shows the survey marker indicating the location of the highest point of Chatswood. This is also the location of the subject site of this report, 815 Pacific Highway, and adjacent to the north shore rail line. The ridge was likely an indigenous walking path, for the traditional owners of these lands, the Cammeraygal people of the Eora nation.

The ridge remains a well trodden, driven and ridden path, with trains, buses, bicycles, pedestrians and automobiles moving along this ridge day and night. This movement and others around other areas of the north shore, also provide many and varied viewing opportunities looking back to the tower cluster of Chatswood.



Chatswood is an important Strategic Centre, located on the ridge in the middle of the North Shore area of Sydney, between Middle Harbour and The Lane Cove River

Historical Urban Context - Sydney as a Tower City

City of Sydney Strategic Plan 1970 Controls

The City of Sydney Urban Design controls set the framework for the management of building height in Sydney for many years. These principles acknowledged that the strength of the economic drivers for the construction of towers to achieve views of the spectacular harbour and natural landscapes of Sydney. They put principles around these which were clear and continue to have a significant effect on the built form of Greater Sydney. Of particular interest is the concept of towers emphasising the activity centres of Sydney.

Tower Clusters on Ridge Lines

As Sydney grew around a strong public transport system, the activity centres also grew with towers emphasising the expansion of dense commercial and residential activities in them. The activity centres of North Sydney, Crows Nest, St Leonards and Chatswood can be seen to be following this model, and many towers have been added since that photo was taken in 2009.

Sydney is Closer to Tokyo than Paris

Sydney has grown in a similar way to Tokyo, with intense tower clusters around key nodes, and the built form often transitions relatively quickly down to low rise housing. This is in contrast to what is often considered a more sedate urbanism of six storey built form common in many European capitals such as Paris, Barcelona and Berlin. Whilst this is often seen as a desirable human scale, it isn't the form that the economic forces of a city with a spectacular landscape like Sydney generates.

Conclusion

Sydney has embraced the tower clusters around activity nodes model since the 1960s, which has spread from the Sydney CBD across most parts of Greater Sydney. This continues to be a proven and viable economic model for well located residential and commercial developments, particularly those with views of Sydney's spectacular natural landscape.



Height Control Policy - Sydney CBD and Chatswood CBD

City of Sydney Height Controls

The City of Sydney established the benchmark policy that set out a clear logic for determining where tall buildings were appropriate in the City of Sydney, in their 1970 City of Sydney Strategic Plan. These controls suggested towers should emphasise the topography, so that they “*emphasise the City’s natural topography, and protect and enhance the drama of the City’s skylines, by encouraging the erection of the tallest buildings along ridges, and controlling the heights of buildings on slopes and valleys leading to the Harbour*”.

This approach, working in conjunction with specific height limits for each area of the city - which originally were 100 feet prior in the early to mid 20th century, then increased to allow modern skyscrapers including Australia Square designed by Harry Seidler.

City of Sydney Sun Access Plane Controls

In more recent times, (2016 - 2021) the City of Sydney has adopted what is described as a more sophisticated model to control the height of buildings. This new model delivers on the key aims of the controls, whilst allowing building heights to reach their maximum limit - in some cases the aviation safety limit of around 310m. The sun access plane controls protect the most important open spaces and key places from overshadowing as proscribed times, and then sets guidelines around appropriate street wall heights, edge treatments, the need to ensure negative wind impacts and other urban design issues. It applies particularly in areas that are not adjacent to the Harbour, which is generally governed by the previous height stepped down towards the water concept.

This is a significant shift, and reflects the need to provide new sites for commercial, residential and other mixed use buildings in the highly sought after CBD of Sydney.

Blue Blanket Height Controls

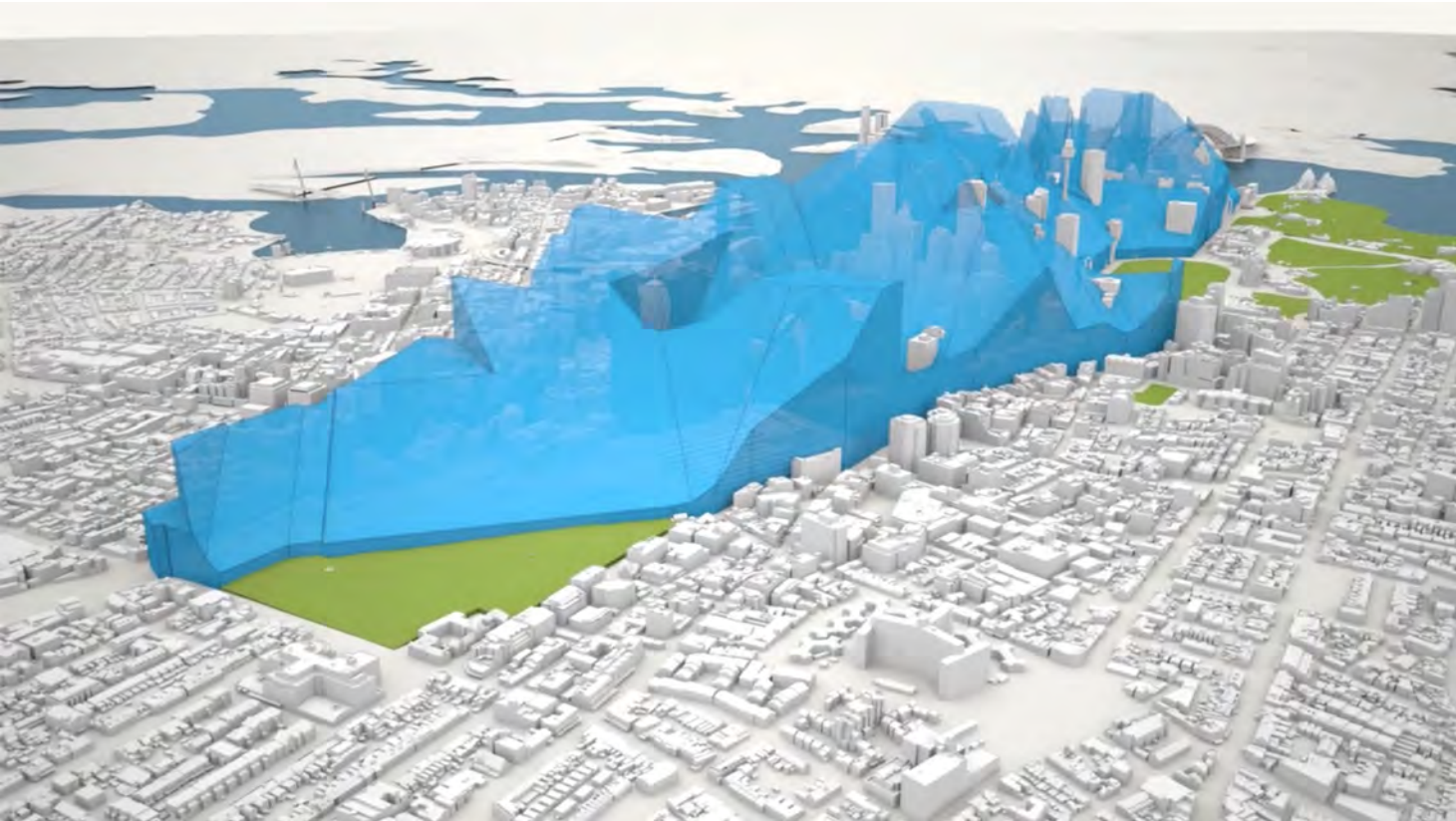
The diagram below on the left explains the protected sun planes, also showing where existing buildings have encroached on those controls, which were permitted under different planning controls that weren’t able to protect these key spaces. This approach has struck a balance between catering for a growing and changing global city allowing very tall towers in suitable locations, whilst protecting the key public elements of the city centre and surrounds.

The City of Sydney has recognised that tall buildings are a critical in catering for the current and future needs of Australia’s key Global City. The shape of the built form of the city has been moulded over many years, driven by the combination of planning and economic forces. As we face new challenges across the city, particularly around the provision of additional housing, new approaches are required to ensure we can meet the State and National targets in locations where development is viable.

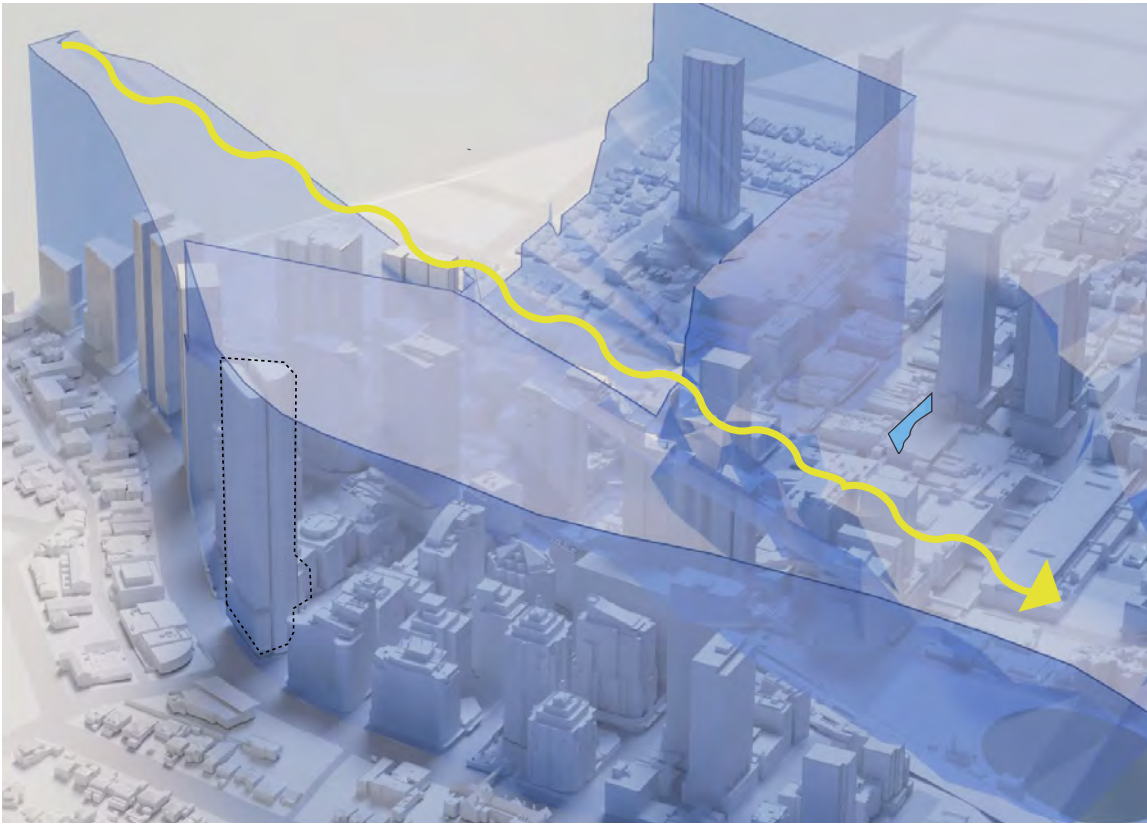
Application to Chatswood Height Controls

Across Sydney, strategic centres are increasing the heights of towers, in part to support the provision of new, well located and affordable homes. Chatswood is well suited to outcomes focussed, sophisticated height control system similar to that now used by The City of Sydney. This would protect Chatswood Park and other key spaces, whilst maximising much needed yield.

