

3 April 2019

The Hon. Rob Stokes MP
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
GPO Box 5341
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Minister

SCEGGS Darlinghurst Concept and Stage 1 DA

SCEGGS Darlinghurst has provided valuable education services to girls for over a hundred years. While the community accepts that the school wishes to upgrade and modernise its premises, changes are needed to protect the adjacent densely populated residential neighbourhood before the proposed concept plan can be approved.

Heritage

I share widespread community concern that the concept plan proposes to demolish the heritage significant Wilkinson House.

Wilkinson House was built in 1928 and is listed as a heritage item in the City of Sydney 2012 Sydney Local Environment Plan. It is visually attractive and contributes to the heritage and predominantly fine grain fabric of Forbes Street.

Of great concern is that the proposed replacement building in Wilkinson House's current location is ordinary and would detract from the streetscape.

The environmental impact statement fails to provide adequate justification for the demolition of this significant building. The school should retain Wilkinson House's façade at the very least while renovating the interiors for adapted reuse.

Demolition of Wilkinson House must be rejected.

There is community concern that the proposed development will obscure all public views of the 1833 Barham Building, which as one of the last remaining Verge houses in Sydney, has the highest heritage significance on the site. Changes that reduce bulk, scale and alignment of the development should be investigated to retain views of the Barham Building from Forbes Street.

Bulk and Scale

The proposed Multipurpose Building is almost three metres higher than existing buildings it will replace, putting it out of scale with the local area, impacting on Thomson Street residents' homes through overshadowing during winter and interrupting existing views of the city and water from homes and the public domain.



Terraces at 2, 4, 6 and 8 Thomson Street will suffer significant and unacceptable loss of sunlight in their homes during winter, with impacts felt throughout the day. Sunlight is essential to residents' quality of life and can reduce the need for heating and lighting, help plants grow, and reduce dampness and mould.

SCEGGS Darlinghurst should be a good neighbour and amend proposals through setbacks and/or reduced heights to ensure winter sunlight is not obliterated in adjacent homes.

Traffic

The proposed concept plan fails to include new transport management measures because the application claims there will be no increase to staff or students. There is widespread community concern that this is disingenuous as increased floor area with new facilities could result in additional activities and events outside standard school hours. Furthermore, the school can increase student intake by 10 per cent without development approval and adjacent residents believe future applications relying on approval of this expansion will result in additional student numbers. I note that the proposed plan includes the potential for a new 90 place childcare facility, but these impacts are not assessed.

Assessment of the concept plan must include impacts from potential uses of the expanded facilities.

Neighbours already report regular traffic congestion as a result of school drop-off, pick-up and large scale activities including weekend or evening events and the environmental impact assessment should make provision for potential increased traffic generation. The concept plan process should also be used as an opportunity to address existing traffic problems.

Closure of St Peter's Street outside peak weekday pick-up and drop-off periods is no longer necessary given the factors that led to the current restricted access are no longer an issue. Adjacent residents believe that the St Peter's Street should be re-opened at all times, removing the need for vehicles to do U-turns at the current northern dead end of Forbes Street. I note that Horizon building residents report that school traffic currently illegally uses the private driveway of their building because of serious traffic congestion during pick-up, drop-off times and when there are excursions requiring buses. This proposal provides an opportunity to provide solutions to existing traffic and parking congestion and address school coach parking.

SCEGGS Darlinghurst should be required to address existing and potential traffic problems as part of this concept plan process.

Construction

Significant excavation and demolition works are proposed as a part of the concept plan, adjacent to large numbers of residents including at the Horizon and in terrace homes and apartments on Forbes, Bourke and Thomson streets and on Clapton Place. Students' ability to learn or use outdoor areas could also be compromised. Staged construction would result in works being carried out over a protracted period – potentially for 20 years.

Strong restrictions on construction activities that create noise and dust are needed to protect all affected people including residents and students, with all groups given opportunity for respite. All affected people should be given respite from intrusive noise such as from rock breaking. The adjacent community should be given a direct complaints contact who has authority to amend practices and prevent problems. This should be reflected in the conditions of consent.

Design Competition

The project has been costed at just below the amount that would require the school to engage in a design competition for the project and there is mistrust within the community that costs have been purposely skewed to prevent this process.

The department must not blindly accept costings but instead conduct an independent assessment of construction costs in order to restore community confidence. If works are estimated at above the \$50 million threshold, a design competition should be required in the conditions of consent.

Roof Aspects

Constituents in the Horizon building have views of school building roofs and I support their call for all new development on the site to include green landscaped roofs, to exclude reflective materials, and to contain service plants within the building to improve visual amenity.

SCEGGS Darlinghurst provides an important educational service in the community and in the wider Sydney region but it must be a good neighbour and protect local residential amenity. I ask you to ensure these concerns are addressed through amendments to the proposed concept plan.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'AG', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alex Greenwich
Member for Sydney
Copy: Department of Planning