



330 CHURCH STREET, PARRAMATTA

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT
JUNE 2013





CONTENTS

1.	BACKGROUND	5
1.1	INTRODUCTION	5
1.2	METHOD	5
1.3	STUDY CONTEXT	7
1.4	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	9
2.	VISUAL ANALYSIS	11
2.1	VANTAGE POINTS SELECTION	11
	VANTAGE POINT 1	12
	VANTAGE POINT 2	14
	VANTAGE POINT 3	16
	VANTAGE POINT 4	18
	VANTAGE POINT 5	20
	VANTAGE POINT 6	22
3.	CONCLUSIONS	24
	APPENDIX A - PHOTOMONTAGES	25



1. BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Urbis has been engaged by Meriton Apartments P/L to undertake a Visual Impact Assessment of the site located at 330 Church Street, Parramatta. The site is located at the northern extent of the Parramatta Central Business District (CBD), along the southern bank of the Parramatta River.

This report assesses the visual impact of the proposed development as shown in the plans prepared by Tony Caro Architecture March 2011 (a000-a650), Revised Issue: Amended S.75W Application and photo montages prepared by Troy Design Media (Appendix A).

This report assesses the visual impact of the proposed development in relation to:

- Maximum Parramatta City Centre Local Environmental Plan 2007 building heights +10% Design Excellence Height Bonus (DEHB); and
- Existing character of the surrounding area (development as constructed).

The objectives of this report are:

- To describe the existing character of the visual environment surrounding the site;
- To provide an overview of the visual objectives of the current planning controls;
- To identify and analyse the key vantage points;
- To assess the proposal from the identified vantage points in terms of its acceptability in the urban setting; and
- To conclude any necessary design solutions that may be used to ameliorate or reduce the visual impacts of the proposal.

1.2 METHOD

The method chosen for assessment utilises a formal aesthetic model for describing the visual elements combined with a qualitative analysis.

The process used to conduct this visual impact assessment involves:

1. Research
 - Desktop overview/analysis of the location, the controls and the proposed development, and the desired future character.
2. Site Survey
 - Field work to assess base information for analysis.
3. Vantage Point Analysis
 - Detailed evaluation of common elements of the urban landscape to understand the visual character and how it is experienced by people in the public domain.
 - An assessment of the relative importance of each common element in the context of the urban landscape in relation to the importance of views.
 - An assessment of the quality and impact of view from the selected view points.
4. Presenting Findings
 - Conclusion of the findings.

Potential private domain visual impacts have been acknowledged in this report. However, specific private domain views have not been assessed.



1.3 STUDY CONTEXT

The site is situated at the northern edge of the Parramatta CBD along the Parramatta River. The Parramatta CBD is a regional city centre as identified in the Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036.

The site currently contains a part three/four storey building. The building is built to site boundaries, including a zero setback from Church Street. The current building on the site presents itself as a blank concrete facade with minimal articulation. The eastern side of the building is utilised for access to a structured car park.

Surrounding physical and built form characteristics include:

- Crown Plaza Hotel adjacent to the south of the site, which is accessed off Philip Street. Immediately to the east of the site is a Council-owned car park, referred to as the David Frase Carpark;
- Church Street to the west of the site, which has a number of shop fronts and outdoor dining areas which results in active frontages for the public domain;
- The Parramatta CBD contains numerous heritage items (Figure 1) as identified in the Parramatta City Centre Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2011, and historic views (Figure 2) as identified in the Parramatta City Centre Development Control Plan (DCP) 2007; and
- The site is within walking distance of entertainment and recreation facilities including the Riverside Theatre, Prince Alfred Park, Parramatta Park. The Parramatta Civic Centre, Parramatta Transportation interchange and Parramatta River ferry wharf are also within walking distance.

The Parramatta City Centre DCP 2007 and Parramatta City Centre LEP 2011 permit major development on sites with, and adjacent to, heritage listed items. The LEP permits maximum building heights between 45m and 200m, which contrasts with the numerous lower-scaled heritage items.

- It is noted that the Parramatta City Centre LEP 2007 permits a maximum building height of 80m for the subject site (Figure 3).