The mixed use buildings being built today wont be redeveloped for fifty or perhaps one hundred years. We need to ensure we are delivering a yield and spatial outcome in strategic centre, providing the highest and best use as we work to alleviate the housing crisis facing Sydney for the long term.



Sun plan diagram, demonstrating the desired sun plane angles for Belmore Park, at the southern end of the Sydney CBD



Maximum height for built form in Chatswood, based on sun plane access to key open space.

Chatswood as North Shore Tower CBD

Long Distance Views

Urban Design Aspects of Towers in the Landscape

From an urban design perspective the intensity of the development of the site at 815 Pacific Highway can be understood and assessed at three scales

- 1. Long distance
- 2. Middle distance
- 3. Close up/ adjacent views (see page

If we explore each of those conditions separately, we can break down the potential impacts of the proposal into component parts.

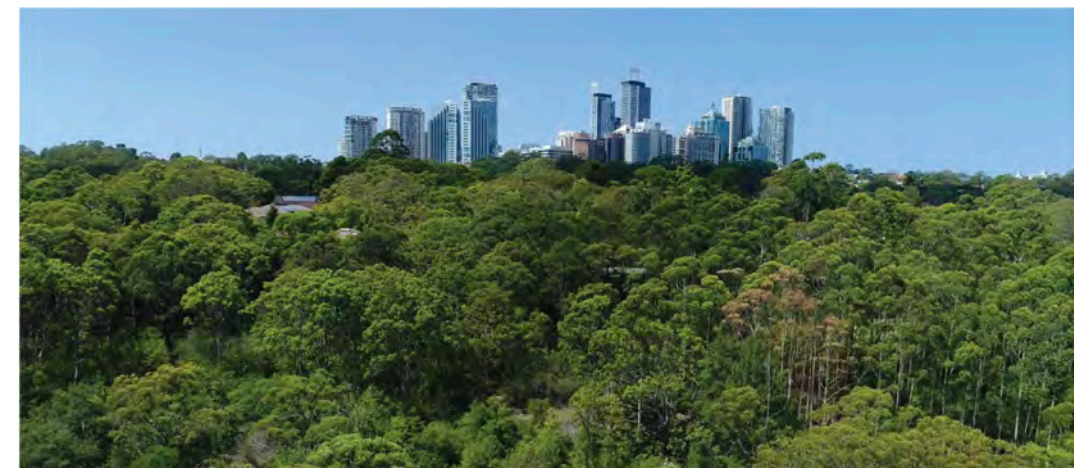
Long Distance Views - Towers in the Landscape

In terms of long distance views, Chatswood has been an identifiable ridge top tower cluster for decades. It is one of the more important and larger scale activity centres within the Sydney Metropolitan Area, and as mentioned above the primary mixed use service centre for the north shore of Sydney.

The site at 815 Pacific Highway is on the ridge, at the highest point of land in Chatswood. This is in part why the tallest office building in Chatswood was constructed, with a rooftop restaurant, which had views of the Sydney CBD skyline. The Chatswood skyline has grown in a relatively haphazard way, with clusters of towers emerging at different times, driven of course by market forces. These forces have shifted from delivering numerous office buildings of between ten and twenty stories through the 1980's and 90's, shifting to residential towers of between forty and fifty storeys around 2010.

Chatswood is located on the ridge line in the centre of the broader North Shore area. The height of the buildings within the tower cluster is visible in the distance from multiple areas of the North Shore. The roads in this area often follow the ridge or contours, so the tower cluster is viewed from many different angles. There isn't therefore a specific point where the taller buildings are necessarily located in the middle of the cluster and they graduate in height from there down to the edge.

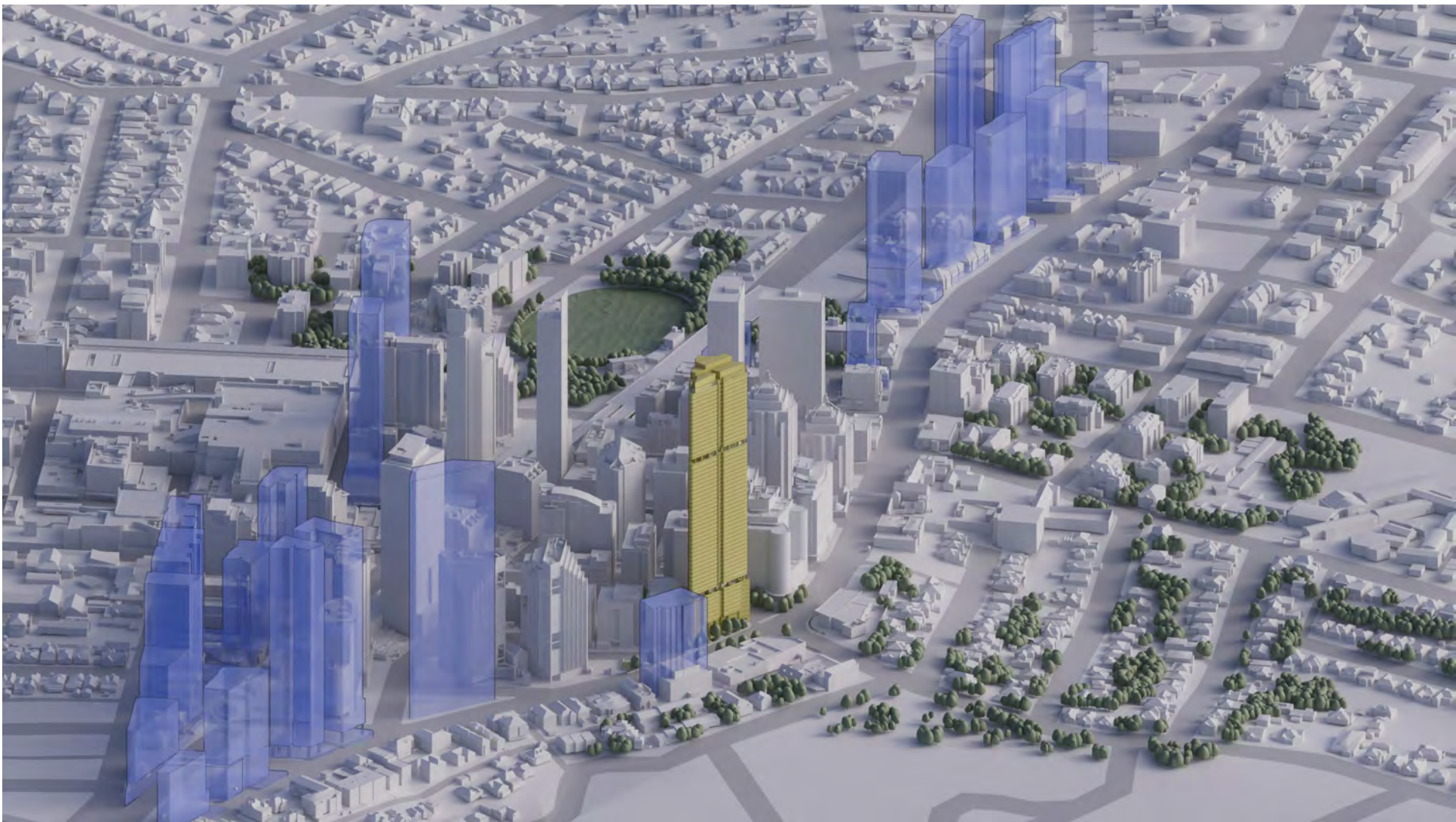
An additional tall tower within this cluster will be seen from many different angles will add to that diverse mix of forms. The tower's slender proportions ensure it will read as a vertical marker within teh sklyine rather than a continuous wall form.



Chatswood, as seen from the Lane Cover River, and across the North Shore- a cluster of towers above the green canopy or urban fabric



In the 1970's 815 Pacific Highway was the tallest building in Chatswood, The BMA Tower



Existing and potential additional built for across and around Chatswood - increasing its built form presence as the North Shore CBD

A Gateway Site at the High Point of Chatswood

Middle Distance Views

The Middle Distance Views

Chatswood has had towers running along the Pacific Highway since the BMA Tower/ Panorama Building was built on the subject site, the highest point in Chatswood in 1972. Additional towers have grown in height over the years, as Chatswood became a desirable secondary office location. In more recent times, large residential towers have been developed adjacent to the station, which is slightly lower than the Pacific Highway ridge line.

The current wave of development is delivering new, taller towers at both the southern and northern entry points to the centre, and this proposal adds a western gateway node to the composition of the centre. These locations make sense given they don't impact the important open spaces of the centre, and are able to take advantage of the wonderful district views across the Lane Cove River towards the Blue Mountains, to Middle Harbour in the east and towards the Sydney CBD to the south.

