

Hills Showground Station Precinct – Visual Impact Assessment (Precinct East)

Hills Showground Station Precinct –
Concept Proposal– Response to
Submission

Prepared for
Landcom

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Contact Information

Cardno (NSW/ACT) Pty Ltd

ABN 95 001 145 035

Level 9 - The Forum

203 Pacific Highway

Suburb State 2065

Australia

www.cardno.com

Phone +61 2 9496 7700

Fax +61 2 9439 5170

Author(s):

Gilead Chen, Senior Urban Planner

John O'Grady, Principal, Urban Planning /
Landscape Architecture /

Approved By: John O'Grady

Name John O'Grady

Principal, Urban Planning / Landscape
Architecture

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Executive Summary

In late 2019, Cardno carried out an assessment of the potential visual impacts of a State Significant Development Application (SSD 9653) for a high density mixed-use development at the Hills Showground Station Precinct (the Site) as illustrated in **figure 1-1**. The exhibited concept proposal shown in **figure 1-2** comprised of a high-density mixed-use precinct with a new public park and plaza.

On 16 January 2020, Department of Planning, Industry & Environment (DPIE) issued a Request for Additional Information to be able to adequately address the key issues raised in the submissions received during the exhibition period. In developing its response, Landcom has revised the Concept Plan for the Site. The amendments made that may materially modify the visual impact of the proposals include the reduction in the density and bulk of the sub area known as Precinct East (refer figure 1 below). As such, Cardno has now been commissioned by Landcom to provide an assessment of the impacts of the changes to this Precinct.

This study of the likely local and regional visual quality impacts is focused on the relevant changes to Precinct East and has been prepared to address the relevant Planning Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) quoted in Section 1.1 of the report.

This report is intended to be read in conjunction with the report on visual impacts of the original concept proposal (Cardno, 30 October 2019).



Figure 1-1 The Hills Showground Station Precinct (the Site) (Cox Architecture, 2019)



Figure 1-2 Exhibited Concept Proposal Reference Scheme (Cox Architecture, 2019)

Assessment method

The assessment of the exhibited concept proposal was carried out via a process of qualitatively assessing:

- > Viewpoint sensitivity – the level of value that viewers would be likely to attribute to the quality of views from a given location.
- > Change magnitude – the amount of change to views from given locations that would likely result from implementation of the proposed development.
- > Composite impact level – a value judgement based on the assessed sensitivity of the viewpoint and the amount of change that would be likely to occur to the specific view or views from similar locations.

Assessments of the impacts of the proposal on each view were rated as Low, Medium or High for each of these three criteria.

Outcomes

This assessment of the revised concept proposal includes the original assessment ratings, further commentary on the changes to each view resulting from the revised concept proposal and amended mitigation measures where warranted.

Our assessment has found that in comparison to the exhibited concept proposal, the revised concept proposal will result in an overall decrease in visual impacts. This outcome is a result of a significant decrease in overall density across the site leading to decreased height of buildings and better separation between built form. The following commentary applies to the revised concept to the revised concept proposal.

Close views (0 - 1km from concept proposal site boundaries)

The assessment has found that close views to the concept proposal site will experience Moderate to High visual impacts. These impacts should be addressed via:

- > A scheme for strategically located plantings of large trees to provide human scale to the tall buildings and relieve views where there is the potential for new buildings to read as continuous walls of built form.
- > Architectural quality and urban design practices leading to a high quality public domain will also be critical to addressing visual impacts.

Mid distant views (1 – 2kms from concept proposal site boundaries)

At views over distances between 1 and 2kms from the site, visual impacts of the Concept Proposal have also been found to be moderate to high, due largely to the fact that the developed site will result in a significant introduction of new buildings in skyline views. Impacts should be addressed via:

- > Positioning of buildings to allow for visibility of sky between new towers and to avoid new buildings reading as continuous walls of built form.
- > Implementation of the principles of design excellence in the development of the design of the individual buildings and building groups.

Distant views (greater than 2kms from concept proposal site boundaries)

In distant views, the composite impact level of the proposal has been found to be moderate. Implementation of the principles of design excellence would be expected to ensure that the developed site would have an acceptable impact on local visual character in these views.

Mitigation measures

The following overarching mitigation measures are recommended to ensure a high quality development that will have an acceptable impact on the developing visual character of the concept proposal site and its environs:

- > Subsequent to approval of the concept plan, implement principles of design excellence as articulated in “Better Placed – an integrated policy for the built environment in NSW” (Government Architect NSW, September 2017) for precinct plans and development applications for individual buildings. Specifically, planning approvals for precincts or individual buildings within the concept proposal should be subject to a Design Review process via a recognised local or State government Design Review Panel.
- > Prepare and implement an integrated public domain plan that includes judicious planting of trees that will reach mature heights sufficient to provide tree canopies consistent with the existing local tree canopy. With respect to visual character, the objective of the tree planting scheme should be to break up continuous built form and provide human scale. Trees with mature heights between 10 and 20m would be expected to achieve this objective. Tree species identified in the Hills Showground Station Precinct Urban Design Guidelines (Cox / Oculus) that would achieve these mature heights would be suitable to achieve this objective.