Figure 1 Heritage Items listed in Parramatta City Centre LEP 2007



Figure 2 Historical Views - Parramatta City Centre DCP 2007

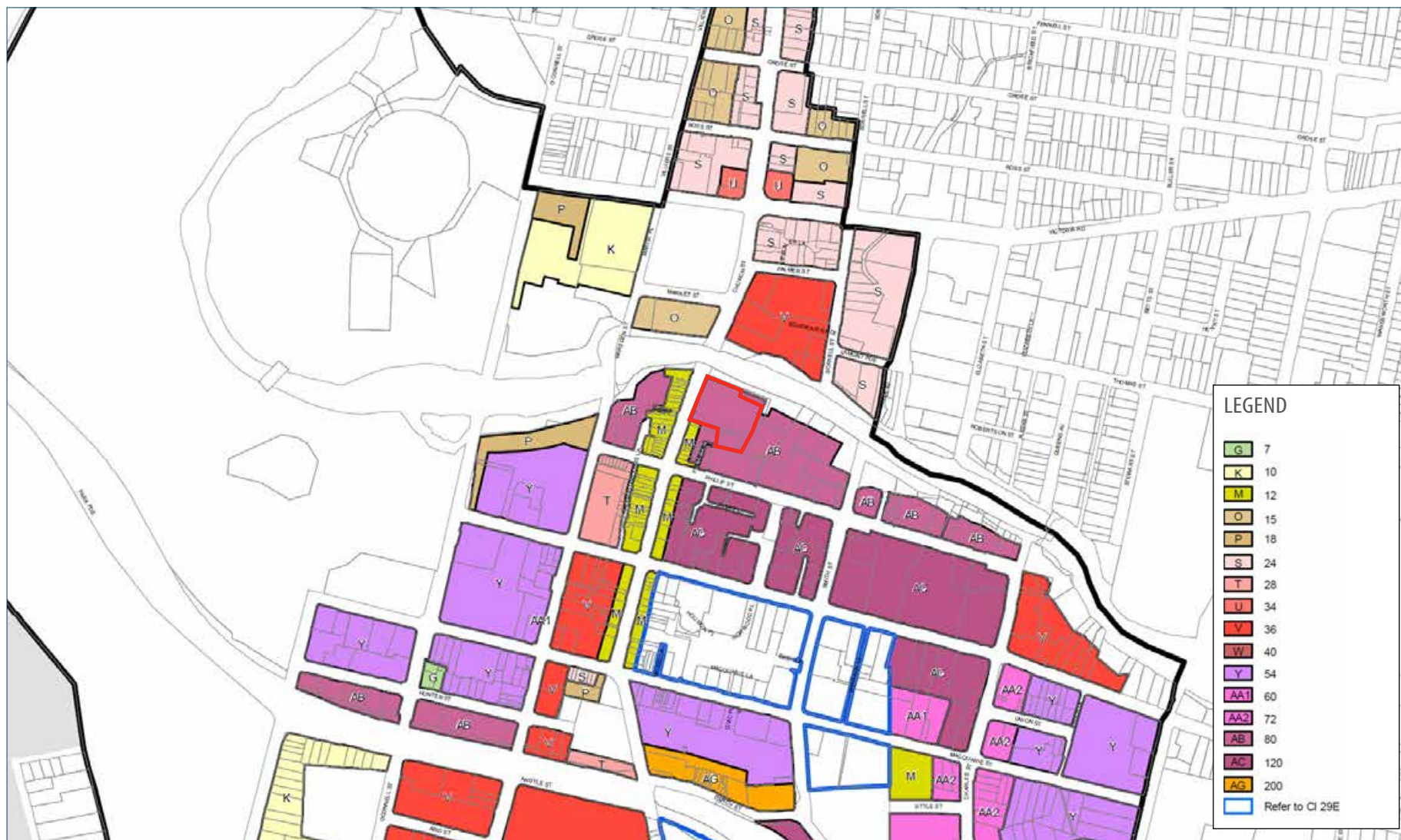


Figure 3 Maximum Building Height Parramatta City Centre LEP 2007

1.4 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The development consist of two towers above a podium level and basement car parking.

Characteristics of the proposed development are:

- A maximum height of RL185.1m with a second tower of RL116.3m height;
- The podium contains 8 retail shops, resident entrance lobby and access to the service areas at the ground level. Levels 1 to 3 of the podium are proposed to accommodate parking that is 'sleeved' by apartments to the Parramatta River and Church Street frontages. Recreational facilities and landscaping are provided on top of the podium;
- The east tower is 27-storeys above the podium and contains 266 serviced apartments (some of which are situated in the podium as described above); and
- The west tower is the highest tower towards church street and contains 378 residential apartments (some of which are situated in the podium as described above).

The towers have been designed to limit bulk through the utilisation of slim, taller forms and building articulation as shown in Figure 4. Photomontages (Appendix A) demonstrate the appearance of the proposed development from areas adjacent to the site and from identified historic views within 1km looking towards the site.

