

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education
Richmond NSW
Project No. SSD-1500146

Schools Infrastructure NSW

APRIL 2021

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ISSUED	REVIEW	ISSUED BY
29 th April 2021	SSDA	Stephanie Ferguson
08 th April 2021	Draft Issue for information	Trevor Eveleigh

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report considers the visual impact of the proposed development of the Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education located on the Western Sydney University Hawkesbury Campus.

To determine the visual impact, assessment was undertaken of a number of matters, including:

- The existing place character of WSU and Heritage items located onsite.
- Identification of key viewpoints from private places such as the WSU student accommodation and Carol Allen House Residential Care Facility
- Assessment of visual impact based on the sensitivity of these viewpoints and the magnitude of change resulting proposal's insertion into the view
- Assessment of this visual impact against relevant parts of applicable planning instruments to determine appropriateness

The site is located at the southern end of the WSU Hawkesbury Campus accessed off a privately owned road. The proposed site sits within an agricultural landscape with WSU microbiology to the East and WSU Student Accommodation to the West.

The existing WSU campus is a series of 1 and 2 storey buildings within a rural setting. The WSU Campus has a number of local heritage items include:

- Memorial Hall
- Potts Hall, Adams Building
- Grandstand
- Blacksmiths Shop
- Stable Square

Based on the consideration of place, any relevant planning instruments and a site inspection, 6 viewpoints in the primary visual catchment were selected upon which to base the visual impact assessment. Photography and photomontages were prepared for each viewpoint. This provided two images – an existing baseline and an indication of the likely proposed future outcome.

Based on consideration of factors such as distance of the proposal from the viewpoint, the composition and dominant features in the view and the purpose of people being at the viewpoint, the sensitivity of all viewpoints ranged from low to high. Based on consideration of factors such as amount and type of new fabric visible and its relationship to the existing view, the magnitude of change at all viewpoints was also ranged from negligible to moderate. It is noted that the photomontages showed that the proposal was likely to be or not to be visible from a number of viewpoints.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) is submitted to the Department of Planning, pursuant to Part 4 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act) in support of an application for a State Significant Development Application (SSDA).

The proposed development of the Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education is identified as State Significant Development (SSD) in accordance with Schedule 1 of State Environmental Planning Policy (State and Regional Development) 2011 (SRD SEPP).

The report has been prepared by NBRS Architecture on behalf of NSW Department of Education - School Infrastructure NSW and is based on photography and photomontages by NBRS Architecture in accordance with Land and Environment Court Policy.

This VIA has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Part 4 of the EP&A Act, Schedule 2 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000 (EP&A Regulation), and the SEARs for the preparation of the EIS.

2.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to determine whether the SSDA (the proposal) has an acceptable visual impact.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

The Methodology used for this VIA has been based on desktop and field analysis and involves the following main steps:

1. Local character: identify local character
2. Visual catchment: identify the visual catchment based on consideration of matters such as landform, built form and vegetation. This will be represented through the use of photographs
3. Viewpoints: identify key viewpoints from where the proposal may be visible. An aerial view will be provided to demonstrate the location of viewpoints.
4. Visual impact: assessment against sensitivity and magnitude
5. Acceptability of visual impact: consideration of the visual impact against applicable and relevant planning instruments to determine acceptability.
6. Recommendation: prepare a recommendation based on the findings of the method.

Central to the assessment of visual impact are the below criteria:

1. Sensitivity
Sensitivity is influenced by a number of factors. It is often important to identify not only what is happening at the viewpoint but also what is being seen. Common influences of sensitivity include:
 - distance from viewpoint (close, medium or long range);
 - relative viewing level (level, below or above);
 - number of viewers (few, moderate or many);
 - use at the viewpoint (residential, business, recreation, industry, special use);
 - purpose of being at the viewpoint (passing through such as a commuter, or dwelling such as resident or a tourist);
 - viewing period (short or long);
 - elements in the view (value and dominance); and
 - view composition type (obstructed, general, focal or panoramic).

The viewpoints will be assessed against the below matrix:

Rating	Common Influences
High	Close, below, many viewers, residential or recreation, dwelling, long period, highly valued and dominant, focal or panoramic
Moderate	Medium, level, moderate viewers, business or special use, passing through, short period, highly valued and not dominant, valued, general, focal or panoramic
Low	Long, above, few viewers, industry, passing through, short period, valued and not dominant, not-valued, obstructed or general
Negligible	The proposal cannot be seen

2. Magnitude

Considerations for magnitude include:

- The amount of new fabric visible compared to the existing situation, which may include a loss or addition
- changes to the composition of the view
- the prominence of the new fabric, or the extent to which its type, role, size, colour, materials and other elements are compatible with the existing view; and
- the ability of the view to absorb the change. For example, a context that is dominated by horizontal elements may limit the ability of the view to accommodate change. Conversely, vegetation may significantly increase the ability of the view to accommodate change.