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2 Introduction

2.1 General

The concept proposal was publicly exhibited and submissions were collated by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE). A Response to Submission was provided to the applicant and in response, the project team has revised the concept proposal for the Hills Showground Station Precinct.

The revised concept proposal, which is the subject of this report, is illustrated in Figure 3. It includes the following amendments to the concept proposal that are of relevance to this assessment of visual impacts:

- > A reduction in GFA and yield from 1,900 dwellings to 1,620 dwelling which:
 - reduce the overall density, bulk and scale
 - increase building separation
 - improve site composition
 - increase setbacks
 - increase solar access to dwellings, communal and public open space areas;
 - improve public domain interface; and
 - incorporate smaller scale townhouse dwellings along the new internal road.



Figure 2-1 Revised concept proposal (Cox Architecture, 2020)



Figure 2-2 Height Plan - exhibited concept proposal (Cox Architecture, 2019)

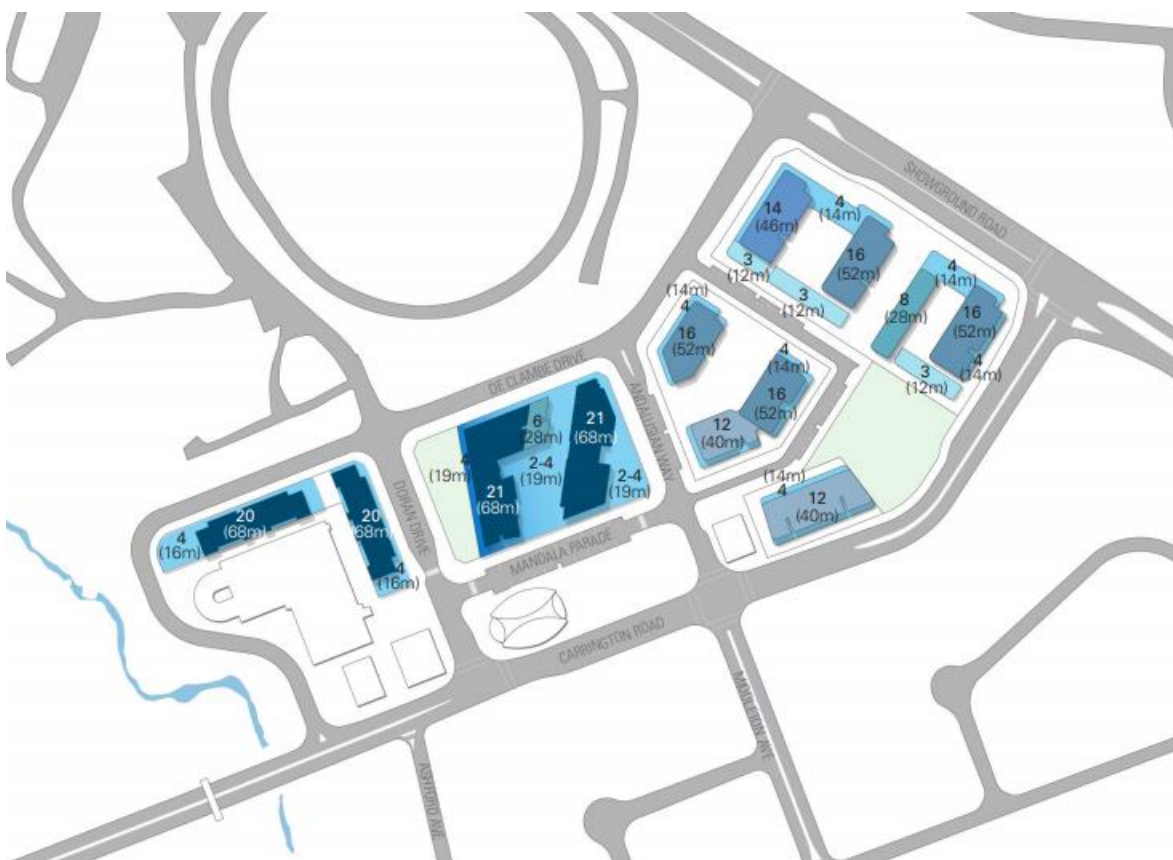


Figure 2-3 Height Plan - revised concept proposal (Cox Architecture, 2020)

On 9 October, 2019, the Director of Key Sites Assessments of the Department of Planning, Industry and the Environment (**DPiE**) (formerly Department of Planning and Environment) issued Planning Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (**SEARs**) for the State Significant Development Application. With respect to visual impacts, the following clauses apply:

“Key issues”