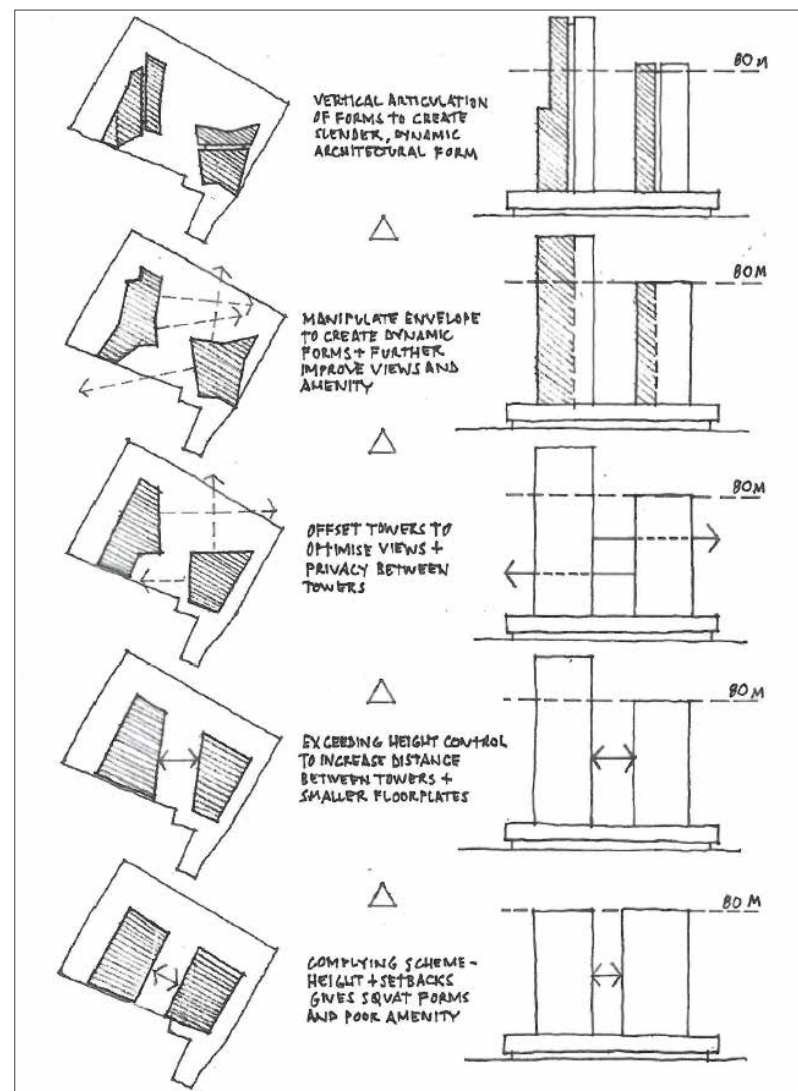


Figure 4 Height and built form options examined at Design Competition



Figure 5 Key Vantage Points

2. VISUAL ANALYSIS

2.1 VANTAGE POINTS SELECTION

Key vantage points (Figure 5) have been selected from the public domain through a consideration of the following parameters:

- Identification of views in Council documents - the historical views adopted within the Parramatta City Centre DCP 2007 are based on the views identified in the Parramatta REP Views Study 1997;
- Distance from subject site - the visual catchment is within an approximate 1km radius. Beyond this distance the proposed development will be seen as part of the future Parramatta CBD skyline;
- Elevation of vantage point - highest points with most visibility were selected; and
- Extent and quality of views - the distance and type of view experienced.

Views shown in this report have been selected from vantage points which are will likely experience the most impacts. In addition to the historic views, key vantage points from major open spaces have also been selected for examination.

The sensitivity of visual receptors and views will be dependent on:

- The location and context of the viewpoint;
- The expectations and occupation or activity of the receptor; and
- The importance of the view (which may be determined with respect to the popularity or numbers of people affected, the appearance in historic guides and tourist maps, in the facilities provided for its enjoyment, and references to it in literature or art).

The most sensitive receptors may include:

- Users of all outdoor recreational facilities including public rights of way, whose attention or interest may be focused on the landscape;
- Communities where the development results in changes to the landscape setting or valued views enjoyed by the community; and
- Occupiers of residential properties with views affected by the development.

Other receptors (less affected) may include:

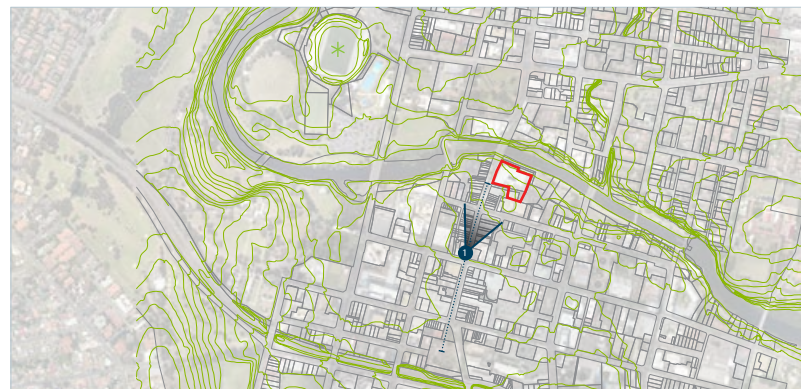
- People engaged in outdoor sports (other than appreciation of the landscape);
- People occupying hotel rooms;
- People travelling through or past the affected urban setting (car, train, or other means); and
- People at their work.

VANTAGE POINT 1

DESCRIPTION

This vantage point has been taken from the high point in Church Street looking towards the Parramatta River and Lennox Bridge. The analysis looks at the view corridor from St John's Cathedral to Lennox Bridge.