The viewpoints will be assessed against the below matrix:

Rating	Common Influences
High	Large amount of fabric added or lost, high change to view composition in particular with regard to focus of view, highly prominent in the field of view
Moderate	Moderate amount of fabric added or lost, moderate change to view composition, visible in the field of view but not prominent
Low	Limited amount of fabric added or lost, low change to view composition, visible in the field of view but not noticeable to the casual observer
Negligible	The proposal cannot be seen

3. Consistency with applicable and relevant planning instruments.

Even if the visual impact of a proposal is considered to be high when considered against sensitivity and magnitude, it may be acceptable based on applicable and relevant planning instruments, or through the mitigation measures.

For example, the introduction of an element that has high magnitude of visual impact may be positive where it better aligns with the desired future character.

4. Visual Impact Matrix

While acknowledging that context specific, qualitative assessment is key, the visual impact matrix below has been used to guide a more objective VIA.

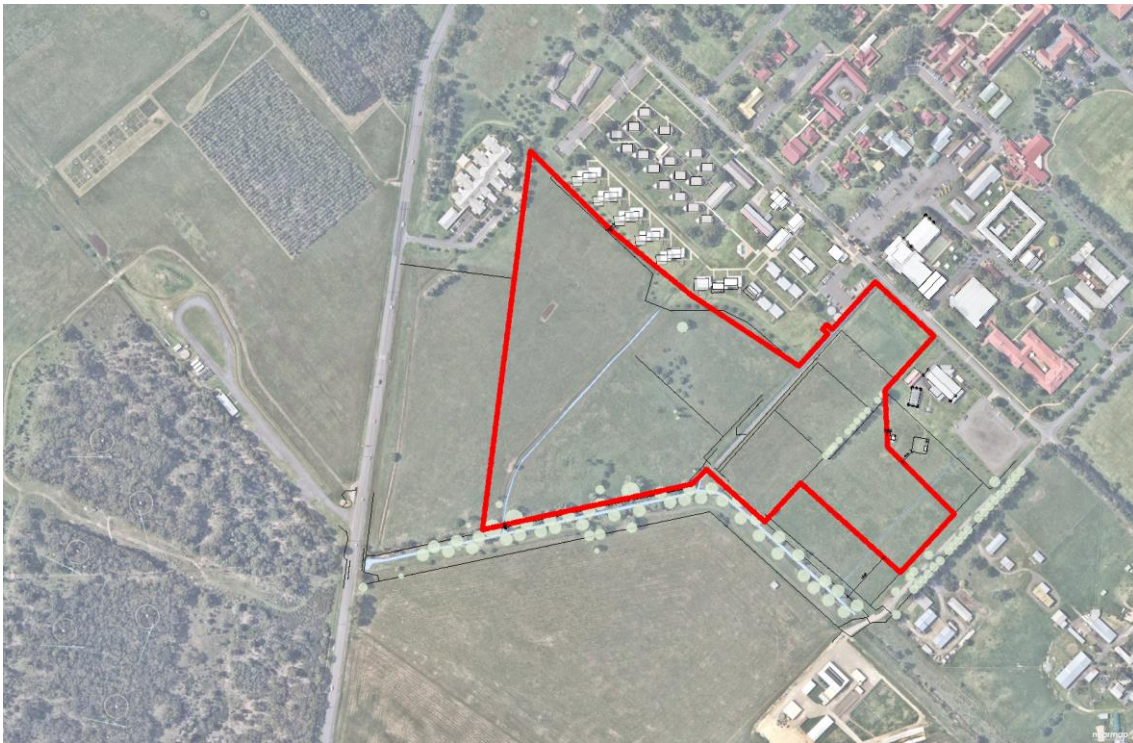
Sensitivity	Magnitude				
		High	Moderate	Low	Negligible
	High	High	High – Moderate	Moderate	Negligible
	Moderate	High – Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – Low	Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Moderate – Low	Low	Negligible
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

3.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

The proposed site is located on the southern side of the Western Sydney University Hawksbury campus. The site can be accessed off Vines Drive (privately owned road).

The site is nestled between picturesque agricultural plots, 1 and 2 storey buildings within a campus that has local heritage items and stately structured gardens.

