

Architectural Review Advisory Panel

Proposal:

Woollooware Bay Town Centre Stage 1 - Retail/Club Precinct

Property:

461 Captain Cook Drive WOOLLOOWARE NSW 2230

Applicant:

Bluestone Capital Ventures No. 1 Pty Ltd

File Number:

DN13/0006

The following is the report of the Architectural Review Advisory Panel Meeting held on 21 March 2013 at the Administration Centre, Sutherland Shire Council, Eton Street, Sutherland. The report documents the Panel's consideration of the proposed development described above.

"3. Consideration of DN13/0006 – Woollooware Bay Town Centre Stage 1 – Retail/Club Precinct at 461 Captain Cook Drive, Woollooware

Council's David Jarvis and Kylie Rourke outlined the proposal for the Panel, including providing details of Council's relevant codes and policies.

Matt Crews, Gordon Kirkby, Bob Perry, Rob Sanderson and Joel Munns addressed the Panel regarding the aims of the proposal and the constraints of the site, including providing details of the master plan that has been approved by the NSW Planning and Assessment Commission.

Description of the Site and Proposal

The site is located off the northern side of Captain Cook Drive Woollooware, adjacent to the Solander playing fields and the Sharks Stadium and Leagues Club, south of Woollooware Bay and north of the Woollooware Rail Station and the existing Woollooware Town Centre.

The Stage 1 DA retail/club proposal comprises 26,495sqm GFA and 770 car parking spaces. It consists of a new retail centre with a full line supermarket, food retail, mini-major tenancies, specialty retail, dining tenancies and medical and leisure uses; public domain works including new foreshore buffer to Woollooware Bay; and upgrade and signalization of the intersection of Captain Cook Drive and Woollooware Road North. The site area of the Sharks Stadium, the Leagues Club and the eastern car park is 59,340sqm.

The fit-out for the specific tenancies and the Sharks Club will be subject to future development applications or provisions of complying development.

The site is within Zone 14 – Public Open Space and Zone 15 - Private Recreation under the provisions of Sutherland Shire Local Environmental Plan 2006 (SSLEP 2006).

On 27 August 2012 a Concept Plan (MP10-0229) was approved, subject to conditions, under Part 3A of the EP&A Act, by the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) as

delegate of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. Conditions of Approval were issued by the DoP&I on 06 September 2012. The PAC is the determination authority for the project application.

Context

The proposal is a large retail centre to be constructed on a prominent, but isolated site, adjacent to the fragile mangrove landscape of Botany Bay. Siting such a development next to an internationally noted wetland area requires particular respect for the context. It is suggested that “northern parkland” is a misnomer. This area is a riparian buffer not a public open space.

Contextually, this is an inward focussed development that gives very little to the adjoining streets or the adjoining community that includes a school and residences. While the massing and uses of the proposal have been approved, it is crucial for the centre’s successful integration with its context that the environmental assessment requirements of the PAC approved Concept Plan in Schedule 3 – especially those relating to built form, ecologically sustainable development, public domain and landscaping – are fully complied with.

Apart from concerns regarding the treatment of the Riparian zone outlined under in the “Landscape” section, the proposed retail centre provides very little ground level activation to Captain Cook Drive and Woollooware Road - as required by Schedule 3 Built Form, Item 2. Instead of enlivening its streets with active uses, the centre relies on architectural treatments around the parking levels and large commercial billboards, which increase its commercial exposure but do not contribute to a high quality public domain. In completely filling the site, little space has been left to develop high quality public open space – such as a town square or major forecourt - along its Captain Cook Drive frontage or in the interface with the existing sporting ground. With raised terraces proposed to its north and a constrained entry point only on Captain Cook Drive, it appears not to be able to meet its environmental assessment requirements.

The proposal appears not to have considered the long term urban design potential of such a large scale intervention. The extension of Woollooware Road for example – the centre’s link with Woollooware Station - has been completely dedicated to loading and manoeuvring of trucks. This will prevent sites to the east and south being transformed and new active streets emerging over time - as would be expected by the longer term positive effects of a “town centre”.

