

WALSH BAY ARTS AND CULTURAL PRECINCT

STATE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION

SSDA 8671

APPENDIX 18:

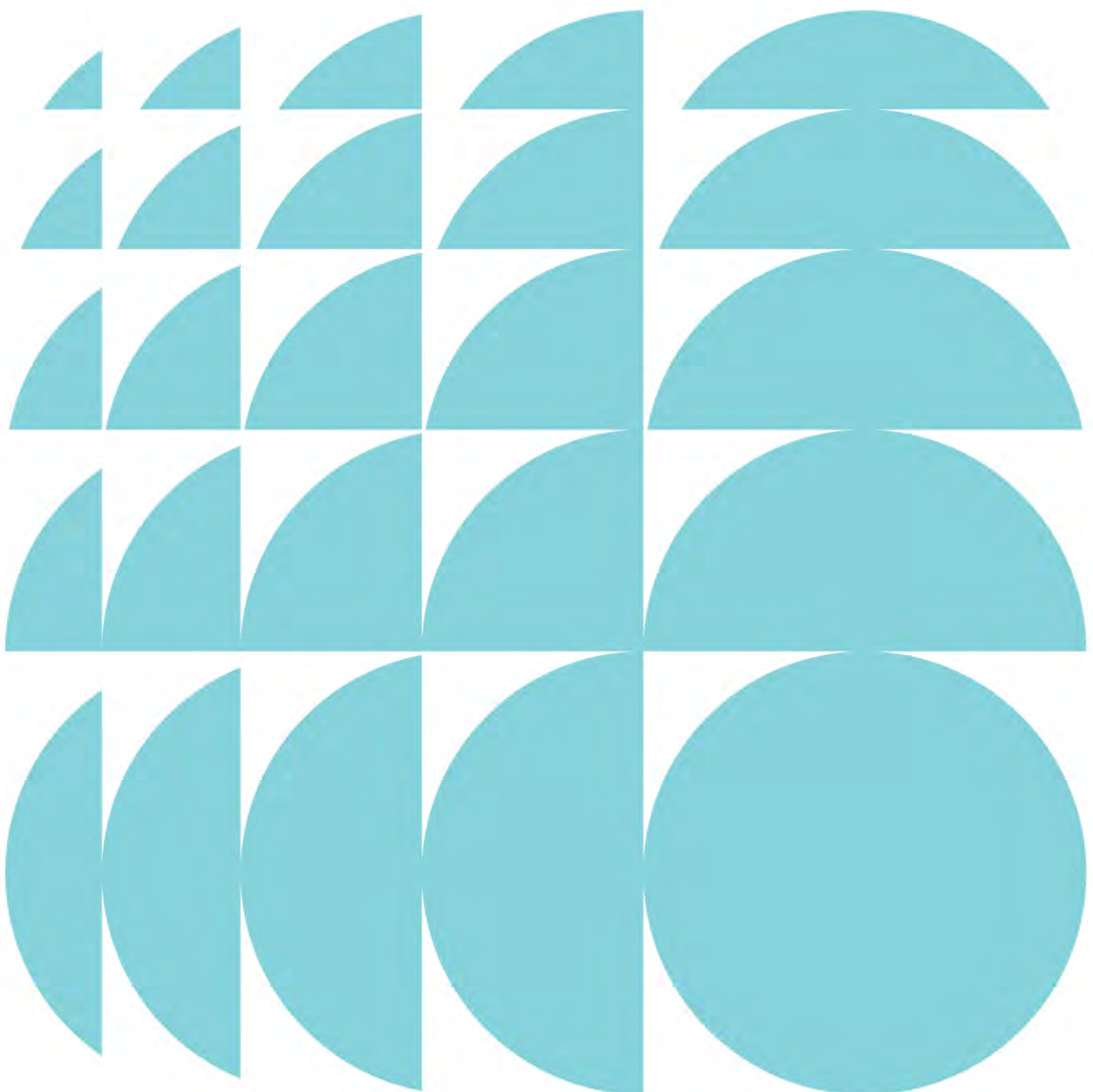
VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