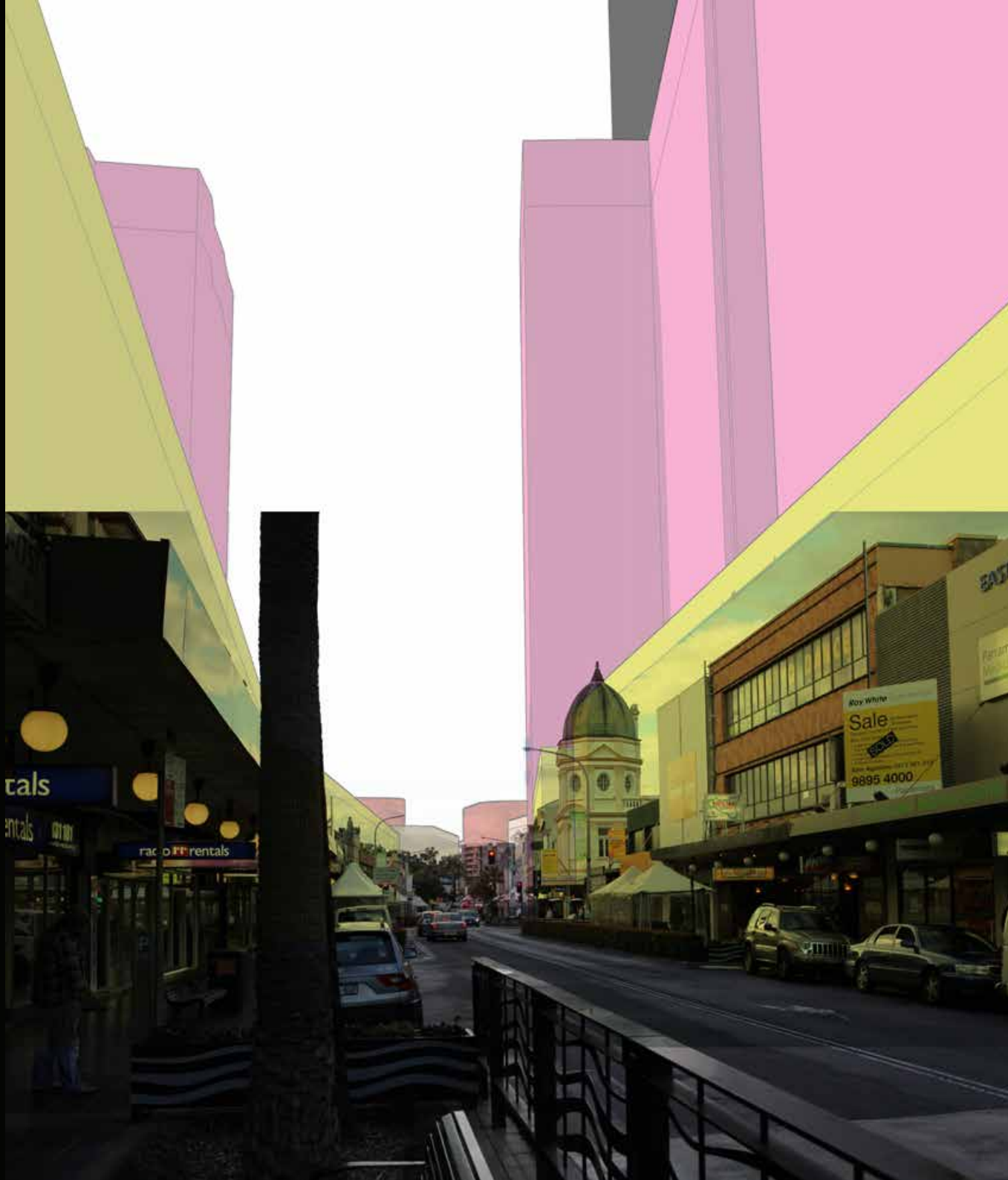
ANALYSIS	
Type of view	Pedestrians, motorists and retailers.
Duration of view	Slow; vehicle movement is generally less than 50 km/hr, longer for pedestrians. The upper parts of the proposal will be visible from St John's Cathedral - 500 m away from the site.
Scenic quality	Narrow shopping street with cars in the middle and pedestrians along an active street frontage. Pedestrians predominantly walk under awnings of shopfronts with the exception of crossing streets. Street dining marques, umbrellas and awnings also limit visibility from the footpath.
Visual and Landscape sensitivity	The streetscape is narrow. The street is a destination with an active use. Combined with awning overhangs there is generally a low visibility of the proposal in the vicinity. There are a number of heritage listed items in the area, including the Former ANZ Bank (Dome) adjacent to the site.



ASSESSMENT

The proposed development will be visible from this location and others on the street, up to 500m (approximately) from the site, on Church Street. The proposal is assessed against the current type of users and duration of views, as well as potential development that is permissible under the current planning framework (which reflects the future desired character of the area).

Existing building height controls on both sides of Church Street frame views towards the Lennox Bridge, and allow a substantial uplift in height from current building heights. Any proposed development above 12m located north of Former ANZ bank Dome will have an impact on the prominence of the dome. However, it is considered that given the nature of the maximum building heights and setbacks, the proposed development will not compromise the future CBD form of development any more than a development allowed under the current DCP/LEP controls. Further, viewers are most likely pedestrians / shoppers who traverse the CBD predominantly under awnings, within shops and under shading devices within restaurants.