This is a large footprint, lower scale building. Its largest façade is its fifth façade – the roof. Yet the roofscape architecture has not been considered. When viewed from above by higher future buildings or from the airspace around Sydney Airport, the development should integrate into the character of its setting – ie interesting roof forms, green roofs and landscape areas. The car park function should be covered or at least obscured.

Scale

This is a new building with a context of landscape and football stadium. It will create a new scale in the area. The proposed height is appropriate to the existing stadium and club, and the general horizontality of the landscape. There is an opportunity to articulate the building mass into two distinct forms by creating a glazed roof level slot or break

above the escalator/stair entry, running along the main north-south circulation spine towards Woollooware Bay.

While the centre's bulk has been approved, its scale has not been modulated by active tenancies along its edges, form-giving open spaces or architectural strategies that emphasize its entry through the creation of multiple forms. Hence, it presents as a very large decorated shed. Large signage and applied architectural motifs are not sufficient to introduce an appropriate scale to the building's very long elevations and large parking roof levels.

Built Form

Apart from the required minimum setback of 35 and 40 metres from the built form for the vegetated riparian buffer corridor from the built form on the northern boundary the development completely fills its site, with little setbacks for appropriate scaled large tree planting along Woollooware Road North.

Because of its position and functioning sporting ground function, the development has extensive parking, which only emphasizes its bulk. Due to the absence of active uses at ground level and on-grade high quality streets around the site, the development is liable to remain detached from its context, which is of great concern. With limited entries and standard internal malls, the main street edge of this massive development is largely dedicated to commercial signage, which on a flat site adjacent to a significant landscape, appears to be a poor outcome.

The term "town centre" is a misnomer. The development is an introverted and isolated retail mall with the primary activity raised one level above the ground plane. There is concern that this is an outdated paradigm for a project of this type - it should do more to connect and integrate with its existing and future setting.

The location of the loading dock and wide car park access in the south-western corner of the site, between the retail entry and Sharks stadium, may resolve functional requirements but undermines the strategy of encouraging pedestrian movement between elements along Captain Cook Drive. This area should be reviewed to improve its extent and footpath treatment. The adjacent 'forecourt' is too small and irregular in shape to be an effective public space and should be reviewed.

The extent of unmediated roof car parking, with its resultant glare and unpleasant views for eastern residential units, is a missed opportunity in a number of ways: first, a number of the services occupying potential street frontages on the ground floor could be relocated to the roof; second there is the opportunity to undertake solar harvesting which could also act as shade structures for parked cars; third, there is the potential for significant wind harvesting along the southern edge of the roof - the sun and wind energy would be a draw card for potential commercial tenants; and fourth, its visibility from numerous aircraft is a potential ESD branding opportunity.

The applicant advised that it did not have a strategy for occupation or treatment of residual areas of the site as the retail centre will be constructed in a single stage over 18 months.

Density

While the development's density appears to basically comply with its approved maximum gross building area, it is of concern that its success as a retail centre will depend purely on whether or not its range of "experiences" do attract the large numbers of people that its retail areas and table seating suggest. However, in its isolated setting, with limited entry and access potential, and with retail struggling elsewhere in the Shire, it is difficult to imagine that this will necessarily be the case. When specialty shops are closed for example, malls are unpleasant places. How will this impact on the success of rear located cafe and restaurants that rely on the mall for access? With non-active surrounding streets and great distances to future residential, will pedestrian links actually work? Will people come? Will it be safe?

The proposal would have benefited from a decanting of some of the residential to the west above the podium. This would have created generally lower heights and better overall scale, as well as a much improved, more integrated mix of uses with all of the attendant benefits. The retail centre is a very dense residential development for this site. It would possibly have been better to reduce the retail area and create an integrated retail/residential development at the eastern end of the site, allowing for reduced density at the western end, possibly even with mixed use. It appears somewhat limiting to separate the uses into west (residential) and east (retail). Diversity always allows for more interesting resolutions.

The proposal does not currently resolve the context, streetscape, active edges, public domain and public amenity issues required by its conditions of consent, and high density development standards generally.

The proposed density is not consistent with other residential developments of this scale in Sydney however its lack of access to public transport is a significant issue. It is likely that residents will be substantially car dependent until such time as a regular public bus route or routes to key destinations are confirmed and established.