Refer to site plan below:



The below photographs provide visual reference of the existing site, context, and character

<p>WSU Stable Square</p> 	<p>WSU Microbiology</p> 
<p>WSU Accommodation</p> 	<p>Rural Setting</p> 
	
<p>Vines Drive Street Scape</p> 	<p>Maintenance Drive Street Scape</p> 

4.0 OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development involves the construction and operation of a new Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Agricultural Education on a leased land parcel within the Western Sydney University (Hawkesbury Campus) site, Richmond NSW.

The CoE will provide new agricultural / STEM teaching facilities with general learning and administration spaces to be utilised by rural, regional, metropolitan and international school students. The CoE will accommodate up to 325 students and up to 25 full-time employees consisting of farm assistants, administration staff and teachers and up to five itinerant staff members. The CoE will also include short-term on-site accommodation facilities for up to 62 visiting students and teaching professionals from regional and rural NSW.

The CoE will include five science laboratories, ten general learning spaces, practical activity teaching areas, seminar, botany room, administration block and accommodation facilities. It will also include covered outdoor learning areas, dining / recreation hall, canteen and kitchen, agricultural plots, significant landscaping spaces, car parking and provision of necessary infrastructure.

The proposed development has been designed to be well integrated into the Western Sydney University site, having due regard for scale, bulk and orientation of existing buildings. The educational facilities will display linear open building forms in single story design with open spaces and lightweight construction techniques. The site is benefitted by views Blue Mountains to the west and the building and landscape plans have incorporated viewing opportunities into the design.

- Three academic blocks (Block B, C and D).
- Short-term, dormitory site accommodation with capacity for 62 patrons (Block F).
- Dining hall, Conference space and canteen (Block E).
- Administrative building (Block A).
- Support facilities for management and maintenance of site.
- External works to accommodate circulation and covered walkways between buildings.
- Pedestrian walkways.
- Student and staff amenities.
- Covered Outdoor Learning Areas.
- Visitor parking and drop off / pick up located off Vines Drive
- Staff parking and accommodation drop off / pick up off Maintenance Lane
- Green house.
- Various agricultural and animal plots and associated agricultural workshop.
- Provision of waste facility area.
- Installation of all essential services including stormwater management devices where required.
- Operation of the CoE site.

5.0 SECRETARY'S ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

On the 22nd March 2021, the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) issued Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) to the applicant for the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed development. This report has been prepared having regard to the relevant SEARs as shown below:

Built Form and Urban Design

- Address:
 - The height, density, bulk and scale, setbacks and interface of the development in relation to the surrounding development, topography, streetscape and any public open spaces.
 - Design quality and built form, with specific consideration of the overall site layout, streetscape, open spaces, façade, rooftop, massing, setbacks, building articulation, materials and colour palette.
 - How Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles are to be integrated into development.
 - How good environmental amenity would be provided, including access to natural daylight and ventilation, acoustic separation, access to landscape and outdoor spaces and future flexibility.
 - How design quality will be achieved in accordance with Schedule 4 Schools design quality principles of State Environmental Planning Policy (Educational Establishments and Child Care Facilities) 2017 and the GANSW Design Guide for Schools (GANSW, 2018).
 - How services, including but not limited to waste management, loading zones, and mechanical plant are integrated into the design of the development.
- Provide:
 - A detailed site and context analysis to justify the proposed site planning and design approach including massing options and preferred strategy for future development.
 - A visual impact assessment that identifies any potential impacts on the surrounding built environment and landscape including views to and from the site and any adjoining heritage items.

6.0 PLACE CHARACTER

Local character is a fundamental element of place. Based on the importance of place to communities, the NSW planning system seeks to ensure that development considers local character. Identification of local character is therefore an important step in determining the visual appropriateness of the proposal.

In accordance with the Department's Local Character and Place Guideline (2019) (the Guideline), local character comprises a broad range of elements, including the environmental, social and economic aspects of a place. However, for the purposes of guide development it is best considered as a combination of the important physical aspects of a place. These physical aspects can be organised under three main themes:

1. Public domain
2. Private domain
3. Cross domain

Importantly, the Guideline acknowledges that it is not always appropriate to keep a places existing local character. It identifies that planning instruments can seek to change, enhance or maintain existing local character.