8. Visual Impacts and View Impacts

The EIS shall:

- > *identify important sight lines and visual connectivity to and through the site*
- > *provide a view analysis to and from the site from adjoining developments, key vantage points and streetscape locations including photomontages or perspectives of the proposed development. The view locations and methodology for the analysis must be prepared in consultation with the Department and Council.*
- > *provide a visual impact assessment to identify the visual changes and impacts on the site and its surrounds when viewed from key vantage points (see plans and documents section)."*

9. Amenity

The EIS shall:

- > *address the following in relation to the surrounding area including neighbouring properties/buildings and the public domain. This includes neighbouring buildings within the proposal and future stages adjacent:*
 - *views and visual impacts*

2.2 Process

In brief, the Cardno assessment of potential visual impacts of the exhibited concept proposal included the following tasks:

- > Assessment of existing conditions with respect to the current and potential future character of the site and its environs
- > GIS mapping to identify the visual catchment of the masterplan site
- > Identification of critical viewpoints toward the development site and preparation of locational accurate computer generated photomontages from each of the agreed critical viewpoints.
- > Assessment of the potential visual impacts of the proposal with respect to:
 - Viewpoint sensitivity - the capacity of the visual environment to absorb change (as viewed from the agreed critical viewing points)
 - Change magnitude - the amount of change that would be experienced as a result of the implementation of the proposal (carried out with the aid of survey accurate photomontages prepared from agreed critical viewing points)
 - The visual quality of the changed visual environment in comparison with the environment prior to development
- > Identification of mitigation measures to address any unacceptable impacts on views that may result from implementation of the concept proposal in its current form.

The process for this review of the revised concept proposal has included:

- > Preparation of revised photomontages based on the revised concept proposal. These have been prepared from each of the previously identified critical viewpoints.
- > Review of the changes to views from the critical viewpoints as identified by the amended photomontages and provision of additional commentary and recommendations for additional mitigation measures where required.
- > Provision of revised conclusions with respect to the impacts of the concept proposal on local visual quality.

2.3 Existing conditions

Cardno's commentary on existing conditions is provided in the 2019 Visual Impact Assessment. The commentary remains current and does not require amendment for the purposes of this revised assessment.

2.4 Visibility of the proposed development

The visibility of the proposal site within its environs will also remain unchanged for this revised assessment and the visual catchment diagrams included in the 2019 Cardno report are still valid.

3 View analysis – Revised Concept Proposal

Critical viewpoints within the identified view catchment were selected for the 2019 assessment through a process of analysis of the visibility diagrams to identify representative viewpoints that would:

- > Be likely to be subject to changes in views as a result of the development; and
- > Be sensitive to these changes to views as a result of the expectations of viewers. In this regard, a typical hierarchy in sensitivity has been assumed. Residential and recreational areas are considered to have higher sensitivity to change than industrial or employment areas. Views from roads are considered to have high sensitivity if they are close to the development site or if the views are on an axis to the site.

These selected viewpoints are indicated on Figures 3-1 and 3-2. Photomontages were prepared from each of these viewpoints to illustrate the changes to these views that would result from implementation of the proposed development.

For the purposes of this revised assessment, photomontages based on the revised concept proposal have been prepared from each selected viewpoint for Hills Showground Precinct East, where the majority of the changes with potential to change visual quality have occurred.

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Figure 3-1 Selected viewpoints – 1km radius – Concept Proposal site edged blue



Figure 3-2 Selected viewpoints – 4km radius – Concept Proposal site edged blue

4 Visual impact assessment

The assessment of the exhibited concept proposal was carried out via a process of qualitatively assessing:

- > Viewpoint sensitivity – the level of value that viewers would be likely to attribute to the quality of views from a given location.
- > Change magnitude – the amount of change to views from given locations that would likely result from implementation of the proposed development.
- > Composite impact level – a value judgement based on the assessed sensitivity of the viewpoint and the amount of change that would be likely to occur to the specific view or views from similar locations.

Assessments of the impacts of the proposal on each view were rated as Low, Medium or High for each of these three criteria.

For the purposes of this assessment of the impacts on visual quality of the revised concept proposal for Precinct East, views towards the site have been assessed. These include Viewpoints 1, 3, 4, 5 & 7 (Figures 3-1 & 3-2).

This assessment of the revised concept proposal includes the original assessment ratings, further commentary on the changes to each view resulting from the revised concept proposal and amended mitigation measures where warranted.

For each viewpoint the following information is provided:

- > Base Photos.
- > Visual sensitivity analysis – this will remain unchanged from the original assessment.
- > Photomontage for exhibited concept proposal.
- > Photomontage for revised concept proposal.
- > Commentary on change magnitude.
- > Composite impact level.
- > Amended mitigation measures.