Resource, Energy and Water Efficiency

The proposal appears to be outmoded in that it is basically an introverted retail mall with a huge area of above grade parking. Apart from its north facing terraces, it does not open up to its environment and appears not to engage with resource, energy or water efficiency practices at all. This is not adequate for such a large proposal in such a sensitive site.

The Concept Plan approval by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure indicates under Schedule 3, Item 11 that the proposal should 'demonstrate the incorporation of ESD principles' – and this could be an important contribution by this development and a branding opportunity.

Yet there is little evidence of resource and energy strategies in the proposal. Water harvesting and general hydraulic plans have not been provided, in particular the storm-water detention and retention management plan. This is also relevant to the bioswale north of the loading dock. There is the opportunity to provide a high level of visibility as an exemplar of environmental development such as Masdar City or the Helsinki C-City and low2No SITRA competition. A number of new shopping centres have recognised that

the consumer seeks green experiential shopping green start-ups. Dufferin Mall, Toronto is a good example as is Singapore's City Square Mall, which is an eco-mall. There is also the concept of a Human Energy Park which can occupy roof areas and could be associated with the wellness centre.

There are discrepancies between the Ecologically Sustainable Development Statement prepared by Arup and the Architectural Drawings prepared by Scott Carver. Proposed strategies appear to have not been implemented - an example being the omission of the roof lights and light wells, which are essential components of the passive design strategy to introduce natural light and ventilation into the building. Presumably the elements have been deleted to maximize roof parking. A materials strategy is noted for the use of materials with reduced embodied energy but not substantiated with energy usage tables.

The location of tanks and related infrastructure to achieve 25% water saving in potable water consumption is unclear. There was no evidence of cogeneration or tri-generation – although these initiatives would appear warranted for a development of this size, in conjunction with the residential development.

Landscape

The landscape proposal is focused on the northern riparian setback, which is generally addressed well in the landscape management plan. However, there is the risk that the native grasslands will not be respected as riparian zones and used for playgrounds as indicated in the power-point presentation to the Panel.

The 'grand' staircase connecting level two to the ground is over-scaled and contravenes the riparian setback requirements. The vertical connectivity to the riparian zone from the building should occur entirely on the designated area.

The landscape proposals for Captain Cook Drive and Woollooware Road North are weak. Strong tall trees, such as *Araucaria heterophylla* are needed along both sides of Captain Cook Drive. As well, the under-planting suggested for the street trees is not recommended; instead robust porous material that can withstand pedestrian movement is recommended.

Amenity

The applicant is confident that the development will provide retail and social amenity to the broader Shire. While this may be true, the Panel believes that its success will depend on the extent that it provides high quality activated and safe street edges, maximizes its links with its local context and makes its entry and access regimes as public as possible.

The new internal plan of the main retail floor with a simpler cruciform arrangement eliminating awkward dead-ends shown briefly in the power-point presentation by the architect is much improved on the submitted plan. While the revised internal plan is an improvement on the circulation model in the submitted drawings it is still of concern that the centre follows the typical pattern of an internally focused retail mall, rather than innovating a genuine town centre. While the applicant insists that it cannot be done another way, the decision to raise the main floor to the first floor level for example, reduces access and activity potential at grade.

The proposal will provide new amenity for the local population, although access to the retail centre is likely to be entirely car-based. Early implementation and frequent, regular service by public bus is a very high priority.

Loading and parking dominate the ground floor, which is a poor outcome when access, safety and long term potential are considered. In the short term, lifeless and potentially perimeter streets dominated by commercial billboards just may not be enough to attract the numbers required.

Although the retail centre will be car dependent – given its isolated location – the degree to which it must rely on “destination” experiences is a concern. Being an internally focused first floor mall with an attached club makes it less flexible than a street-based town centre to adapt over time to local conditions. What if the club relocates for example? What if the cafes fail to attract clients at night? Greater consideration should be given as to how the centre can be better integrated into its context, how its perimeter can be more active and how it can fit into a broader centre strategy for the location.