7.0 APPLICABLE PLANNING INSTRUMENTS

7.1 ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING INSTRUMENTS (LEP)

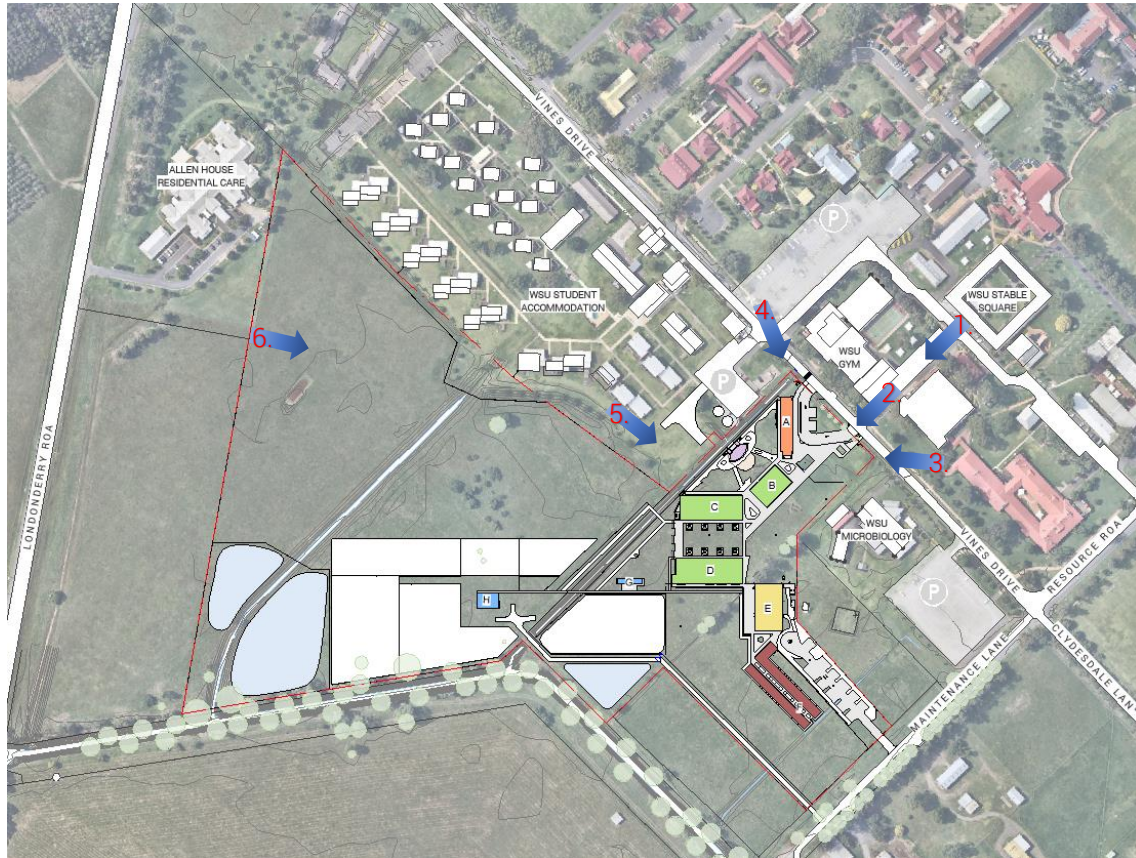
The LEP does not provide any specific guidance on VIA matters for this site.

7.2 DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PLAN (DCP)

The DCP is a guidance document that sets out principles in relation to character areas.

8.0 VISUAL IMPACT VIEWPOINTS

The below site plan identifies viewpoint locations with arrows indicating the direction of the vista.



Viewpoint 1 – is located from the southern entry of stable square facing back towards the proposed development site

Viewpoint 2 – is located at the corner of Vines Drive and Stable Square Place facing south towards the proposed development site

Viewpoint 3 – is located North East of the proposed development site facing south west

Viewpoint 4 – is located North West of the proposed development site facing south east

Viewpoint 5 – is located at WSU accommodation facing east towards the development site

Viewpoint 6 – is located at Allen House Residential Care facing east towards the development site

8.1 VISTA FROM STABLE SQUARE



(Photo taken from in front of Stable Square facing South towards the proposed development site)



(Photomontage overlaying the proposed development onto the site)

	Characteristic	Comment
Characteristic	Distance from site	109m
	Relative viewing level	Level with site
	Use at the viewpoint	Vehicular access road, parking and education facilities
	Purpose of being at viewpoint	View from Heritage Item north from the subject site
	Dominant elements	Existing building K-21, existing vegetation and roadway
Magnitude	Amount of fabric change	Low
	View composition change	Low - The proposal maintains the existing visual composition
	Prominence	The new building fabric is slightly noticeable within the existing site
	Overall Rating	Low

8.2 VISTA FROM VINES DRIVE FACING SOUTH



(Photo taken from Stable Square Place and Vines Drive looking South towards the proposed development site)



(Photomontage overlaying Block A and the pedestrian / vehicular entry to the site)