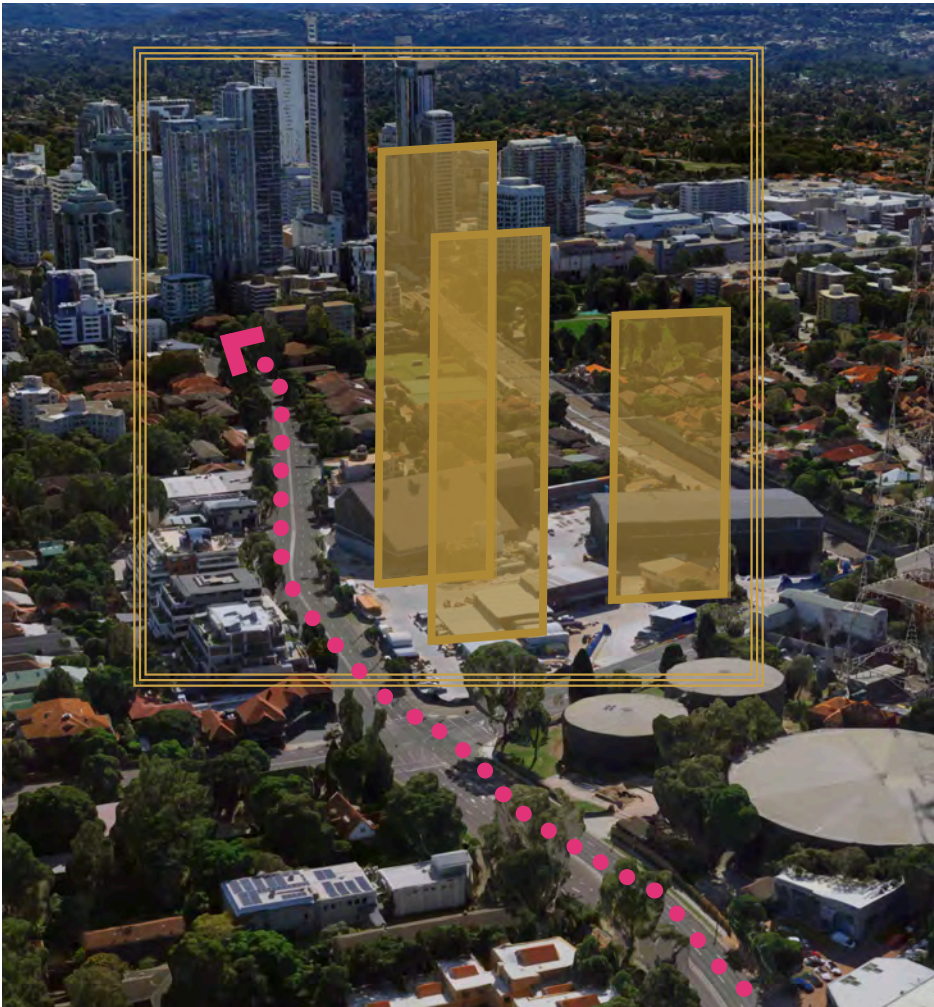
Chatswood Gateway Views

The strengthening of the gateways to Chatswood intensify the middle distance views of these buildings, including the proposed building at 815 Pacific Highway. Viewing this building from the middle distance, or on approach to the centre, is an important aspect of way finding in modern day Sydney. As citizens of a Tower City, we recognise the urbanity and intensity of activities as we approach the centre, and are drawn to the opportunities that go along with that, including retail, entertainment and leisure, work for some and/ or transport to other places.

The strengthening of the three main gateways to Chatswood, as described on this page, will also strengthen the role and vibrancy of the centre.

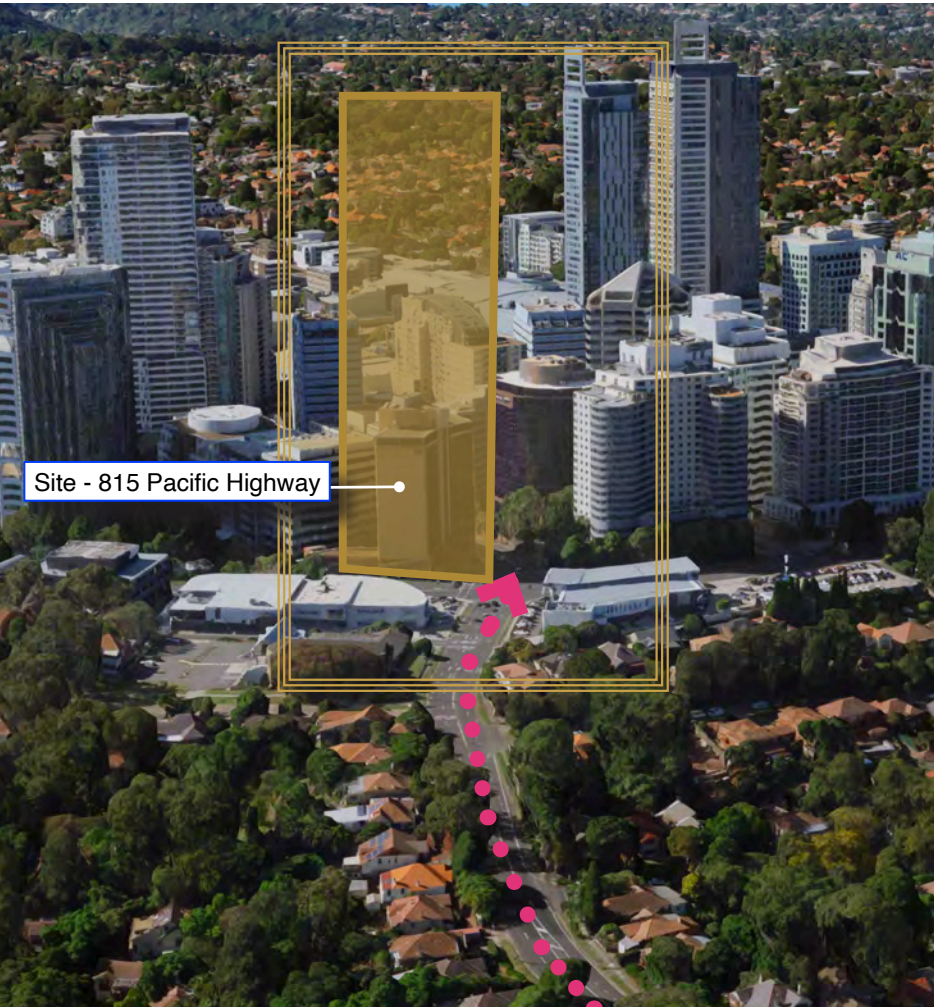


New Southern Gateway



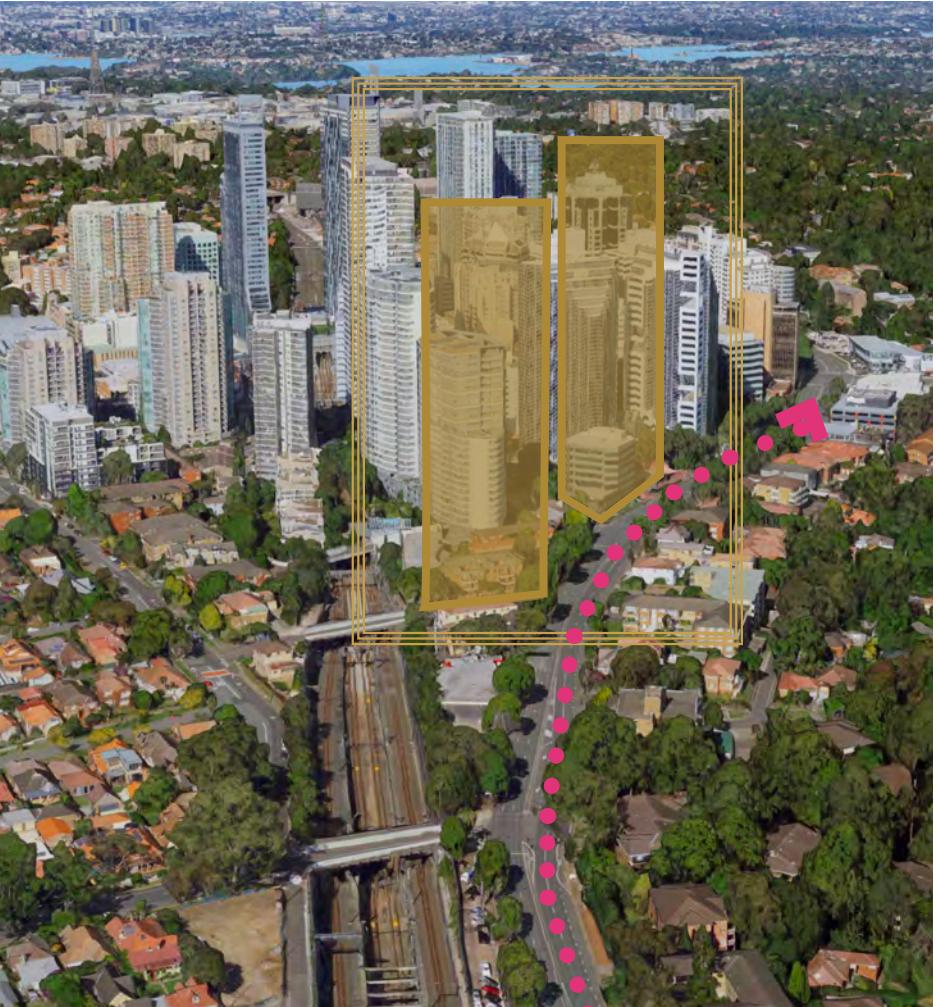
Existing Gateway forms, southern approach along Pacific Highway

Western Gateway



Existing/ Proposed Gateway on approach from West along Fullers Rd

New Northern Gateway



Existing/ Proposed Gateway on approach along Pacific Highway from North

Western Gateway - Key Entry to Chatswood

Prime Gateway Site

The site at 815 Pacific Highway is a key node in Chatswood for the following reasons:

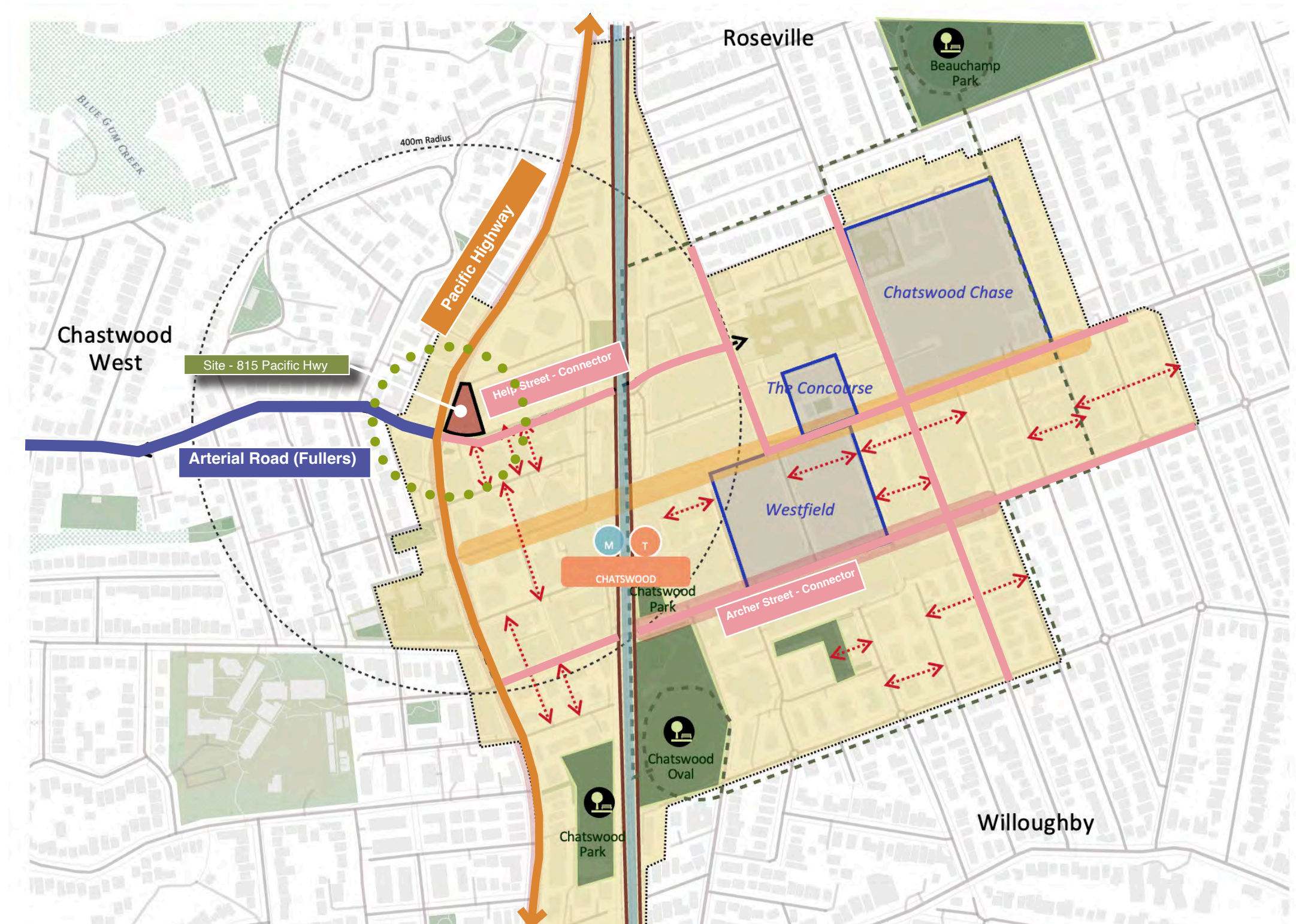
- On the highest point of land in the area,
- On the corner of Pacific Highway, Fullers Road & Help St
- Pacific Highway is the primary North Shore ridge road
- Fullers Road crosses Lane Cove River connects to the M2
- Help Street is the central street crossing under rail line
- Located on CBD core edge, 300m to the rail station

Key Node Within the Wider Context

There are three main arterial road connections across the Lane Cove River from the west to the North Shore area - Pennant Hills Road to the north, Ryde Road in the middle, and Fullers Road leading directly to Chatswood is the southern connection.

Fullers Road joins the main north-south spine of the North Shore - the Pacific Highway, at the corner of Help Street, which is also the subject site of this report. Help Street is a main connection into the centre of Chatswood, as it passes under the rail line, which Archer Street also does, but it's not connected to a main arterial road.

These road system connection points reinforce the importance of the node where the subject site is located, and therefore why it is appropriate for it to become a key gateway site for the precinct and broader area.



Overlay of Roads and Streets On Chatswood CBD Plan, - FJC

Peer Review - FJC Scheme for 815 Pacific Highway

State Significant Development Application - Design Report by FJC

Overview

The following comments are based on a review of specific aspects of the FJC Studio designed proposal for a mixed use tower at 815 Pacific Highway, Chatswood. It is based on the State Significant Development Application Design Report, issued 16/04/26.

The document covers the following areas: Introduction/ Executive Summary, Context, Design Principles, Urban Design Response, Built Form Response, Residence and Amenity, Compliance and Appendices.

This review focuses comments and recommendations on the Urban Design related issues that are potentially contentious, which include:

- **the height and location of the proposed building**
- **the development intensity**
- **ground level setbacks & podium/tower configuration**
- **development potential of adjacent lots**
- **deep soil planting**
- **wind impacts**

General Comments - Renewal Rationale

The FJC report outlines a strong case for replacing an outdated and under utilised fifty year old office building that occupies one of the most strategic sites on the North Shore of Sydney. The current building is built to the street edge on the Pacific Highway, which doesn't comply with the proposed Green Setback street treatment as recommended by the Chatswood CBD Planning and Urban Design Strategy, September 2036.

In that strategy, a setback of 4 metres is recommended to achieve a walking and cycling connection along the highway through the Chatswood Centre, to be achieved through developer agreements when sites are re-developed along the Pacific Highway frontage. A number of the existing buildings along this strip are mixed use and strata titled, with commercial on the lower levels and residential above. These buildings may take some time to be redeveloped, however some of them have setbacks which could be re-worked to achieve improved walking and cycling conditions along the Pacific Highway.

Controls and Compliance

The FJC report notes that:

- The land is zoned E2 Commercial Core, which permits a mix of commercial, retail, residential and other uses
- Maximum height under the LEP is 246.8m with an amendment sought to increase that to 310.28
- The site is not subject to specific FSR controls for a mixed use development
- The proposal would not overshadow any of the key open spaces of Chatswood
- The report explores in some detail the emerging urban context of Chatswood, including the many and various proposals for significant mixed use towers proposed across the centre
- The scheme recognises the complex and constrained nature of the site, and outlines an elegant scheme that will provide a significant amount of affordable and market housing and importantly facilitate the renewal of the site to deliver on major improvements to the ground plane that will deliver the pedestrian and cycling pathway along the Pacific Highway as well as an active ground plane with significant street trees, as outlined in the CBD Study.

Summary

The FJC report makes a strong case that this is an appropriate location for a mixed use tower, and that the scale and type of development is appropriate and necessary to deliver on the significant public domain improvements.

The following pages reviews some of the key issues that have emerged during design review and SDRP panel sessions on the project, including:

- **Setbacks and design of the podium and tower**
- **Development potential on adjacent sites**
- **Potential for deep soil planting of street trees**
- **Mitigating wind impacts on public and private realm**



Existing Panorama Building, 815 Pacific Highway Chatswood



Proposed mixed use tower - 815 Pacific Highway, Chatswood - FJC

Peer Review - FJC Scheme for 815 Pacific Highway

Chatswood CBD Planning and Urban Design Strategy 2036

Deep Soil Setback to Pacific Highway East

The diagram below from the Chatswood CBD Planning and Urban Design Strategy 2036, recommends awarding property owners development uplift in return for dedicating 4 metres of private land to create a setback from the busy Pacific Highway.

The proposal that is the subject of this report complies with the 4m ground level setback, however is unable to comply with the additional 6 metres setback above a two storey podium. A number of the sites along the eastern edge of the Pacific Highway are between 31 and 36 metres deep. These sites may also have problems with a 10m setback from the front, and up to 12m at the rear in order to achieve ADG compliance for any residential uses. The 4 metres at ground level however should be achievable for all of the sites in a redevelopment scenario, and for some that could be retrofitted at the ground level without renewing the built form.

Ground Floor Plan - Setback and Active

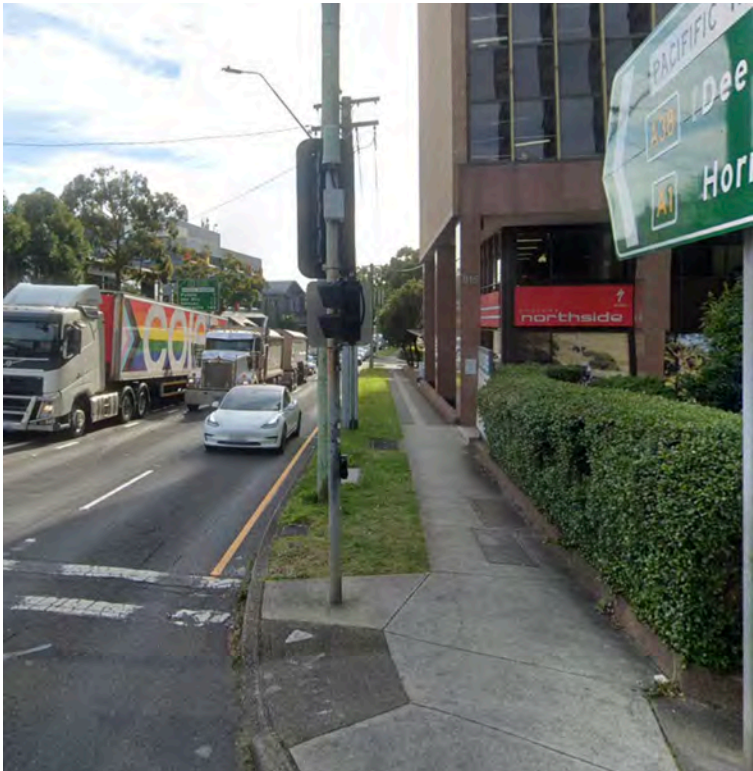
The photo on the right of this page shows the narrow footpath that exists at 815 Pacific Highway. The ground floor plan as proposed creates a gently sweeping curve along the Pacific Highway Frontage which does two things. It provides a subtle reference to the original Panorama Building and its curved facade, and it also provides a landscaped setback from the Highway, whilst bringing the active retail tenancy back to the Help Street corner, which is an important nod to creating a more active streetscape as the building turns toe corner away from the busy Highway, into the Chatswood Centre proper.