4.1 Visual impacts

4.1.1 Viewpoint 1 – Castle Hill Showground



Figure 4-1 Viewpoint 1 – base photo 55mm focal length

Viewpoint sensitivity: High

The Castle Hill Showground is a recognised recreational area with potential heritage values. We note that the site is currently subject to a draft Castle Hill Showground masterplan for its renewal and refurbishment prepared by The Hills Shire Council. The level of visitation to the site would be high and would be expected to increase with its refurbishment under the future masterplan. Sensitive components of the view towards the revised concept proposal site would include:

- > The presence of individual trees and tree groups as a significant natural element in the view; and
- > The low scale of the existing built form and the presence of substantial amounts of open sky.

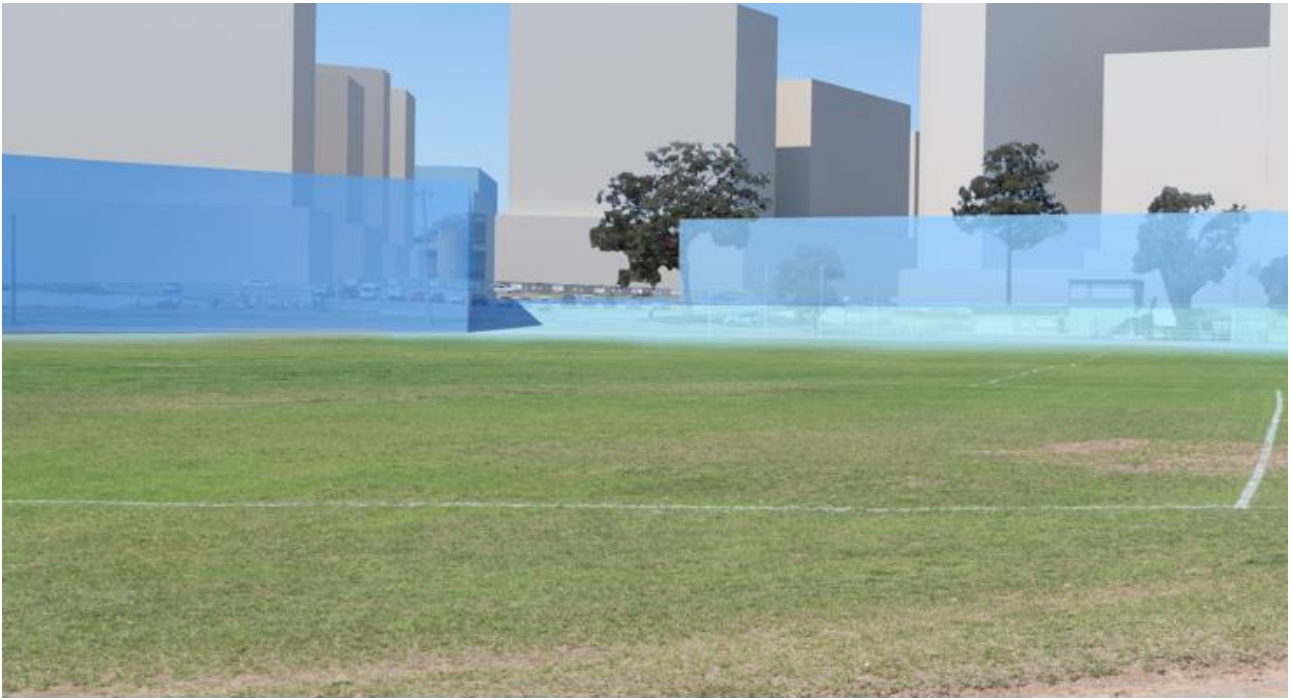


Figure 4-2 Viewpoint 1 – photomontage – exhibited concept proposal - 55mm focal length (Virtual Ideas) – future built form outside of site shaded blue.



Figure 4-3 Viewpoint 1 – photomontage – revised concept proposal - 55mm focal length (Virtual Ideas) – future built form outside of site shaded blue.



Figure 4-4 Viewpoint 1 – base photo – panorama



Figure 4-5 Viewpoint 1 – photomontage panorama – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - development only



Figure 4-6 Viewpoint 1 – photomontage panorama – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - development only



Figure 4-7 Viewpoint 1 – photomontage panorama – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - future built form outside of the site in blue tone



Figure 4-8 Viewpoint 1 – photomontage panorama – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - future built form outside of the site in blue tone

Change magnitude (exhibited concept proposal): High

The montages indicate that there will be major change to views towards the concept proposal site from elevated areas within the Castle Hill Showground. Changes to these views will result from:

- > The development of the Showground site (by others), including new grandstands and associated built infrastructure; and
- > The works included in the concept proposal.

The cumulative impacts of these two proposals will result in the composition of these views changing from low scale built form with a predominance of sky and vegetation to a view including a major component of new built form. Existing stands of trees and individual trees would remain as softening elements prior to future development outside of the site.