Clearly the shops and medical centre will provide amenity but given the problems occurring in many such internalised shopping precincts, including some in the Shire such as Miranda Fair, there is the chance to embed community amenities in the proposal. It is important to recognise that the northern riparian zone is not an open space amenity.

Safety and Security

A development of this scale creates potentially significant safety and security issues. The lack of street activation will engender safety and security issues, as will the large car-park areas that will often be empty. The landscaped riparian zone raises questions of surveillance and security after hours – how is this to be managed?

The “Family Hill” appears too complicated and diverts direct pedestrian flow along this zone – the proponent advised that this will be public space on non-game days however. Details around this should be fleshed out – a sloping ground plane within the Stadium curtilage does not on the face of it appear to set up a legible public connection.

Public access across the face of the southern stand is also important for connectivity with the residential precinct, but achieving this from a management perspective seems complex and has the probability of being diluted or closed over time.

As advised by the applicant at the meeting, the approval requires that Captain Cook Drive and Woollooware Road must have active uses at ground level. This has not been achieved. Nor is passive surveillance provided from tenancies above street level. This makes the retail centre potentially unsafe – especially at night.

The car park and loading dock location have been positioned and designed for internal planning efficiency, but create a major impediment and safety issues for the public moving along Captain Cook Drive.

Social Dimensions

A development of this scale raises potentially significant social issues.

There are ways to address some of the safety and security issues by allowing for greater social and community facilities in the street-front spaces released if the services are placed on the roof. The proximity of Woollooware High School creates the potential for an after school drop-in centre, community library, local radio station, recording studio, creative industries incubator spaces, and so on.

As well, the large area allocated for food services could be modified to include a cooking school with suitable media facilities. Federation Square in Melbourne is an example of intriguing green food pop-ups. There is a strong role for artists in the entire development – not just for interpretative environmental signage in the riparian zone. There are also ways artists can be engaged to work with Cronulla Sharks as community engagement, such as the Penrith Panthers' project with Sylvie Blocher <http://www.mca.com.au/artists-and-works/external-projects/c3west/campement-urbain-future-penrith-penrith-future/>

Drop-in spaces at street level are ideal for such projects and give the development a role and profile in the community. This project could brand itself as an example of good citizen engagement.

Clearly the proposal needs spaces for temporary uses such as markets, concerts, etc. Also it is noted that the La Perouse Land Council has not provided its feedback yet. This is an opportunity to provide some links, particularly if youth creative industries incubators are established.

Aesthetics

The façade treatments are mainly decorative to disguise the fact that the building is principally a car park. Generally, the facades have been broken into discreet pieces to mitigate the building's mass and principal use, and are generally well handled by the architect within these constraints. The south-eastern corner of the building could be improved – it is bulky and mostly blank, almost “freeway architecture”. The blank northern wall of the supermarket loading dock is an inappropriate interface to the riparian zone, relying mainly on tree screening for relief.

More attention should be afforded to the Woollooware Road frontage – this is a natural connection from the mangroves and riparian foreshore up to Woollooware Station. The site to the east could be re-developed in the future, making this streetscape a distinctive and special place in a wider urban design sense.

Recommendations and Conclusions:

In the view of the Panel the proposal is flawed in its conception and distribution of uses across the entire Shark's site. The ability of the development to contribute to the evolving urbanization of the larger area precinct has not been explored.

While the concept has already been approved by the PAC, the current development application does not satisfy the clear environmental assessment requirements relating to built form, ecologically sustainable development, public domain and landscaping requirements in Schedule 3 of the PAC approved Concept Plan.

It is clear that the Shire is presently a strongly car-based community and in this respect the Panel understands the issues facing the developers, given the site's isolation. Like

most private development, its underlying raison d'etre will be creating optimised commercial return in the short term. However its longer term commercial and social sustainability will depend on it being integrated and open to the community, not the opposite, and in this respect the development team is encouraged to reflect generally on what the Panel hopes are received as critically constructive comments.

The Panel has the view that the proposal could be significantly improved in terms of its physical, environmental and social engagement with its context, and may in fact still be improved if the applicant is willing to engage in further open discussion.”

Colleen Baker
ARAP Coordinator

05 April 2013