LEGEND

proposed development
(RL185.1 m & RL116.3)

Maximum future height controls
according to Parramatta LEP 2007

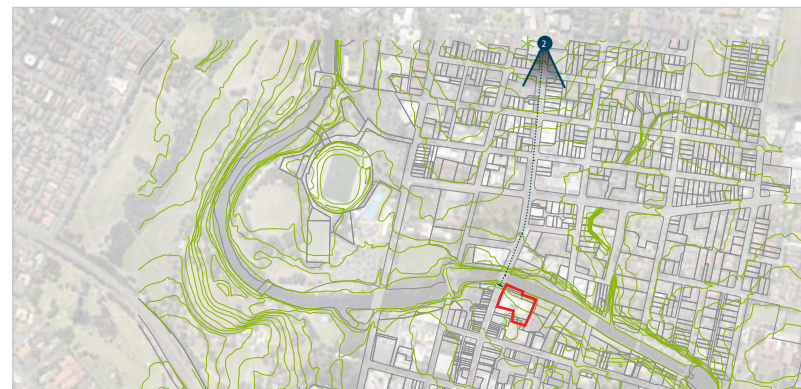
- 12 m +10% DEHB
- 34 m +10% DEHB
- 80 m +10% DEHB

VANTAGE POINT 2

DESCRIPTION

This vantage point is located at the corner of Harold Street and Church Street and looks towards the Parramatta CBD. The analysis considers the view corridor from this corner to the Lennox Bridge. The view is of the Parramatta CBD and currently terminates on buildings along the eastern side of Church Street.

ANALYSIS	
Type of viewer	Pedestrians, motorists and residents.
Duration of view	<p>Moderate; 50 km/hr speed limit, the road falls in elevation and curves slowly towards the site. Upper levels of the proposed development will be visible when not obscured by existing development and street trees.</p> <p>Prior to crossing the Parramatta River (Lennox Bridge), at Prince Alfred Park the road swings to the right which aligns the tower off centre with the road.</p>
Scenic quality	The vantage point is on approach to the CBD, with a wide street profile (dual carriageway) including a separate bus lane in both directions and a footpath with semi mature street trees.
Visual and Landscape sensitivity	The Parramatta City Centre LEP identifies the historic approach to the main street. The setback and scale of the street wall are identified as important elements.



ASSESSMENT

The impact of the proposed development is low, as the lower levels of development will be located behind street trees and existing buildings.

Visually the towers will be a part of the existing visible of building mass within the Parramatta CBD. Further, permissible building heights as stipulated in the Parramatta City Centre LEP will contribute to this urban view and the upper levels of the development will be backdropped to some extent from views from this location.

It should be noted that the 200m envelope at the background of the proposal is located approximately 570m south of the site.



LEGEND

proposed development
(RL185.1 m & RL116.3)

Maximum future height controls
according to Parramatta LEP 2007

- 12 m +10% DEHB
- 54 m +10% DEHB
- 80 m +10% DEHB
- 120 m +10% DEHB
- 200 m +10% DEHB

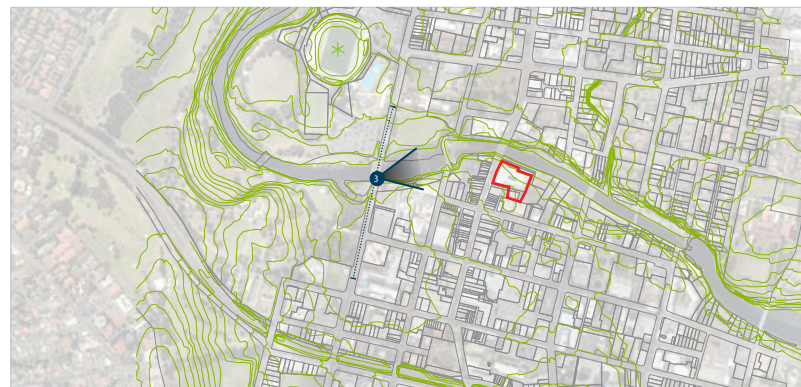
VANTAGE POINT 3

DESCRIPTION

This vantage point from Rings Bridge on O'Connell Street is approximately 370m distant. The view corridor looking east/south east stretches on one side of the road over the park of Old King's School and the Parramatta River.

The view is of buildings that form part of the Parramatta CBD. Curvature in the Parramatta River means that views along the river are short.

ANALYSIS	
Type of viewer	Motorist and pedestrians.
Duration of view	The view is short and oblique for motorists travelling south and obscured by existing development for motorists travelling north. For pedestrians travelling along the Parramatta River the view is longer where not interrupted by existing vegetation and development.
Scenic quality	The Parramatta River and its corridor either side are located in the foreground. Parramatta Park is located on one side and the building mass of the Parramatta regional centre is located on the other side.
Visual and Landscape sensitivity	The view is not identified as a historical view in the Parramatta DCP 2007. The landscape forms an edge to development (located behind) which softens the appearance of the built form.




ASSESSMENT


While the upper portion of the proposed development will be highly visible from this view point, it does not compromise any views from this vantage point. The reduction in visibility of sky is replaced with views between slender towers that contributes to the CBD skyline. The proposed facade provides visual interest from this location, and is likely to be read favourably against other developments into the future, of a comparable height.