Tree Canopy and Deep Soil Planting

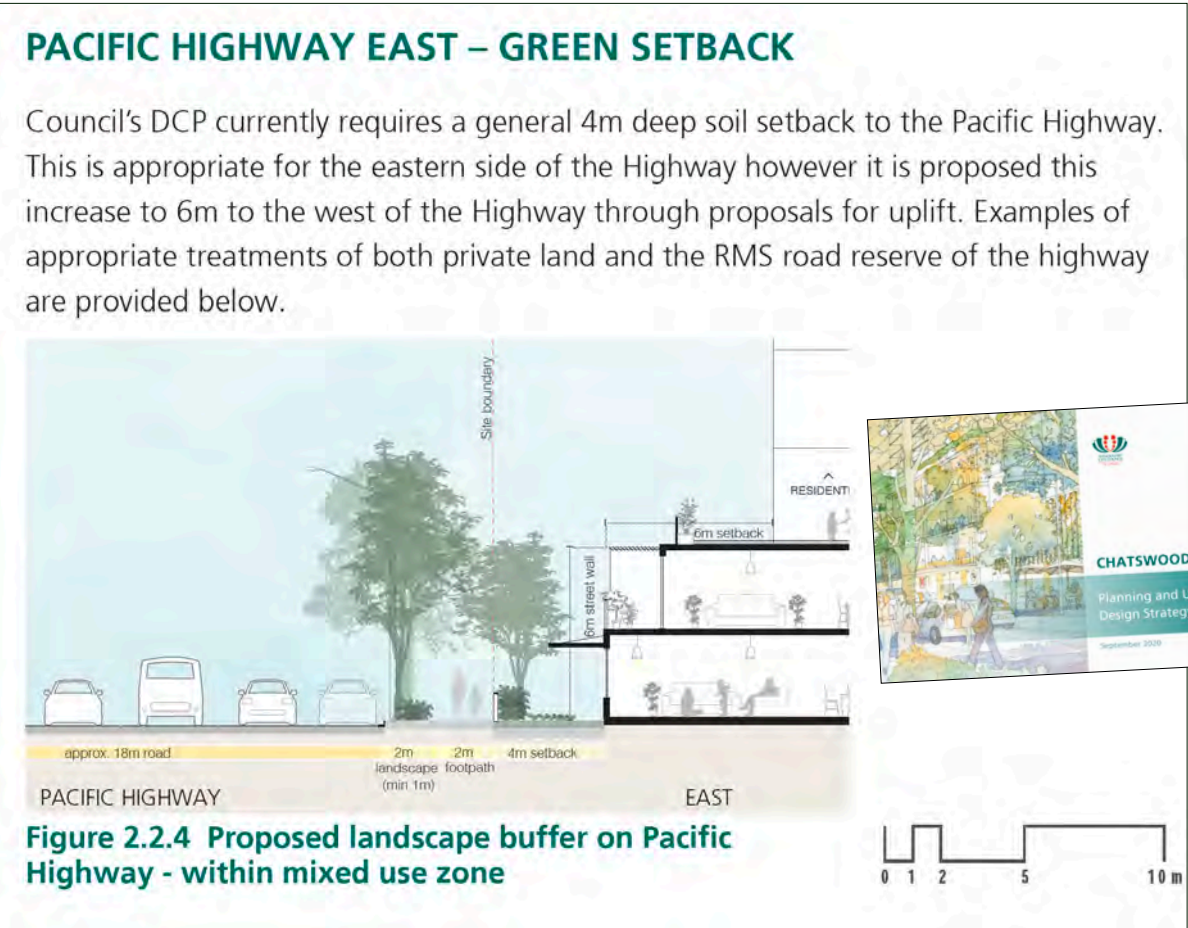
The ground plane and facade design as proposed allows for trees to be planted in appropriate soil conditions, as determined by an Arborist. The facade curve is limited, and the extent to which upper levels of the podium extend into the setback they are high enough to ensure the trees have appropriate space to develop a full canopy. These points relative to tree health are outlined in Arborists to report - as provided by fivev.

Conclusion

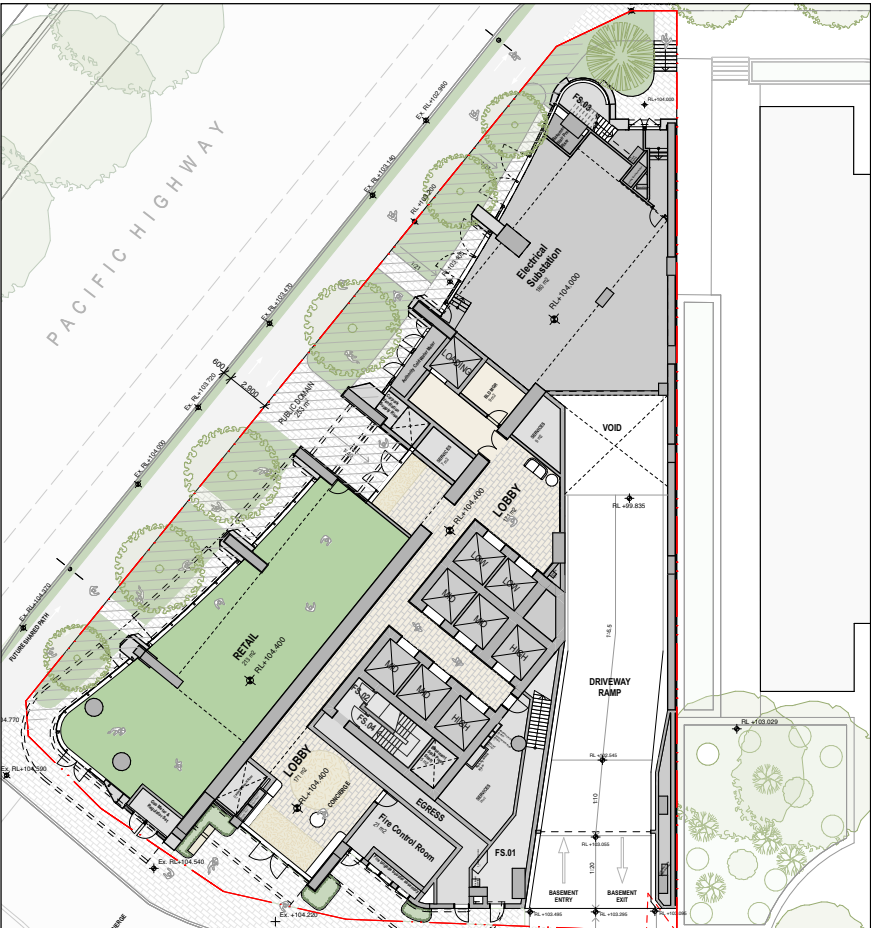
The ground plane as designed in the proposed scheme provides a significant improvement and controbution to the public realm compared to the existing conditions. It will satisfy the aims of the Chatswood CBD Planning and Urban Design Strategy 2036, delivering the space in an adequate configuration along the site frontage for a 4m landscape setback and the maintainance of mature trees.



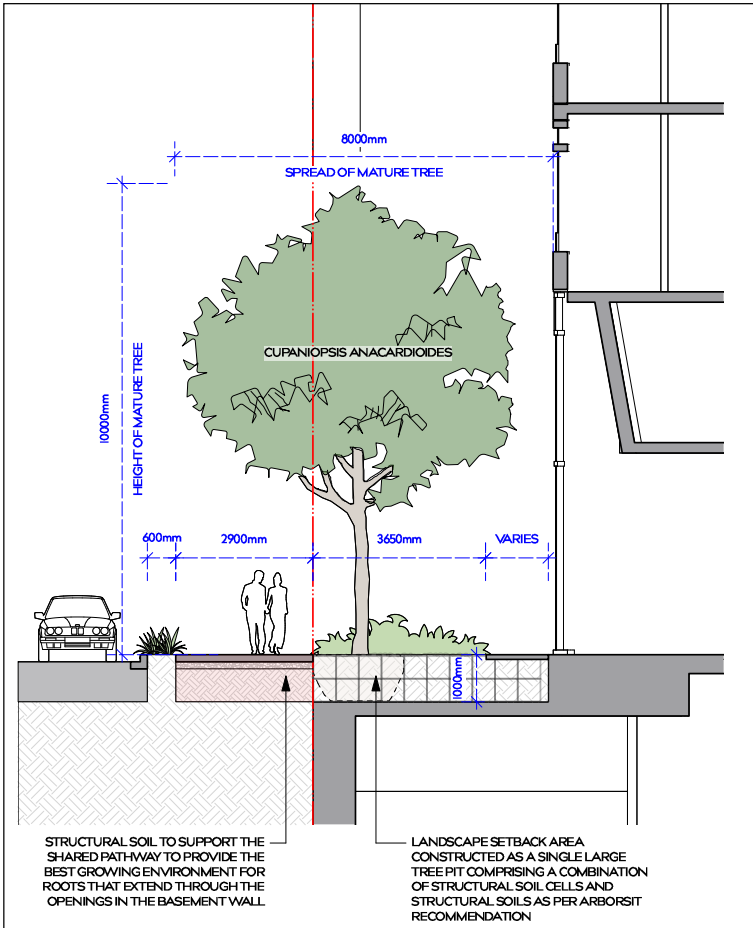
Existing constrained footpath along site @ 815 Pacific Highway



Proposed Green Setback- Chatswood CBD Planning and Urban Design Strategy 2020



Proposed Ground Floor Plan - 815 Pacific Hwy - FJC



Proposed detailed street frontage section - FJC

Peer Review - FJC Scheme for 815 Pacific Highway

Podium and Tower Design- Relative to Public Realm

Podium Design - Height

The proposed podium is set at a datum to match the adjacent existing commercial building context of around ten floors - see image below. This establishes a higher datum than the suggested two storey podiums in the Chatswood CBD Planning and Urban Design Strategy 2036, which seems to have been based on lower rise, large floorplate commercial office buildings from an earlier period of development in Chatswood.

The height of the proposed mixed use tower is 206 metres, driven by the inclusion of approximately 15% affordable housing and the potential to extend to 308m AHD, as the site is located outside the envelope where shadowing of the key open spaces is a limiting factor.