	Characteristic	Comment
Characteristic	Distance from site	15m
	Relative viewing level	Level with site
	Use at the viewpoint	Vehicular access road and vacant land
	Purpose of being at viewpoint	Streetscape view
	Dominant elements	Proposed entry and Block A – administration
Magnitude	Amount of fabric change	High
	View composition change	High – The visual composition is altered through the introduction of elements of greater human scale when compared to the existing condition.
	Prominence	The new building fabric is readily noticeable compared to the existing site
	Overall Rating	High

8.3 VISTA FROM VINES DRIVE FACING WEST



(Photo taken from Vines Drive looking West towards the Blue Mountains)



(Photomontage overlaying Block A, B & C onto the site)

	Characteristic	Comment
Characteristic	Distance from site	45m
	Relative viewing level	Level with site
	Use at the viewpoint	Vehicular access road, WSU Microbiology, and vacant land
	Purpose of being at viewpoint	Streetscape view within surrounding context
	Dominant elements	Proposed entry and Block A – administration
Magnitude	Amount of fabric change	High
	View composition change	Moderate – The visual composition is altered through the introduction of elements of greater human scale when compared to the existing condition.
	Prominence	The new building fabric is readily noticeable compared to the existing site
	Overall Rating	Moderate - High

8.4 VISTA FROM VINES DRIVE FACING EAST



(Photo from Vines Drive looking East towards the WSU Microbiology)



(Photomontage overlaying Block A and the aboriginal enterprise onto the site)

	Characteristic	Comment
Characteristic	Distance from site	58m
	Relative viewing level	Level with site
	Use at the viewpoint	Vehicular access road, WSU Microbiology, and vacant land
	Purpose of being at viewpoint	Streetscape view within surrounding context
	Dominant elements	Proposed entry and Block A – administration and aboriginal enterprise
Magnitude	Amount of fabric change	High
	View composition change	High – The visual composition is altered through the introduction of elements of greater human scale when compared to the existing condition.
	Prominence	The new building fabric is readily noticeable compared to the existing site
	Overall Rating	High

8.5 VISTA FROM WSU STUDENT ACCOMMODATION



(Photo from WSU Student Accommodation looking South East towards the WSU Microbiology)



(Photomontage overlaying Block A, B, C, and the aboriginal enterprise onto the site)

	Characteristic	Comment
Characteristic	Distance from site	87m
	Relative viewing level	Level with site
	Use at the viewpoint	WSU Student Accommodation
	Purpose of being at viewpoint	View from neighbouring property
	Dominant elements	Agricultural Plot / Vacant Land
Magnitude	Amount of fabric change	Moderate
	View composition change	Moderate - The proposal impacts the existing visual composition.
	Prominence	The proposed agricultural plots, agricultural shed, greenhouse, Aboriginal enterprise, Block A (Admin), Block B (Teaching), Block C (teaching / food tech)
	Overall Rating	Moderate

8.6 VISTA FROM CAROL ALLEN HOUSE RESIDENTIAL CARE



(Photo from WSU Student Accommodation looking South East towards the WSU Microbiology)



(Photomontage overlaying all building Blocks (A, B, C, D, E & F) onto the site)

	Characteristic	Comment
Characteristic	Distance from site	400m
	Relative viewing level	Level with site
	Use at the viewpoint	WSU Student Accommodation
	Purpose of being at viewpoint	View from neighbouring property
	Dominant elements	Agricultural Plot / Vacant Land
Magnitude	Amount of fabric change	Low
	View composition change	Low - The proposal maintains the existing visual composition
	Prominence	The proposed agricultural plots proposed agricultural shed, proposed greenhouse and building blocks
	Overall Rating	Low

9.0 CONCLUSION

The below table summarises the proposal against the relevant criteria

View	Location	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Visual Impact	Consistent with Planning Instruments
1	Vista from stable square	Low	Low	Low	✓
2	Vista from Vines Drive looking South	High	High	High	✓
3	Vista from Vines Drive looking West	High	Moderate	Moderate – High	✓
4	Vista from Vines Drive looking East	High	High	High	✓
5	Vista from WSU Student Accommodation	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	✓
6	Vista from Carol Allen House Residential Care	Low	Low	Low	✓

An assessment of the proposal as represented in photomontages prepared in accordance with L&E Court policy has been made against relevant factors such as existing place character of the primary visual catchment, sensitivity, magnitude, applicable planning instruments, the need for mitigation strategies and measures and consideration of residual impact.

On this basis, this VIA concludes that considering all relevant factors, in its current form the proposal has an acceptable visual impact.