Figures 4-7 and 4-8 are representations of the likely view after construction of a new grandstand which is proposed for the Castle Hill Showground site. The electronic model that includes the grandstand has been

“clipped” in these images at a distance of approximately 40m from the viewpoint and it appears in section in the panorama montage at that point. This allows a true representation of the view that would be available to a person sitting in the completed stand at the viewpoint (outlined in blue on the 55mm focal length montage at Figures 4-2 and 4-3 toned blue / black in the panoramas at Figures 4-7 and 4-8). The montages illustrate that with the proposed construction on the Castle Hill Showground site, which is to be developed by others and does not form part of the concept proposal. The dominance of built form will increase substantially and most of the previously visible trees will be obscured by the new built form.

Change magnitude (revised concept proposal): High

The concept proposal incorporates a general reduction in building height across the length of this view, resulting in a decreased loss of visible sky in the view. Conversely, some increase in building bulk is evident in the view, particularly in the central portions of the developed site. Our opinion is that the net outcome of the concept proposal is that change magnitude would remain high.

Composite impact level (exhibited concept proposal): High

Composite impact level (revised concept proposal): High

Potential mitigating measures (exhibited concept proposal):

- > Planting of trees where opportunities arise in the public domain or within future development sites that would achieve mature heights between 10 and 20m as part of an integrated landscape scheme for the overall Precinct and for each individual development site. Potential locations for these plantings in the concept proposal could include Doran Drive Plaza and other public / semi-public spaces in the Doran Drive Precinct and Hills Showground Precinct East.
- > Enhance the visual connection between the site and Castle Hill Showground via implementation of the north-south view corridors indicated in the concept proposal (specifically within the Doran Drive Precinct)
- > Achievement of design excellence in the completed development, with particular regard to the architectural design of the proposed tall buildings. The buildings should be designed to achieve the following objectives:
 - Design consistent with State Environmental Planning Policy 55 – Design Quality of Residential Apartments and the Apartment Design Guide – Part 1 Identifying the Context, Part 2 Siting the development and Part 4 Design the building.
 - Design with slender plan forms which achieve separation between tall buildings to maximise appearance of sky in the view.

Design to include materials and finishes consistent with the Materials and Elements Strategy included in the *Hills Showground Station Precinct Urban Design Guidelines* (Cox / Oculus). Materials should be selected to respond appropriately to the local context and result in locally appropriate built form.

Potential mitigating measures (revised concept proposal):

No additional mitigation measures are proposed.

4.1.2 Viewpoint 3 – Middleton Avenue / Partridge Avenue



Figure 4-9 Viewpoint 3 – base photo 55mm focal length

Viewpoint sensitivity: Moderate

The view extends from Middleton Avenue and transects the Hills Showground Station Precinct site along Andalusian Way between the Doran Drive Precinct and Hills Showground Precinct East. The distant view includes existing substantial trees on the street to the south of the Hills Showground Station Precinct, relatively new street tree plantings on Andalusian Way and a tree lined horizon, consisting largely of existing trees within the Castle Hill Showground.

The neighbourhood along Middleton Avenue is a low density residential environment but is permissibly zoned for high density. Residents may be sensitive to changes in views but would have an expectation that the area will be subject to future change in visual character resulting from new high density built form. Viewers would be residents or people passing through the neighbourhood. The level of visitation would be expected to increase with the redevelopment of the locality and the Hills Showground Station Precinct. Significant trees and sky views would again be the main elements of visual sensitivity.



Figure 4-10 Viewpoint 3 – 55mm focal length – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) – development only



Figure 4-11 Viewpoint 3 – 55mm focal length –revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) –development only.



Figure 4-12 Viewpoint 3 – 55mm focal length – exhibited Concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) – future built form outside of the site in blue tone.



Figure 4-13 Viewpoint 3 – 55mm focal length – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) – future built form outside of the site in blue tone.



Figure 4-14 Viewpoint 3 base photo – 24mm focal length



Figure 4-15 Viewpoint 3 – photomontage 24mm focal length – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - development only



Figure 4-16 Viewpoint 3 – photomontage 24mm focal length – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - development only



Figure 4-17 Viewpoint 3 – photomontage 24mm focal length – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - future built form outside of the site in blue tone



Figure 4-18 Viewpoint 3 – photomontage 24mm focal length – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - future built form outside of the site in blue tone

Change magnitude (exhibited concept proposal): High

New built form both within the site and in the immediate surroundings, south and north of the Hills Showground Station Precinct will dominate these views and the local visual character will change accordingly. The montages also illustrate that the majority of tree growth on the horizon would be obscured by new development within the Castle Hill Showground site. Existing street trees and many trees within building setbacks in Middleton Avenue will be retained in the redevelopment of these areas.

Change magnitude (revised concept proposal): High

The increased setback of built form in Hills Showground Precinct East to Andalusian Way will result in some minor additional visibility of sky on the horizon. However, this would be largely offset by future off site development. The change magnitude of the proposal in this view will remain high.