Podium Design- Curved frontage

The central image below outlines the proposed FJC design, with a gentle curve establishing a average setback of 4 metres from the footpath. This means the depth of green space is greater than 4m at the centre of the site and less on the corners. As is evident in this image, reducing the setback on the southern corner creates an opportunity to bring the retail space closer to the Pacific Highway corner on Help Street - as can be seen in the image on the right. This is a positive move in terms of activating the frontages, as well as making it more likely that customers walking along the Pacific Highway will go into the tenancy.

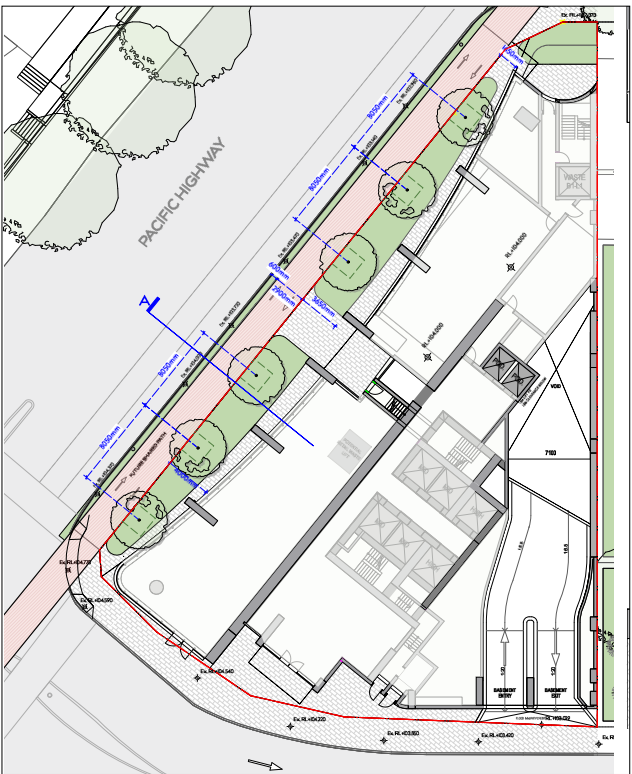
Designing active frontages that encourage customers to enter a premises can seem like a minor detail, but it can be a major factor in creating successful places where retailers or hospitality operators thrive and create a long term business which can help build community

Podium Design- Columns and Protrusions

The FJC proposal runs structural columns down the structure to support the apartments above, and these protrude 350mm into the 4m setback. This shouldn't impact the public domain in any negative way, and in fact could create attractive niches that could be occupied by the retail operator if it's a hospitality venue, which would seem likely.

Conclusion

The design is driven by the constrained footprint and triangular site geometry. Relatively limited depth in the narrow part requires the upper level apartments in the podium to protrude from the curving wall. This creates better quality apartments, and also extends beyond the upper level apartments, breaking the form and potentially improving the wind performance. The vertical separation between podium and tower is key to establishing a clear podium form.



Plan - Ground Floor and Public Domain - FJC



Tower and Podium Diagram - FJC



View of Podium and Street Front/ Public Domain - FJC



Proposed detailed street frontage - Help St and Pacific Highway - FJC

Peer Review - FJC Scheme for 815 Pacific Highway

Adjacent Sites Re-development Potential

Gateway Corner Site and Adjacent Potential

In response to queries as the proposal has gone through design iterations and discussions, and in reviews with State Government, studies have been undertaken to ensure the proposal doesn't negatively impact the potential for a mixed use residential development on the site immediately to the east of 815 Pacific Highway, at 15 Help Street.

As can be seen to the right, a 45 storey mixed use tower could be developed on that site, adjacent to the current FJC proposal, and both schemes could achieve recommended ADG compliance.

There are however scenarios where this could be increasingly complex, such as if all three adjacent sites on Help Street, numbers 15, 11 and 9 were to explore redevelopment options as mixed use towers with majority residential uses on the upper levels.

Challenges of Every Site Redeveloping

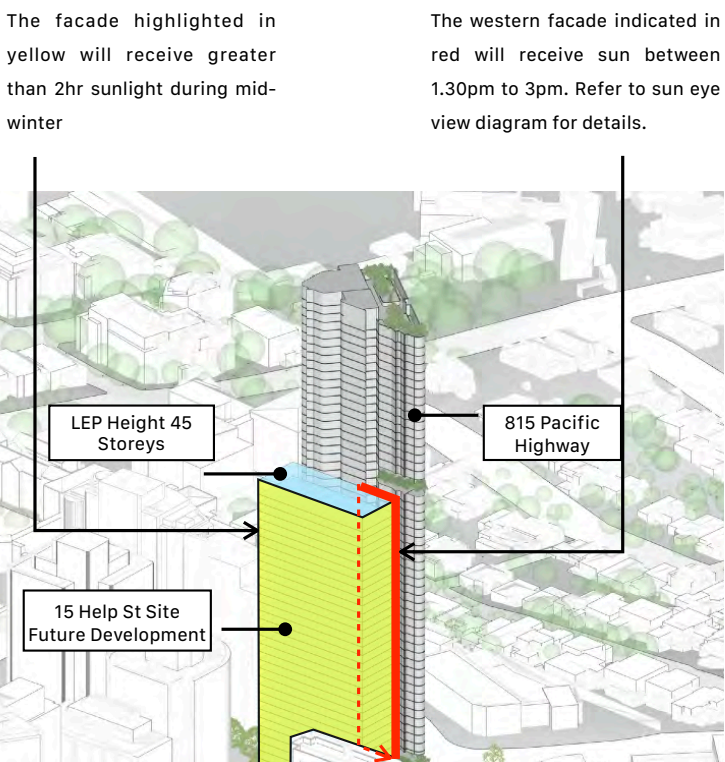
If the three commercial office buildings were all to attempt to re-develop into mixed use/ predominantly residential uses, the nature of the blocks would present ADG compliance challenges. The blocks are around 30m wide, so setbacks of 6 metres from each side boundary could be achieved, but would then only allow for living spaces to be oriented on the shorter northern and southern facade. This would create very challenging conditions to enable all three towers to achieve ADG compliance and still deliver a viable residential yield.

The triangular nature and CBD edge location of 815 Pacific Highway creates a unique set of conditions to deliver a landmark tower on the highest point in Chatswood.

Conclusion

The proposal for 815 Pacific Highway has the strategic advantage of being on the edge of the Chatswood CBD, at its western gateway. It has the Pacific Highway on its northern and western edges, and Help Street to the south.

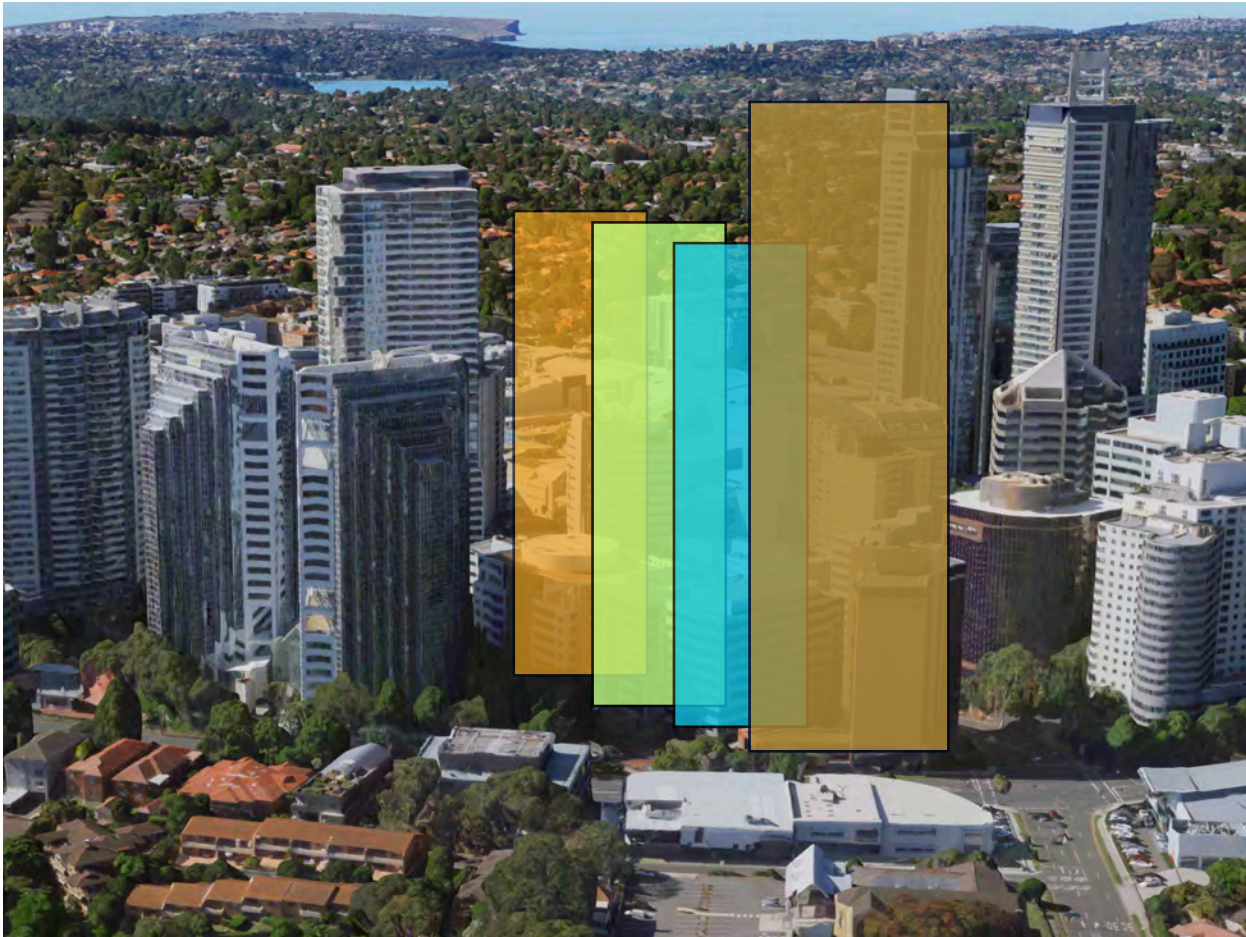
The unencumbered views to the north and the long boundary facing north west make this an ideal site to transition to mixed use. It can deliver on the significant public domain benefits of creating a landscape setback allowing a walking and cycling path to proceed along the Pacific Highway. The potential of adjacent sites to also convert to residential uses is compromised by their size, orientation and their ongoing operations as tenanted commercial office buildings.



