

Residential Development with In-Fill Affordable Housing

2-8 Highgate Road, Lindfield

Response and comment from Robert Cahill

42 Treatts Road, Lindfield.

I have lived in this locality for 44 years total, and nearby, at 42 Treatts Road, Lindfield which is close to the proposed development at 2-8 Highgate Road for the past 29 years.

In those 44 years in the area, I have lived in one Local Heritage Item listed residence for 15 years, followed by the past 29 years in another Local Heritage Item listed residence. Both residences have a significant impact on the surrounding residential precinct, trees, vegetation and gardens.

Both residences are excellent examples of fine residential architecture representative of the design influences of the time in which they were built. They replicate numerous other such examples completed over the same period across the neighbourhood which collectively provide a holistic, consistent and quality residential environment. The suburb provides a meaningful and historic reflection of the greater area of Sydney.

During this time living in Ku ring gai, I have become familiar with the special attributes of the area in terms of biodiversity, tree canopy and exceptional examples of well designed built form representing the careful development of the area from the late 1880s to now.

I make the following points and observations referring to the SEAR requirements.

5. Design Quality

The proposed construction of 84 dwellings, at 2-8 Highgate Road, in the place of 4 residential houses, lacks empathy with the existing environment, look and feel of the surrounding garden suburb. The design includes long facades to the west and east, at Highgate Road, to 9 storeys high, which do not reflect the scale and diversity of built form which characterises the surrounding streets.

6. Built Form and Urban Design

The building is a 9 storey flat building, built to a scale where one street away the existing 2 storey residential development will remain. In addition this nearby residential development, one street away, forms part of a Heritage Conservation Area. It is very clear that this development represents too great a height and bulk for the locality. It is an inappropriate level of development. It is sufficiently high to be obvious from the neighbouring streets to the north where the ground levels rise.

The east and west facades, though indented here and there, are the full length of the block, and not modulated to any degree. This again is at odds with nearby residential development.

In other words, the transition from this development to nearby built form to be retained, is inadequate to properly protect the locality and its importance as a recognised Heritage Conservation Area.

The appropriate height, as proven in Tryon Road and Milray Avenue, not far away, is some 5 storeys in height. This proposed building is 4 storeys higher than the recent development opposite at Woodside Avenue, an 80% increase in height to that building.

Given the locality and context of Lindfield, the setbacks to street facades at 6m are inadequate and do not reflect the general conditions of the area.

A more appropriate setback to key streets is 9m consistent with residential setbacks of surrounding residential areas at the lower side of the street. (Note high side of streets has a 12m setback)

7. Environmental Amenity

The Urbaine Design Group report on visual and environmental impacts includes photomontage images which confirm that the design is foreign to the present environment in respect to visual impact, bulk as viewed from Woodside Avenue, Highgate Road and Reid Street. It confirms this by categorising the impact as “severe”.

The impact is created by the building height at 9 storeys, the lack of street setback and issues around capacity to provide screen planting of significant trees. The façade to Highgate Road extends for some 65m set back from the boundary at 6m.

As opposed to surrounding residential development, the façade design has limited variation in form, materials, facade treatment so provides limited amenity to the streetscape.

8. Visual Impact

The Visual Impact Report by Urbaine Design Group advises as follows:

2.1. The Visual Context The immediate surroundings of the site feature a range of properties, mostly single-storey residential dwellings with some 2 and 3 storey mixed-use developments towards the town centre. These buildings showcase a blend of architectural styles, encompassing both traditional and contemporary designs. The area's development history spans different eras, leading to a mixture of construction materials and finishes. As a result, the buildings exhibit varying setbacks from the public domain, contributing to the overall character of the neighbourhood. The locality has a residential, leafy character characterised by a streetscape quality of side setbacks and predominant, mature landscape. The building heights reinforce the existing townscape, in response to the undulating character of the area.

2.3. Streetscapes Within the immediate and surrounding areas, the streetscapes are typical of Sydney's outer suburbs, being a mixture of individual houses and apartments blocks of varying scales, commercial building, schools and large, public parks. The landscaping is predominantly mature and well established. Of greatest relevance, in terms of visual impact, is the amount and maturity of the existing landscaping in this area, both along the streets and within the private gardens. The density of foliage ensures views to the subject site are significantly screened from locations beyond its immediate surroundings. This continuation of street trees has been incorporated into the design proposal.

The above descriptions are a true representative of the current urban scape.

However the proposed development is nothing like this existing environment.

Given there is only a 6m building street setback from Reid Street and Highgate Road and 4m deep soil to Highgate Road and about 2m to Reid Street, landscaping will not be able to shield views to this proposed building per the current environment.

The impact of this development will therefore be very high.

The Urbaine Report correctly advises that views from Woodside to Lindfield Avenue are assessed as “moderate to severe”; Highgate to Reid Street are assessed as “severe”; views from Reid Street assessed as “severe”.

The proposed 9 storey development has a Level 8 floor level of RL117.35 to the north end of the site.