Composite impact level (exhibited concept proposal): Moderate

The composite impact level would be moderated by the expectations of viewers that, due to changed zonings in the locality and the recent construction of the Hills Showground Station, the character of these views is likely to change significantly.

Composite impact level (revised concept proposal): Moderate**Potential mitigation measures**

The Urban Design Guidelines (Cox/Oculus) identifies Andalusian Way as a green link between the Castle Hill Showground, the Hills Showground Station Precinct and the developing high density residential area to the south. Tree planting along Andalusian Way, at the Station Plaza and generally within the proposed public / semi-public setback areas that will address Andalusian Way will be instrumental in developing this link and maintaining human scale and visual quality.

Development of a four storey street podium, as proposed in the Urban Design Guidelines will also be important to retain human scale at the street level.

Potential mitigating measures (revised concept proposal):

No additional measures recommended.

4.1.3 Viewpoint 4 – Showground Road / Carrington Road



Figure 4-19 Viewpoint 4 – base photo 55mm focal length

Viewpoint sensitivity: Low to moderate

This location is identified in the Showground Road Station Structure Plan (NSW Government, September 2013) as a Gateway to the Hills Showground Station Precinct. Viewers would be chiefly travellers on Showground Road. There would be a large number of viewers but the majority of these would view the site for a short period of time as part of a travel experience. Moreover, the quality of the view in its current form would be moderate only. Sensitivities to change would be expected to be the height of the existing built form on the site, the visibility of sky and the presence of significant trees. Expectations of the quality of the view would be expected to be low to moderate.



Figure 4-20 Viewpoint 4 – photomontage 55mm – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) – development only



Figure 4-21 Viewpoint 4 – photomontage 55mm – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) – development only



Figure 4-22 Viewpoint 4 base photo – 24mm focal length



Figure 4-23 Viewpoint 4 – photomontage 24mm focal length – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - development only



Figure 4-24 Viewpoint 4 – photomontage 24mm focal length – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - development only



Figure 4-25 Viewpoint 4 – photomontage 24mm focal length – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - future built form outside of the site in blue tone



Figure 4-26 Viewpoint 4 – photomontage 24mm focal length – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - future built form outside of the site in blue tone

Change magnitude (exhibited concept proposal): High

The montages indicate that new built form will occupy the majority of this view and much of the currently visible sky will be lost. The existing foreground trees in the view (on the corner of Showground and Carrington Roads) are indicated for retention in the Concept Proposal as part of the new Precinct East Park and this will be a significant and important mitigating factor with regard to visual impacts from this location.

Change magnitude (revised concept proposal): High

The revised concept proposal incorporates reduced building bulk and improved separation between built elements resulting in increased visibility of sky and a general reduction of impacts on this view. Notwithstanding this the change to the view incorporating tall buildings and substantial additional overall visibility of built form, remains high.

Composite impact level (exhibited concept proposal): High**Composite impact level (revised concept proposal): High****Potential mitigating measures (exhibited concept proposal):**

- > Positioning of new buildings to retain and protect existing significant trees where possible and implementation of the Hills Showground Precinct East public domain plan as indicated in the Urban Design Guidelines (Cox/Oculus). Retention of the existing mature trees in the view, as proposed, will be critical to the quality of views from Showground Road. Tree planting in the proposed community park should incorporate some trees of similar mature scale to the existing trees indicated to be retained.
- > Implementation of the desired precinct specific guidelines indicated in the Hills Showground Precinct East
- > As the new buildings will be dominant in these views, achievement of high quality design in the built form, materials and finishes will be critical to the success of the development as a new built element in the view. Design excellence in the completed development should be a key planning and design objective, consistent with “Better Placed – an integrated policy for the built environment in NSW” (op cit) with particular regard to the architectural design of the proposed tall buildings.

Potential mitigating measures (revised concept proposal):

No additional measures recommended.

4.1.4 Viewpoint 5 – Gilbert Road / Hills District Pony Club



Figure 4-27 Viewpoint 5 – base photo 55mm focal length

Visual sensitivity: Moderate

The locality includes elements of natural bushland which would influence expectations regarding quality of views. Viewers would be residents of adjacent low density housing, users of the Pony Club and bushland and travellers along Gilbert Road. Levels of visitation would be likely to increase moderately in response to regional redevelopment but residential populations would not be expected to increase. The dominance of vegetation over built form and the level of visibility of sky would contribute to visual sensitivity of these views.



Figure 4-28 Viewpoint 5 – photomontage 55mm focal length – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) – future built form outside of the site in blue tone



Figure 4-29 Viewpoint 5 – photomontage 55mm focal length – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) – future built form outside of the site in blue tone.