Potential development of 15 Help Street - FJC



815 Pacific Highway, and potential tower outlines if the adjacent sites were to redevelop from commercial to mixed use



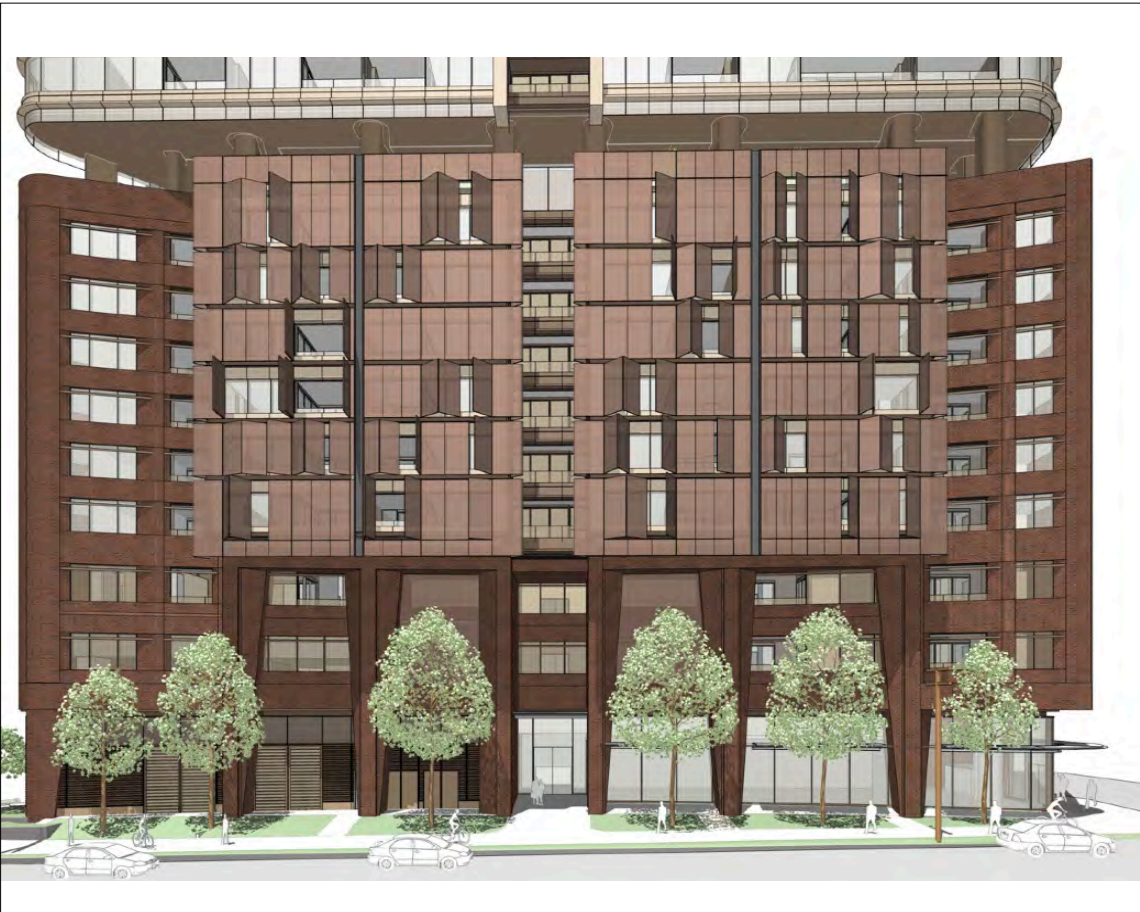
Diagrammatic exploration of redevelopment potential of 15, 11 and 9 Help Street 16

Peer Review - FJC Scheme for 815 Pacific Highway

Close Up Views and Wind Impacts

Podium Design and Streetscape Visual Scale

The podium design in the FJC proposal creates a sophisticated composition that is operating at a number of levels relative to the pedestrian / user experience. The triangular site is relatively narrow in parts, and thus to deliver a meaningful size floorplate, the tower can't be set back a significant distance from the street edge. The podium therefore creates a vertical spacer - with the sweeping curve of the ground plane and green landscape setback providing a separation from the busy Pacific Highway. By setting the podium height at ten stories, this creates a sense of an urban room, that combines with the similar height commercial towers on adjacent blocks. The podium apartments pop out from the curved facade on level four, which will not be immediately noticeable from the ground level, as the trees and canopies will create smaller urban rooms along the frontage. The layering effect that these different planes create will add to the dynamism of the experience, activated by the retail/ cafe space on the main corner.



Podium details showing layering of landscape setback and awnings to mitigate wind impact -FJC

Awnings

The provision of significant awnings will be critical in working with the tree canopies to create a spatial enclosure, but critically to mitigate any negative wind impacts. Awnings can be very effective when placed in the right location and at an appropriate scale, and will be need to be subject to rigorous testing in order to prove up the case that this design advocates for - a tower rising above a podium with a minimal setback.

Awnings can be seen on the sectional diagram below, however there will need to be testing to explore how these work to maximise their efficacy.

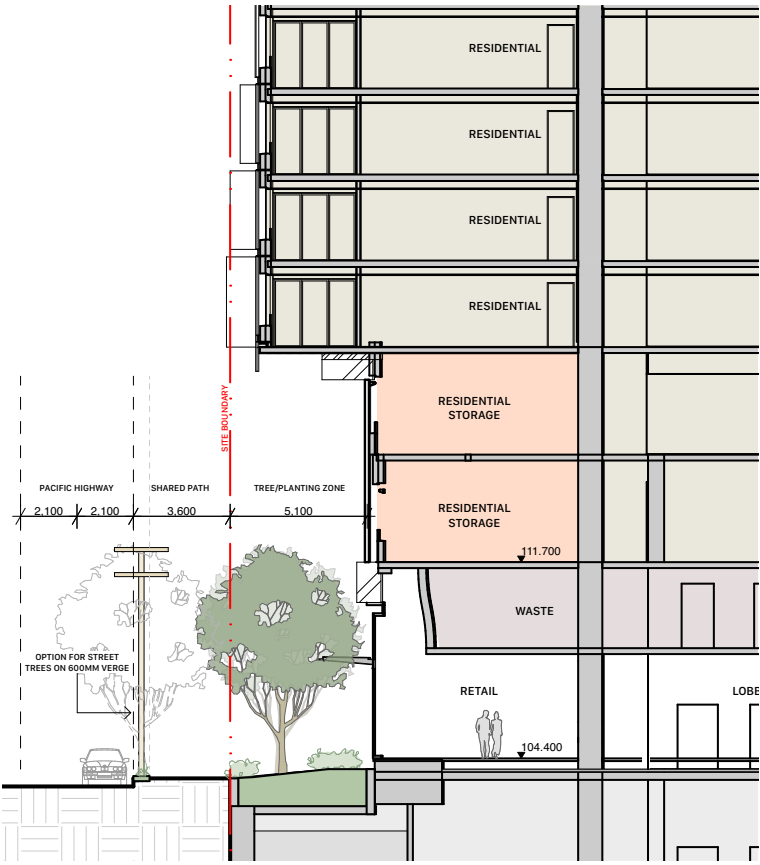
Wind Modelling

SLR Consulting undertook wind tunnel testing of a model of the scheme in April 2026, and provided a report outlining the baseline and proposed scenarios in terms of ground level and key communal areas of the proposed development. This report was reviewed as part of this peer review.

In general the ground plane wind conditions under the proposed development were considered to be comfortable, with some wind mitigation measures recommended such as deep awnings around entries and sitting areas on the Pacific Highway frontage.

Upper level communal spaces were recommended to have more substantial wind mitigation measures including vertical windbreaks up to three metres tall, such as balustrades, planters, glass or other material walls.

The study shows that the proposed design, including the podium configuration has managed to respond to the complex geometry and constrained site to deliver a positive microclimate.



Ground Plane Section -FJC



Figure 15 Predicted Lawson Comfort Levels - “Baseline” Scenario – Ground Level

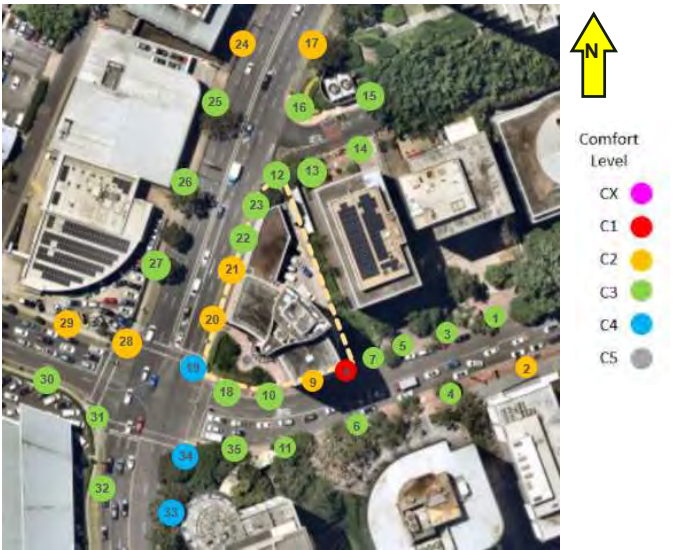


Figure 16 Predicted Lawson Comfort Levels - “Proposed” Scenario – Ground Level



Conclusions

Chatswood is Changing

Chatswood is a centre undergoing significant change. The challenges of delivering well located, diverse and affordable housing across Sydney are exacerbated by a number of issues including the recent significant increases in the cost of construction. Chatswood is one of a limited number of locations where high rise apartment projects are currently viable, and as a result there are a large number of projects in various stages of the development process.

The result of these projects will, in the medium term, deliver a significant contribution to the targeted number of new homes to be delivered across Sydney. It will also change the physical shape of the Chatswood skyline, reinforcing its role as a major mixed use centre.