LEGEND

 proposed development
(RL185.1 m & RL116.3)

Maximum future height controls
according to Parramatta LEP 2007

 18 m +10% DEHB

 34 m +10% DEHB

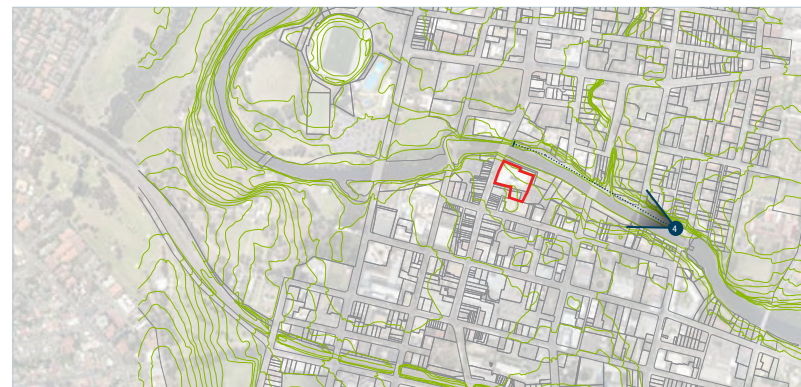
 80 m +10% DEHB

VANTAGE POINT 4

DESCRIPTION

This vantage point is located on the Parramatta riverside walkway, close to the pedestrian crossing from Queens Avenue to Charles Street. The analysis takes the view corridor from this point to the Lennox Bridge.

ANALYSIS	
Type of viewer	Pedestrians for daily recreation and using access route to the Ferry Wharf
Duration of view	The duration of the view will be long since it will be only visible to pedestrians. The new development begins to be visible at approximately 500m from the subject site (along Parramatta riverside walkway).
Scenic quality	The view comprises the Parramatta River and the associated open space on either side of the river. The park has a high landscape quality and is the main public space for the Parramatta CBD.
Visual and Landscape sensitivity	The view is not identified as a historical view in the Parramatta DCP 2007, although the view will be of moderate to high importance. The park functions as a through route and as a place of pause. However, the landscape setting is not highly sensitive to change, as views from the park are dominated by highly visible buildings in the mid-ground and backdrop.



ASSESSMENT

The proposed development will be read against other buildings in the foreground and background in views from this vantage point.

Due to the curve of the river to the east of Lennox Bridge between the vantage point and the subject site potential new development built to the permissible LEP building heights on the southern side of the River will obscure direct views to all but the upper level of the proposal.



LEGEND

proposed development
(RL185.1 m & RL116.3)

Maximum future height controls
according to Parramatta LEP 2007

34 m +10% DEHB

80 m +10% DEHB

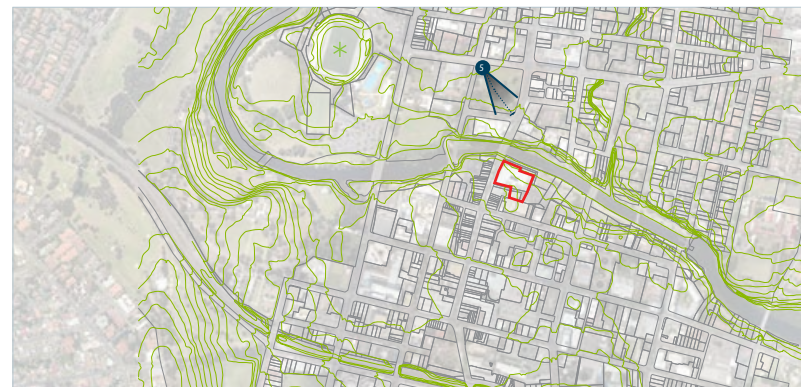
VANTAGE POINT 5

DESCRIPTION

This vantage point is located in Prince Alfred Park, which is located at the crossing of Marsden Street and Victoria Road southeast to the crossing of Church Street and Market Street.

The vantage point is on the axial path that diagonally crosses Prince Alfred Park.

ANALYSIS	
Type of viewer	Pedestrians used for daily recreation and as access route to/from the CBD via Lennox Bridge.
Duration of view	The park is small and evergreen palms blocking out most the view. The park functions as a through route and also for passive recreation and community events. Foreground vegetation limits visibility to the distance.
Scenic quality	The open space provides a high level of scenic quality to the foreground of this view.
Visual and Landscape sensitivity	The view is not identified as a historical view in the Parramatta City Centre DCP 2007. The view is of moderate importance due to the function the open space performs as providing urban relief. However, buildings are visible in the mid-ground and background from this vantage point.



ASSESSMENT

The upper portion of the proposed development is visible from within the park and at some points along the axial path. Existing buildings are visible above the treeline and intermittently through the tree canopies. The proposed development will be visible above the trees along and adjacent to this vantage point, and will be read as an addition to the existing buildings within this view.

As the development is not in the direct alignment of the axis, the proposed development is more visible from other locations within the park as shown in on the opposite page. The photomontage taken from the monument on the Church Street (Appendix A) edge of the Prince Alfred Park near the axial path, shows the proposed development extending above the treeline.