ETHOS URBAN

Walsh Bay Arts and Cultural Precinct
Visual Impact Assessment Final for
Submission

Submitted to the NSW Department of
Planning and Environment
On behalf of INSW

04 October 2017 | 17503



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Contents

Acronyms	3
Executive Summary	4
1.0 Introduction	5
2.0 Background	7
3.0 The site	9
4.0 The proposal	10
5.0 Assessment criteria	33
6.0 Visual impact assessment	35
6.1 Dealing with views in the planning framework	35
6.2 Methodology	35
6.3 Visual effect analysis	35
6.4 Visual impact analysis	39
7.0 Assessment	41
8.0 Conclusion	43
9.0 Recommendation	44
Appendices	45
Appendix 1: Visual Impact Assessment Report, RLA, November 2016	45

Figures

Figure 1 – Originally proposed Waterfront Square	9
Figure 2 – The Site	10
Figure 3 – Proposed ground floor plan	12
Figure 4 – Existing and proposed east elevation to Pier 2/3 (proposed alterations shown in blue)	12
Figure 5 - Existing and proposed west elevation to Pier 2/3 (proposed alterations shown in blue)	13
Figure 6 - Existing and proposed east elevation to Wharf 4/5 (proposed alterations shown in blue)	13
Figure 7 - Existing and proposed west elevation to Wharf 4/5 (proposed alterations shown in blue)	14
Figure 8 - Existing and proposed north elevation to Pier 2/3 (proposed alterations shown in blue)	14

Contents

Figure 9 - Existing and proposed north elevation to Wharf 4/5 (proposed alterations shown in blue)	14
Figure 10 - Existing and proposed Hickson Road south elevation through shore sheds (proposed alterations shown in blue)	15
Figure 11 - Existing and proposed Hickson Road north elevation through shore sheds (proposed alterations shown in blue)	15
Figure 12 - Artist impression of proposal looking north	16
Figure 13 - Artist impression of proposal looking west	17
Figure 14 - Artist impression of interior of buildings showing proposed openings to external fabric	18
Figure 15 - Artist impression of interior of buildings showing proposed openings to external fabric	19
Figure 16 - Original view: Sydney Harbour Bridge Pylon Lookout	20
Figure 17 - Analytical photomontage: Sydney Harbour Bridge Pylon Lookout (proposed alterations shown in blue)	21
Figure 18 - Original view: Lower Fort Street	22
Figure 19 - Analytical photomontage: Lower Fort Street (proposed alterations shown in blue)	23
Figure 20 - Original view: Hickson Road / Pottinger Street intersection	24
Figure 21 - Analytical photomontage: Hickson Road / Pottinger Street intersection (proposed alterations shown in blue)	25
Figure 22 - Original view: West apron of Pier 3	26
Figure 23 - Analytical photomontage: West apron of Pier 3 (proposed alterations shown in blue)	27
Figure 24 - Original view: East apron of Wharf 4	28
Figure 25 - Analytical photomontage: East apron of Wharf 4 (proposed alterations shown in blue)	29
Figure 26 - Original view: east apron of Wharf 4	30
Figure 27 - Analytical photomontage: east apron of Wharf 4 (proposed alterations shown in blue)	31
Figure 28 - Original view: Sydney Harbour north of site	32
Figure 29 - Analytical photomontage: Sydney Harbour north of site (proposed alterations shown in blue)	33

Contents

Tables

Table 1 – Assessment criteria	33
Table 2 - Summary of overall extent of visual affects	38



The rejuvenation
of the Walsh Bay
Arts Precinct into
a fresh cultural
and creative hub
is a priority
infrastructure
project for the
NSW
Government

Create NSW

Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
DA	Development application
EPI	Environmental Planning Instrument
HIA	Heritage Impact Assessment
INSW	Infrastructure NSW
LEC	Land and Environment Court
LEP	Local Environmental Plan
LGA	Local Government Area
Minister	Minister for Planning
RLA	RLA and Associates
SEARS	Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements
SSDA	State Significant Development Application
The Act	The Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
The Department	Department of Planning and Environment
The Precinct	The Walsh Bay foreshore area
The proposal	Walsh Bay and Art and Cultural Precinct, the subject of the SSDA
The Regulation	The Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000
The site	Pier 2/3 and Wharf 4/5 at Walsh Bay, including relevant parts of Sydney Harbour, the subject of the SSDA
VIA	Visual Impact Assessment
WBACP	Walsh Bay Arts and Cultural Precinct