Figure 4-30 Viewpoint 5 base photo – 24mm focal length



Figure 4-31 Viewpoint 5 – photomontage 24mm focal length – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - development only



Figure 4-32 Viewpoint 5 – photomontage 24mm focal length – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - development only



Figure 4-33 Viewpoint 5 – photomontage panorama – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - future built form outside of the site in blue tone



Figure 4-34 Viewpoint 5 – photomontage panorama – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - future built form outside of the site in blue tone

Change magnitude (exhibited concept proposal): High

The photomontage from Viewpoint 5 indicates that the developed site would appear as a series of new towers extending the skyline to the east. The new skyline elements would be significantly visible from Gilbert Road and from existing housing on slopes to the south east orientated towards the site. The vegetated foreground will remain as a softening element in these views and although visible sky will decrease as a proportion of these views, it would still remain as a dominant visual element. Notably, the new buildings would read as towers separated by sky and not as continuous walls of built form. With respect to visual quality, the success of the development when viewed from these locations will be largely contingent on the architectural quality of the new buildings and their response to their local context.

Change magnitude (revised concept proposal): High

The revised concept proposal as it presents from this viewpoint incorporates decreased building height resulting in lesser presentation of the new built form as a horizon element. However, this decreased impact would be offset by an increase in the bulk of the development resulting from increased footprints of the new built elements. Our overall assessment of the change magnitude of the revised concept proposal with respect to these views is that it would remain high.

Composite impact level (exhibited concept proposal): Moderate to high**Composite impact level (revised concept proposal): Moderate to high****Potential mitigating measures (exhibited concept proposal):**

- > Impacts of the concept proposal on the quality of elevated mid–distant views such as from Viewpoint 5 will be a function of the architectural quality of the new tall buildings. Achievement of design excellence as articulated in “Better Placed – an integrated policy for the built environment in NSW” (Government Architect NSW, September 2017) will be necessary to ensure that these prominent new built elements contribute positively to the quality of views from these locations.
- > Selection of building materials and finishes should be consistent with the future character statements for each precinct is included in the Hills Showground Station Precinct Urban Design Guidelines (Cox/Oculus).
- > Buildings should be designed as tall, slender tower forms so as to maximise the appearance of sky between built form.
- > Materials and finishes should be contemporary and generally non-reflective.

Potential mitigating measures (revised concept proposal):

- > Achievement of design excellence will remain critical to the impacts of the revised concept proposal on the quality of views from elevated mid-distant views.

4.1.5 Viewpoint 7 – Old Northern Road, Castle Hill (approximately 3kms from the site)



Figure 4-35 Viewpoint 7 – base photo

Visual sensitivity: Moderate

The location is elevated and enjoys panoramic views to the south west which would include the development site. However, the locality is not a recognised viewing point and would receive limited visitation. Viewers from this location and similar would include travellers on Old Northern Road and residents of houses on the south west facing slopes. Viewers' expectations with regard to visual quality would be that the panoramic views would remain and that vegetation and sky views would remain dominant visual elements.



Figure 4-36 Viewpoint 7 – photomontage 55mm focal length – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) – future built form outside of the site in blue tone.



Figure 4-37 Viewpoint 7 – photomontage 55mm focal length – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) – future built form outside of the site in blue tone.



Figure 4-38 Viewpoint 7 base photo – 24mm focal length



Figure 4-39 Viewpoint 7 – photomontage 24mm focal length – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - development only



Figure 4-40 Viewpoint 7 – photomontage 24mm focal length – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - development only



Figure 4-41 Viewpoint 7 – photomontage 24mm focal length – exhibited concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - future built form outside of the site in blue tone



Figure 4-42 Viewpoint 7 – photomontage 24mm focal length – revised concept proposal (Virtual Ideas) - future built form outside of the site in blue tone

Change magnitude (exhibited concept proposal): Moderate

The montage from Viewpoint 7 indicates that the developed site will appear as a consolidated group of tall buildings within the existing broad, substantially vegetated plain. Vegetation and sky would remain as dominant elements in these views and the development would read as a new built element occupying a relatively small component in the overall view.

Change magnitude (revised concept proposal): Moderate

The visibility and presentation of the developed site would not change appreciably from this Viewpoint 7.

Composite impact level (exhibited concept proposal): Moderate**Composite impact level (revised concept proposal): Moderate****Potential mitigating measures (exhibited concept proposal):**

Similar to mid – distant views, the contribution of the developed site to the quality of elevated distant views such as from Viewpoint 7 will be contingent on:

- > Achievement of design excellence consistent with “Better Placed – an integrated policy for the built environment in NSW” (Government Architect, op cit);
- > Use of contemporary, generally non-reflective building materials and finishes in new buildings;

Specific to these longer distant views where the new development will tend to read as a consolidated group of buildings that are distinct and separate from the surrounding built form, the development should:

- > Include buildings of varying heights to create a varied and articulated skyline;
- > Exhibit variation in architectural style and design; and
- > Include well-articulated facades to provide visual interest when read as a group.