The LEP permissible envelopes to 80m provide a solid horizontal wall above the treeline as opposed to the narrow vertical forms of the development which provides for views through.



LEGEND

proposed development
(RL185.1 m & RL116.3)

Maximum future height controls
according to Parramatta LEP 2007

34 m +10% DEHB

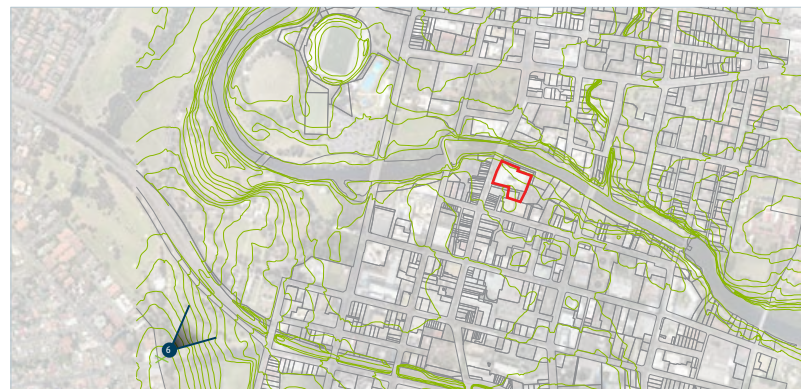
80 m +10% DEHB

VANTAGE POINT 6

DESCRIPTION

This vantage point is located at the local high point in Parramatta Park, near the eastern end of Amos Street. A gated at-grade public carpark is located at this vantage point and residential development is located along Amos Street. The subject site is located approximately 1 km northeast of the vantage point.

The DCP identifies the relationship of this point to the distant hills. The view line is across the CBD.

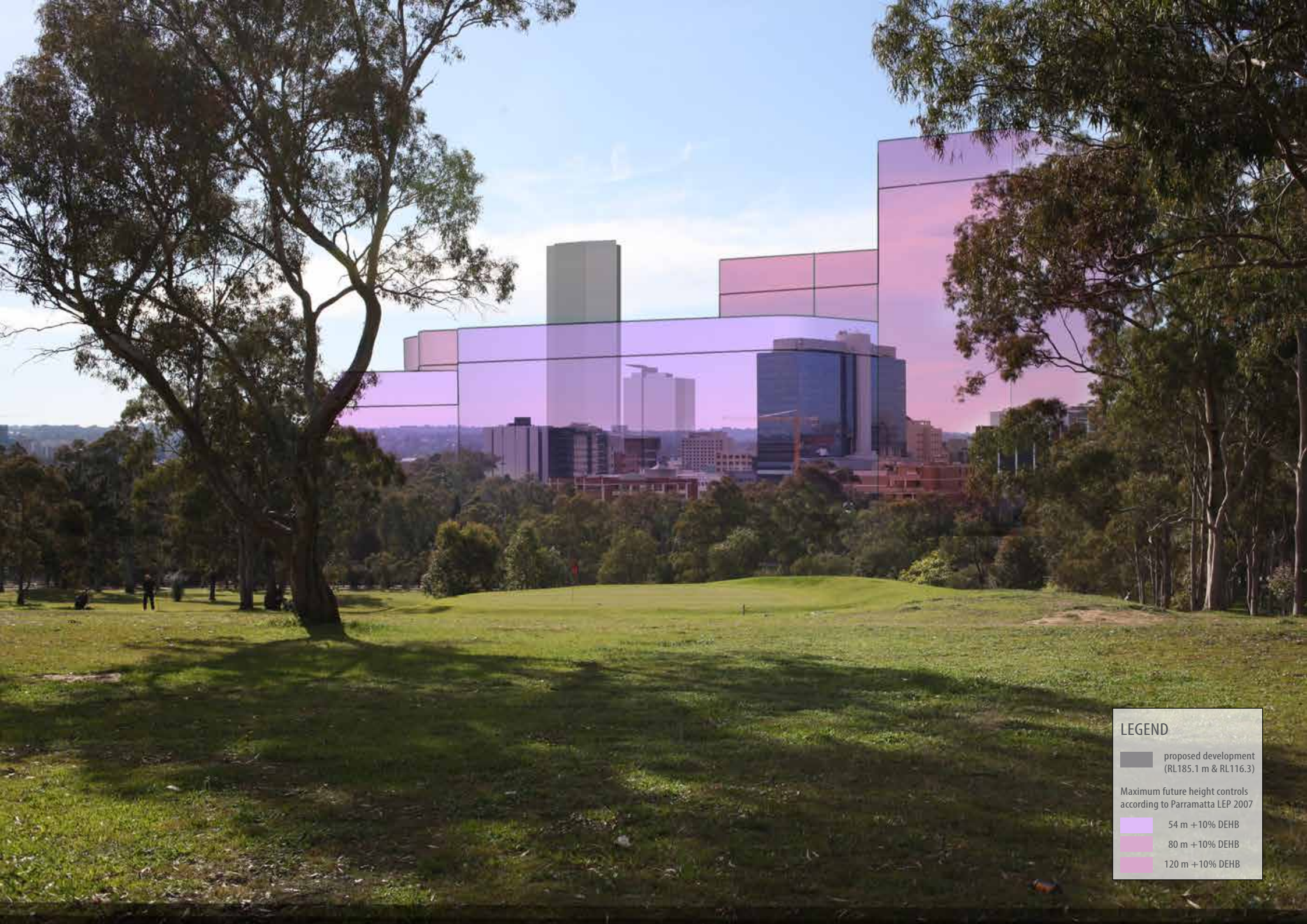


ASSESSMENT

Receptors will over time experience a loss of this view as existing buildings already block views to the distant hills in this location, accentuated by LEP permitted envelopes.