Executive Summary

This report has been prepared by Ethos Urban to support a State Significant Development Application (SSDA) by Infrastructure NSW (INSW) on behalf of Arts and Culture Division for the revised Walsh Bay Arts and Cultural Precinct (WBACP). It updates and summarises work undertaken by Richard Lamb and Associates (RLA) and documented in their Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) in November 2016, adjusted for removal of the Waterfront Square from the revised SSDA, and to address revised Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARS).

The main purpose of the VIA is to undertake an assessment of the visual impact of the proposal against relevant criteria to determine its acceptability.

The methodology used to identify visual impact was developed by RLA and incorporates relevant aspects of methods used in landscape assessment modified to suit an urban and maritime context.

Application of the methodology determined that the proposal would not result in significant change to the visual catchment of the project or to the visual character, scenic quality or private domain sensitivity of the site. When assessed against the relevant criteria, it was determined that the overall visual impacts of the proposal are minor and acceptable. The removal of the originally proposed Waterfront Square will in particular reduce visual impact. Due to this, should development consent be granted, it is not recommended that extensive conditions be imposed to mitigate visual impact.

1.0 Introduction

This report has been prepared by Ethos Urban to support a SSDA by INSW on behalf of Arts and Culture Division for the revised WBACP. It updates and summarises work undertaken by RLA and documented in their VIA in November 2016, adjusted for removal of the Waterfront Square from the revised SSDA, and to address revised SEARS.

The report is structured into 10 main parts:

1. **Introduction** – provides an overview of the purpose and structure of this report
2. **Background** – provides a background history of the proposal
3. **The site** – outlines the site and its context
4. **The proposal** – outlines the proposal
5. **Assessment criteria** – identifies the relevant assessment criteria identified in the draft Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARS)
6. **Visual impact** – identifies the visual characteristics of the site and precinct, undertakes an evaluation of the likely effect of the proposal on these visual characteristics and determines the visual significance of these effects to determine visual impact
7. **Assessment** – undertakes an assessment of the visual impact of the proposal against relevant assessment criteria
8. **Conclusion** – based on the findings of the visual impact assessment and assessment of visual impact against the relevant assessment criteria, determines the appropriateness of the proposal
9. **Recommendation** – suggests considerations to guide a government decision on the SSDA
10. **Appendices** – includes a full copy of the original RLA report (note that this report contains reference to the now deleted Waterfront Square).

Due to the highly specialised body of knowledge required, full assessment of heritage values is not comprehensively covered in this report. Rather, discussion of heritage is addressed in a separate Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) that supports this SSDA.

It is important to note that this report is an update of the original work of RLA. To ensure consistency with the rigorous process established by RLA, and to not compromise their certification of accuracy in accordance with Land and Environment Court policy, the only changes that have been made are to photomontages to reflect amendments made to the proposal subsequent to the withdrawal of the original SSDA. The amendments to the photomontages were made using the same methodology as that employed for the preparation of the originals, including the use of the same photos taken by RLA and updates by the same consultants who prepared the original photomontages. To this effect, the work of RLA is to be acknowledged as the basis for this report. In fulfilment of Land and Environment Court policy, reference should be made to the original RLA report that documents matters such as:

- wire frame lines

- 2D plan showing the location of the camera and target point
- The name and qualifications of the surveyor who prepared the survey information
- The camera type and field of view of the lens.

2.0 Background

The NSW Government has publicly stated that the rejuvenation of the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct into a fresh cultural and creative hub is a priority infrastructure project for the NSW Government.

Due to the nature of the development proposed, a SSDA, including an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), must be made to and approved by the Department prior to uses or works commencing.