My home location is some distance away and located on significantly higher natural ground in Treatts Road, the ground floor level is RL109.6 and first floor is RL112.8. Given this proposed development is downhill from my location, development of this bulk and height will impact upon view from the nearby higher surrounding streets and homes such as mine and be well above the tree line. This will create a significant change to the ambience and prevailing conditions where built form is within tree canopy development.

The acceptable impact would suggest a 5 level development consistent with the locality.

9. Transport

The submission includes a Traffic and Parking Assessment Report by Varga Traffic Planning.

This is a totally inadequate report which only deals with two intersections at Highgate and Woodside and Woodside and Lindfield Avenue.

Within 50m of the site at Lindfield Avenue and Havilah Road is a totally inadequate intersection that provides one of the few locations to enter and leave the Pacific Highway to service those living in this vicinity.

This intersection presently operates chaotically during morning and evening peak times, weekdays and very inadequately at many other times, 7 days per week. For those travelling north along Lindfield Avenue and entering the Pacific Highway, traffic light changes of more than 4-5 times may be required to enter the Highway.

Because of inadequate local roads, entering and leaving the local vicinity around Lindfield can often be slow and tedious.

Some key locations during peak times are:

- Havilah Road/Lindfield Avenue to Pacific Highway requiring 4-5 light changes
- Stanhope Road mornings to Pacific Highway with queued traffic back to Killara Avenue
- Tryon Road west to Archbold Road queued to Howard Street requiring 4-5 light changes both morning and evening peak

The traffic report ignores and does not deal with these current locations and conditions and therefore can only be deemed inadequate. The provision of 84 new dwellings replacing 4 residences will have an incremental and deleterious effect upon existing conditions including these locations.

Commuter parking regularly takes up street parking around this proposed development so that typically commuter cars are parked in the street at Woodside Avenue from Lindfield Avenue to Blenheim Road, in Highgate Road to past Reid Street, and Reid Street.

Given 4 houses will be replaced by 84 dwelling units street parking will be severely effected beyond the current busy conditions.

The proposal provides for 131 carparks of which 17, at the rate of 1 car space per 5 dwelling units will be provided for visitors.

This leaves 113 car spaces for 84 dwelling units or 1.35 spaces per dwelling. This will cause significant street parking to be used by the occupiers of the new development where car ownership is likely to be well in excess of the assumptions.

A more realistic calculation ought be used.

14 Trees and Landscaping.

Visual Impact Report by Urbaine Design Group confirms the existing conditions on the site and around the site as follows:

Of greatest relevance, in terms of visual impact, is the amount and maturity of the existing landscaping in this area, both along the streets and within the private gardens.

However, the proposed development has little deep soil planting. The Highgate setback to building is 6m with small private garden and planters located some 4m from street alignment.

The deep soil planting to Highgate is only 4m wide, and to Reid Street, about 2m wide. Within these constraints, it is not possible to complement and replicate existing conditions. The development is therefore inappropriate and the design ineffectual in maintaining existing environmental conditions and landscape.

There is no intent to maintain any trees within the site boundaries; the proposal assumes all existing trees and planting is removed per the arborist report. There is no room to plant trees of scale within the site boundaries given the narrow allocation of deep soil conditions.

The development will be dependent upon planting within the public area nature strip.

The development will therefore not be able to reflect the correct observations as stated within the proposal's own submission, as noted above.

19. Flood Risk.

The current stormwater system is overwhelmed in high rainfall conditions.

The current stormwater system capacity is unable to cope with the local demands.

There is a stormwater inspection lid in the middle of Lindfield Avenue just short of the roundabout.

In heavy rain conditions, this lid can be seen to be lifted, about a meter above road surface level, supported on a stream of water sprouting from the inground system. This demonstrates the pressures within the pipework and the lack of capacity within the system as installed.

The proposed development will only exacerbate the deficiency.

22. Environmental Heritage

The development is one street away from Blenheim Road, both sides of which is a Heritage Conservation Area.

This road consists of one to two storey post WW1 residences and gardens, consistent in form and quality and to a high standard representative of the period.

They are well maintained.

The adjacency of 9 storey flat development one street away is inconsistent with the existence of the Heritage Conservation Area.

The visual impact from Blenheim Road houses and the 9 storey development will be substantial.

A further boundary to a Heritage Conservation Area is to the north including houses to the south side of Treatts Road.

The development is inconsistent with these Heritage Conservation Area which are close by.

The 9 storey development provides no transition particularly to the Blenheim Road properties. Good planning principles would dictate that R2 zoning should be applied to houses on the east side of Highgate Road as transition to heritage area abutting these property back fences and that Highgate development on the west side of the road was 5 storeys high.

23. Public Space

The predominant public space within the development is provided as landscape roof space. This is a restricted type of allocation given many adults with children would be unwilling to have children playing up on a roof top space without supervision.

There is no public space that works as usable public space at the Highgate Road, Reid Street and Woodside Avenue as all these areas are very narrow, less than 4m in width from site boundary to unit fence line.

Open space to the west side is about 6m wide only and inadequate as outdoor recreational space despite having a BBQ area included. This area has very limited sun penetration.