Potential mitigating measures (revised concept proposal):

No additional mitigating measures are recommended.

4.1.6 Commentary

Our assessment has found that the visual impacts of the revised concept proposal with respect to Hills Showground Precinct East will be decreased to some extent in comparison to the exhibited concept proposal, due to the reduction in height of buildings and greater separation between the built elements. Notwithstanding this reduction in impacts, our assessment is that the composite impact levels and following commentary of the revised concept proposal in comparison with the exhibited concept proposal would remain unchanged.

4.1.6.1 Close views (0 - 1km from concept proposal site boundaries)

The assessment has found that close views to the concept proposal site will experience Moderate to High visual impacts. These impacts should be addressed via:

- > A scheme for strategically located plantings of large trees to provide human scale to the tall buildings and relieve views where there is the potential for new buildings to read as continuous walls of built form.
- > Architectural quality and urban design practices leading to a high quality public domain will also be critical to addressing visual impacts.

4.1.6.2 Mid distant views (1 – 2kms from concept proposal site boundaries)

At views over distances between 1 and 2kms from the site, visual impacts of the concept proposal have also been found to be moderate to high, due largely to the fact that the developed site will result in a significant introduction of new buildings in skyline views. Impacts should be addressed via:

- > Positioning of buildings to allow for visibility of sky between new towers and to avoid new buildings reading as continuous walls of built form.
- > Implementation of the principles of design excellence in the development of the design of the individual buildings and building groups.

4.1.6.3 Distant views (greater than 2kms from concept proposal site boundaries)

In distant views, the composite impact level of the proposal has been found to be moderate. Implementation of the principles of design excellence would be expected to ensure that the developed site would have an acceptable impact on local visual character in these views.

4.2 Mitigation measures

The following overarching mitigation measures are recommended to ensure a high quality development that will have an acceptable impact on the developing visual character of the concept proposal site and its environs:

- > Subsequent to approval of the revised concept proposal, implement principles of design excellence as articulated in “Better Placed – an integrated policy for the built environment in NSW” (Government Architect NSW, September 2017) for precinct plans and development applications for individual buildings. Specifically, planning approvals for precincts or individual buildings within the revised concept proposal should be subject to a design review process via a recognised local or State government Design Review Panel.
- > Prepare and implement an integrated public domain plan that includes judicious planting of trees that will reach mature heights sufficient to provide tree canopies consistent with the existing local tree canopy. With respect to visual character, the objective of the tree planting scheme should be to break up continuous built form and provide human scale. Trees with mature heights between 10 and 20m would be expected to achieve this objective. Tree species identified in the *Hills Showground Station Precinct Urban Design Guidelines* (Cox / Oculus) that would achieve these mature heights would be suitable to achieve this objective.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

This study of the likely impacts of the revised concept proposal for redevelopment of the Hills Showground Station Precinct (in particular Hills Showground Precinct East) on local and regional visual quality has been prepared to address the relevant Planning Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) quoted in Section 1.1 of the report.

The assessment has been carried out with the aid of electronically generated photomontages over a series of photos from surveyed locations taken with a 55mm and a 24mm focal length lens. In order to achieve full vision of the developed site, photomontages prepared from Viewpoints have been prepared over a panoramic photograph created by stitching two 24mm focal length photographs.

In summary, the conclusions of the visual impacts of the proposal with respect to the Planning Secretary's requirements are:

- > The proposal is consistent with current planning for north western Sydney incorporating a range of new centres of activity around Sydney Metro Northwest Places Program precincts. Where visible in distant views from the public domain it will present as a consolidated new urban centre within the context of the other developing centres.
- > In long distant views (between 2 and 4kms from the site), the developed site will read as a new consolidated built element within existing broad and expansive views that include significant tracts of vegetation, building groups and a dominance of sky. These existing elements will remain dominant. Contingent on the quality of the architecture, urban and landscape design, the proposal will have an acceptable impact on the quality of these views.
- > In medium distant views (between 1 and 2kms from the site), the proposal would read as a substantial new built element. Its impact in visual quality would be acceptable contingent on generally retaining separation between the new skyline built elements and achievement of design excellence in the completed development, with particular regard to the architectural design of the proposed tall buildings.
- > In close views (less than 1km from the site) the proposal will significantly change the existing visual character. Its visibility will be variable depending on the context and the existence of local vegetation but it will generally read as a substantial new building group that will differ significantly from the existing visual character. Its impact will be mitigated by the expectations of most residents and visitors to the locality that the local visual character is subject to change as a result of implementation of planning strategies associated with development within and in the vicinity of the new Metro Stations. Mitigation measures to address these impacts will include design development to result in a high quality ground plane including allowance for healthy growth of forest scale trees in the street and other proposed public places.

Contingent on the recommended mitigation measures in this report, the proposal has been found to be worthy of support with regard to its effects on the existing visual environment of the site and its locality.