The Western Gateway to Chatswood

This is a prime location in one of Sydney’s best connected and most sought after centres. The location is a Gateway Site at the intersection of Fullers Road, which is a collector road that connects the Pacific Highway at Chatswood with the M2 Freeway, across the Lane Cove River via Delhi Road. This is one of the few sites that can accommodate significant height and not impact/ overshadow the important public open space of Chatswood Park as shown in the LSPS diagrams. The Heights of towers in general in a significant number of centres across Sydney are increasing, particularly in sought after, high value locations such as Chatswood. This is in part due to the increasing construction costs which make fewer locations viable, as well as height and FSR bonus provisions to encourage the construction of market, affordable and public housing in response to the current housing crisis.

Three Scales

From an urban design perspective the intensity of the development of this site can be assessed at three scales -the adjacent street edge condition, the middle distance and long distance.

At the close up/ immediate scale, the proposal finds a balance between creating an active frontage and providing the required four metre setback to accommodate a secondary row of trees to comply with the Pacific Highway East - Green Setback, as outlined in the Chatswood CBD Planning and Urban Design Strategy 2036

At the middle scale the Podium height has been established at a similar height to the adjacent commercial towers, which integrates it at the middle distance scale, operating visually on the approach to the centre along the Pacific Highway from the north and along Fullers Road from the west.

In terms of long distance views, Chatswood has been an identifiable ridge top tower cluster for decades, and is one of the more important and larger scale activity centres within the Sydney Metropolitan Area. An additional tall tower within this cluster will be seen from many different angles as people move around the complex topography of Sydney, and will add to that diverse mix of forms.

Triangular Site Geometry

The triangular shape of the site creates an opportunity for sweeping district views to the north west, north and south to the CBD, once the tower gets above the podium. In a sense, it benefits from the air space created by the sweeping curve of the Pacific Highway below. Above that podium level, given the site is a triangular shape and located at the gateway, and on the edge of the Chatswood CBD, the space created above the Pacific Highway adds significant amenity to the site. If we consider this area almost as part of the site, then the effective area could be thought of as increasing from the 1657 sqm triangular site to what would, on a rectilinear site be between 2750 and 3000 sqm. That would lead to a notional FSR of around 16:1 or 17:1 in terms of the spatial impact of the tower.

Built Form

The proposal outlines a podium and tower built form, oriented mainly to the north-west, aligned with the long boundary above the Pacific Highway. Given it is on the edge of the CBD cluster this provides excellent district views. The core and a number of apartments are located on the southern facade on Help Street and a design solution is proposed to manage the interface with the adjacent building at 15 Help Street, sleeving the core with some apartments.

This site forms the end of a row of commercial office sites, with adjacent 15 & 11 Help Street sites being approximately 30m wide x 60m deep. If these sites were to convert form commercial towers to residential uses in the medium to long term, then the nature of those sites means they would largely rely on achieving light to apartments via the north and south facades, as required ADG separation between towers could not be achieved. The boundary conditions associated with the proposal for 815 Pacific Highway is therefore appropriate and does not constrain the potential future opportunities for the neighbouring sites.

The triangular shape of the site and inclusion of setbacks from the Pacific Highway to enable the ground level landscape setback have keen key drivers of the built form.

Recommendations

This existing office tower is not an appropriate use for one of the most strategic sites on the North Shore. There is an opportunity to redevelop the site to deliver much needed, well located market and affordable housing. The site can also contribute to the long term goal of significantly improving the public realm along the Pacific Highway.

Centres across Sydney are increasing their height and development yields, led by the City of Sydney, to contribute to long term sustainability and to solving the housing crisis. They are at the same time focussing on public benefits and protecting important public open space. In that context, this report recommends the support of this proposal.



Six Degrees Urban

Six Degrees Urban is a boutique urban design firm based in Sydney, Australia specialising in projects at the macro and micro scales. Our work ranges from large scale Metropolitan Strategies, masterplans and precinct plans through to streetscape activation guidelines, active frontage designs, and individual place plans.

Six Degrees Urban is lead by Craig Allchin, a founding partner of Six Degrees Architects, (www.sixdegrees.com.au) a Melbourne based architectural practice that was part of the revitalization of inner city Melbourne through the 1990's delivering innovative, mixed-use renewal projects, many involving the creation of fine grained, active ground planes.

Since then he has worked in various capacities in the public and private sector, gaining experience on large and small projects in Asia, the Middle East, the USA, Europe and all major Australian Cities. He uses this experience of working from multiple perspectives within the city development process to provide a unique lens on how best to achieve outcomes for projects over the long term. Six Degrees Urban tend to start any project by zooming out to explore the wider context, identify the key issues and examine relevant case studies to work towards specific, place based Urban Design solutions.

Craig Allchin:

Qualifications and Affiliations:

Bachelor Of Architecture, University of Melbourne 1989.

Registered Urban Designer Urban Design Group UK, 2021-

Registered Urban Designer Urban Design Association NSW 2024 -

Adjunct Professor of Architecture, UTS, 2009-2015

Visiting Lecturer, Graduate School of Design, University of Philadelphia, USA 2014-15

Trustee – Historic Houses Trust NSW, 2011-2012, appointed by NSW Minister for The Arts, (stepped down due to relocation to USA.)

Registered Architect – Victoria 1996-2014

Board Member : Renew Australia, not for profit Urban Renewal Foundation putting creatives and small businesses into empty shops, offices and spaces 2012 - Current

Board Member : Renew Newcastle, Urban Renewal Foundation 2009-2012

Board Member Mietta Foundation, creative trust 2001-10

Board Member Melbourne Fringe Festival – 1996-99



Current Roles

Director, Six Degrees Urban Pty Ltd – Sydney based Urban Design consultancy working on a variety of urban renewal projects, since 2004.

Consulting Design Director (Part Time) Ethos Urban since 2019.

Previous Roles

Lendlease Aust Urban Design Lead in house consultant- 2015-19

NSW Planning Dept Urban Design Director, Metro Strategy 2005-10

Urbis - Principal Urban Designer NSW and China 2000-2004

Six Degrees Architects Director 1991 - 2014

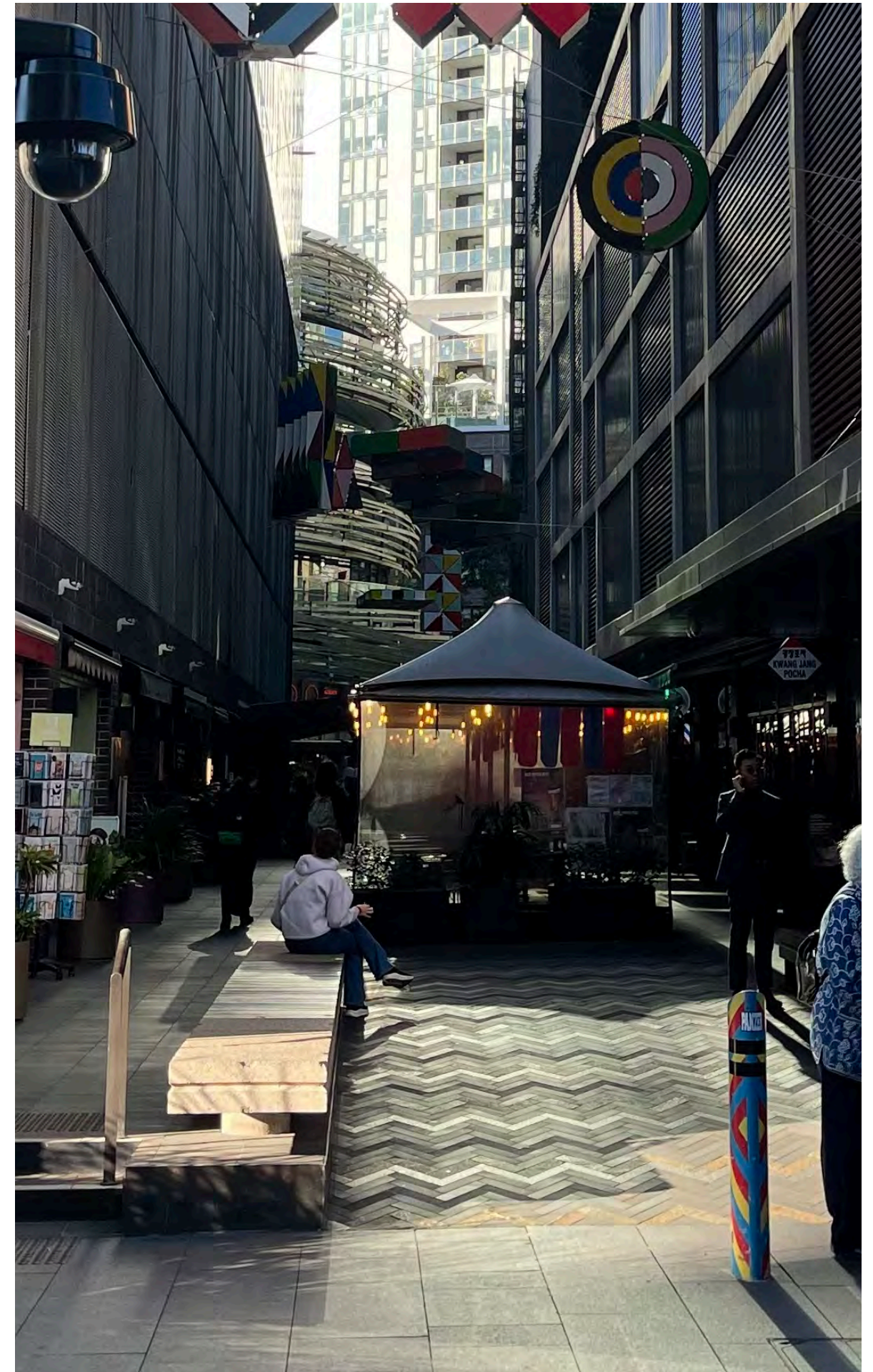
Expertise Areas

Urban Design, structure planning & Master Planning at large & medium scale

Strategic Design & related policies – Metropolitan Strategies/ Regional Plans

Urban Renewal of precincts, including identifying and delivering catalytic projects to begin a transition over time

Fine Grain Retail, Hospitality and Placemaking Strategies





Urban Design Peer Review

815 Pacific Highway , Chatswood

Six Degrees Urban

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URBAN DESIGN, STRATEGY, RESEARCH
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