

As a local resident, I strongly object to the development application and accompanying rezoning proposal of the Mixed-use development at 10 Dangar Street, Wickham. Newcastle Council envisages a village lifestyle for the suburb of Wickham and establishing a 152m building is not in keeping with that vision. Should the application be approved, there will be negative impacts to the environment and a loss of community character. The current Wickham Masterplan 2021, adopted in 2022, recognised the opportunity of this piece of land and acknowledged this by seeking to increase the FSR and maximum building size – which was subsequently approved. This proposal, however, seeks to grossly expand upon those concessions. Previous approvals of the site to establish a building at 60m in height are far more in keeping with the area whilst balancing the growing housing, social and economic needs.

After perusing the associated materials and noting the repeated arguments in favour of this project outlined by the developer, I highly suspect this project will be approved despite any opposing submissions. My chief fear however is it will set a precedent for further development in the area, which will allow future development applications to cite this development as justification for erecting buildings of this height or above. This fear is compounded by the fact that every time I read an update of this proposal, there is an incremental increase to the size of the project. Evidence of this includes the pre-development application which describes a 38-storey building approximately 117m tall. This increases in the scoping report to a 39-storey building with a maximum height of 133m and FSR of 13:1, whereas the application increases the sizes again to request a 43-storey building with maximum height of 152m and a FSR of 14.4:1. Whilst the current plans appear to be for a 133m building, I suspect should the application be approved, the building design will be amended to ensure the maximum values are reached, further negatively impacting the area.

The Wickham Masterplan reiterates the area adjoining the proposed development to be of village character and supports this by restricting building heights. It designates the Dangar Street site in the Rail precinct and notes that existing structures in this corridor have benefited from ‘generous development standards’ (Wickham Masterplan 2021, p. 13) and future development will ‘maintain a transition down to integrate with the lower scale Village Hub precinct fronting Bishopsgate Street’ (Wickham Masterplan 2021, p. 13). Consequently, approving a structure of this size at this site fails to acknowledge the concessions already made to support growth, and conflicts with these future focused principles.

Approval of this application would greatly increase pedestrian and vehicle traffic which would lead to an accumulation of negative environmental impacts to existing and future residents. These include but are not limited to, increased air, noise, and light pollution, along with reduced natural light and increased wind. This application seeks to more

than double the previously approved development application and if approved, would greatly extend construction time, which would further negatively contribute to environmental and noise pollution in the area.

A further reason to justify my opposition to this development and rezoning application is because two of the three frontages are on small residential roads which are of insufficient size to accommodate expected traffic generation. Development will also reduce the parking opportunities for visitors of current residents. It is naïve to assume parking spaces in the proposed building will be sufficient for the number of residents, resident visitors, and expected guests and staff of the hotel and commercial spaces. Increased traffic congestion and inability to secure parking for residents and visitors would negatively contribute to the intended village vibe of the suburb.

I consider the conclusion in the scoping report that a building at least 133m tall – and possibly 152m tall – is in keeping with the permitted or actual skyline to be misleading. Whilst acknowledging this area borders the western end of the Newcastle CBD, the suburb of Wickham is not part of said CBD, and thus it is not suitable to compare the maximum heights of the CBD to this proposal. Contrary to the argument it is in keeping with the size of the currently permissible building heights, when viewed in the opposite direction to the western end of the CBD it is almost four times taller than some of neighbouring buildings which already overshadow existing dwellings of the suburb. Additionally, the Visual Impact Report found the development would have a ‘moderate to severe’ impact on two viewpoints and a ‘severe’ impact from another viewpoint which conflicts with the opinion it will blend in with its surroundings.

Finally, I would like to include an observation I consider should be of relevance when new developments are being approved within the Newcastle area. There are already a number of empty ground level retail spaces in recently constructed buildings throughout Newcastle including along Honeysuckle and National Park Street. Elsewhere there is high turnover of failed businesses on ground level retail sites including 38 Hannell St, Wickham. Accordingly, there seems little argument for additional retail space to be established if there is already an oversupply in the area.

I am not against development in the area and appreciate the favourable location of this site and the opportunities it can provide. What I am opposed to is the inflated size and scope of this project. Amendments to original planning laws and development applications have already been approved to better serve the community through providing additional housing within this development and these should be retained. The increase in building size associated with this application is not in keeping with the character of the suburb and will have greater negative impacts than positive for the local community.

Cited Source

Wickham Masterplan 2021 (<https://newcastle.nsw.gov.au/getmedia/097c90a5-55fd-482c-9a0d-5202b97eed9d/Wickham-Masterplan-2021-Update-Adopted-July-2022.pdf>)