The proposed development will contribute to the skyline of the Parramatta CBD from this location by providing variation in building height and interest in facade and CBD skyline.

ANALYSIS	
Type of viewer	Pedestrians use for daily recreation, motorists who park their vehicle in the at grade carpark and residents of developments located adjacent to the vantage point.
Duration of view	The long duration view is of the hills in the background with the CBD in the middle ground. However the view is interrupted by large tree canopies in the foreground if walking through the park.
Scenic quality	<p>The view is of high value as open space is located in the foreground, CBD buildings in the middle ground and distant hills in the background.</p> <p>The views of distant hills are identified in the DCP as being between buildings. The DCP does not identify whether these are existing or future buildings nor does it identify the desired proportion or expanse of these views to be retained.</p>
Visual and Landscape sensitivity	The view is identified as a historical view line to the distant hills in the DCP. The proposed development will not compromise views to the distant hills as existing and LEP permissible development will also block views from this location.



LEGEND

proposed development
(RL185.1 m & RL116.3)

Maximum future height controls
according to Parramatta LEP 2007

- 54 m +10% DEHB
- 80 m +10% DEHB
- 120 m +10% DEHB

3. CONCLUSIONS

A key consideration in the assessment of visual impact is viewer perception and expectations of acceptable change to the landscape or urban setting in which the individual lives or works.

Within heavily urbanised town centre settings, the issue of visual impact does not relate as directly to the unacceptable imposition of an element with the setting as it does to an expectation of change occurring. A city is dynamic and change to the visual setting is generally expected and accepted.

Aspects such as quality of design are subjective, and it could be argued that poor design execution and lower bulky forms are less visually acceptable, and result in a higher apparent visual impact, than well designed and well-articulated tall and slender forms. Therefore, height, on its own, is not the overall predetermining factor for visual impact, particularly given the subject site sits adjacent to an area with approved LEP height of 120 m.

A massed form to 80m occupying the entire permissible area (Figure 14 – Draft Riverbank Design Guidelines [2010]) will potentially result in a greater visual impact than a two slender forms exceeding this height set on a low podium.

In the context of the existing Parramatta River landscape / urban setting, if a high limit is designed to protect the viewshed and landscape of the river, the visual change resulting from an 80 m high form occupying the entire permissible area on the development site will be little different to the highly articulated form of the proposed development.

The primary visual catchment for the development is within approximately 1km of the subject site. Beyond this distance the proposal will form part of the future Parramatta CBD skyline.

As identified throughout this report, the historic views identified in the Parramatta City Centre DCP 2007 are also not significantly impacted by the proposed development as existing LEP and DCP controls permit significant building height uplifts to 120 m, immediately to the south of the subject site, and 200 m within the CBD, to which the proposal is comparable to.

The location of the site in relation to key view corridors renders the majority of site partially or fully blocked by existing development, existing vegetation and/or potential development as permitted by existing planning controls (heights and setbacks). The slight bend in Church Street crossing Lennox Bridge and in the Parramatta River, reduces the ability to directly view the proposed development; thereby reducing the visual impact of the proposed development from these areas to all but the upper parts of the proposed slender towers.

While the proposed development is visible from the key vantage points, the impact is not detrimental to any important public domain views.

The impact of the proposed heights of 177.1 m and 107.5 m, beyond the existing maximum building height identified in the Parramatta City Centre LEP 2007 is appropriate in the context of the Parramatta CBD, as:

- Although the proposed maximum building height exceeds the height controls of the Parramatta LEP 2007 by 97.1 m and will be discernable from the public domain, the proposed building heights will be read in the context of a range of building heights in the CBD; including a maximum 200 m height control.
- There is limited residential development within the vicinity of the site, hence limited private domain view loss opportunities.
- The photomontages show that the proposed building facades are varied to provide visual interest. The massing of the proposal provides physical and visual separation across the site.
- The proposed development will have a low visual impact on views from key vantage points, as a majority of the vantage points are viewed in the context of existing CBD-related buildings and towers in the mid-ground and/or backdrop and viewer perceptions will be accepting of change within the urban setting of the CBD.
- The proposed development will have no significant impact on historic views identified in the DCP.

Given the acceptable visual impact of the proposal no design changes are recommended.

APPENDIX A - PHOTOMONTAGES



Perspective Location Map - 330 Church Street, Parramatta.

20/06/2013



View A



PROJECT | CHURCH STREET
DATE | 20 / 05 / 13



View B



View C



PROJECT | CHURCH STREET
DATE | 23 / 05 / 13

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