Original proposal and SSDA

The original SSDA for the WBACP was submitted to the Department of Planning and Environment (the Department) on behalf of INSW in July 2014. This was a stage 1 SSDA that sought in-principle approval for the overall development concept. It was intended that subject to approval, a subsequent more detailed stage 2 development application (DA) would be submitted seeking approval for construction of the public domain, building alterations and specific uses. Submissions were invited and made about the SSDA. A number of submissions received objected to the proposal. In particular, opposition centred on the Waterfront Square (refer **Figure 1**). Waterfront Square was intended to be the most significant public domain proposal, and was to extend northwards of the existing public boardwalk between Wharf 4/5 and Pier 2/3 to create a large, flexible performance space scaled for a variety of performance and event configurations and day to day use.

The Department prepared an assessment report for the SSDA. Visual impact was a key matter addressed by the report. Impacts were discussed in relation to heritage values and scenic quality. In terms of heritage, the main issue that was discussed was the tension between the proposed alterations being necessary to accommodate the adaptive re-use of the structures, versus protection of heritage values. In its report, the Department relied on the advice of agencies such as the Heritage Council and a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA). The HIA separated discussion of the alterations to the existing structures and the proposal for Waterfront Square. Key findings included:

Heritage values: alterations to the existing buildings

- while alteration to the north-end of Pier 2/3 and Wharf 4/5 to open up existing weatherboards as operable louvres will have a high visual impact, the HIA found it to be an acceptable compromise to allow the partial opening up of the end of the wharf to views
- in terms of the rooftop penetration for Pier 2/3, the Department concluded that it is necessary to accommodate the adaptive re-use of the building and is acceptable subject to compliance with design criteria recommended in the HIA
- in respect to the overall proposed external building modifications, the HIA concluded in general terms that the proposed changes will not alter the scale or mass of the buildings and as such are considered to generally have a low-moderate heritage impact
- subject to the further design development and being under the guidance of the heritage expert and in consultation with the Heritage Council, the Department supported these elements of the proposal and notes that this approach will enable issues raised by the Heritage Council to be addressed.

Heritage values: Waterfront Square

- the Department considered that the public roof over the stage has the potential to have the greatest visual impact (and hence heritage impact) on Walsh Bay particularly when viewed from the harbour and potentially from a number of locations in neighbouring Dawes Point
- the Department considered that the visual impact of the public roof on views to Walsh Bay Wharves requires detailed consideration to ensure that its visual impact is minimised and furthermore, that it achieves a high design standard
- subject to compliance with the recommendations in the HIA in addition to detailed consideration of the visual impacts, the Department was satisfied that a sensitive design response can be devised in consultation with the Heritage Council.

Scenic quality

- based on assessment against relevant criteria in Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005, the proposal was not considered to significantly alter the scenic quality of the site or its contribution to Sydney Harbour.

The Department's main conclusion was that while certain aspects of the proposal would have a high visual impact, these aspects would facilitate the adaptive re-use of the building for its intended purpose. Subject to further work being undertaken under the guidance of a heritage expert and in consultation with the Heritage Council, they represented an acceptable compromise. Based on this assessment, the Minister granted consent to the SSDA in May 2015. On appeal, the Land and Environment Court (LEC) upheld the Department's decision. However, the approval was subsequently deemed invalid by the NSW Court of Appeal.

The revised proposal and SSDA

In response to this, INSW considered the submissions and commissioned TZG to prepare a revised proposal for the Precinct. The key difference between the original and revised proposal is the removal of Waterfront Square. Adjustments have also been made to some other aspects of the proposal such as roof plant (refer to the main SSDA report for detail).

Pursuant to the Environmental Planning Assessment Act 1979 (the Act) and Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000 (the Regulation), the Department has issued draft SEARS on 1 September 2017 for the revised SSDA. The SEARS identify what the EIS for the SSDA must address. These requirements include addressing visual impact.

RLA was commissioned by INSW to prepare a VIA for the original proposal. As the revised proposal is substantially the same as the original proposal, except for the removal of the Waterfront Square and some minor adjustments, the assessment and findings of the RLA report remain valid.

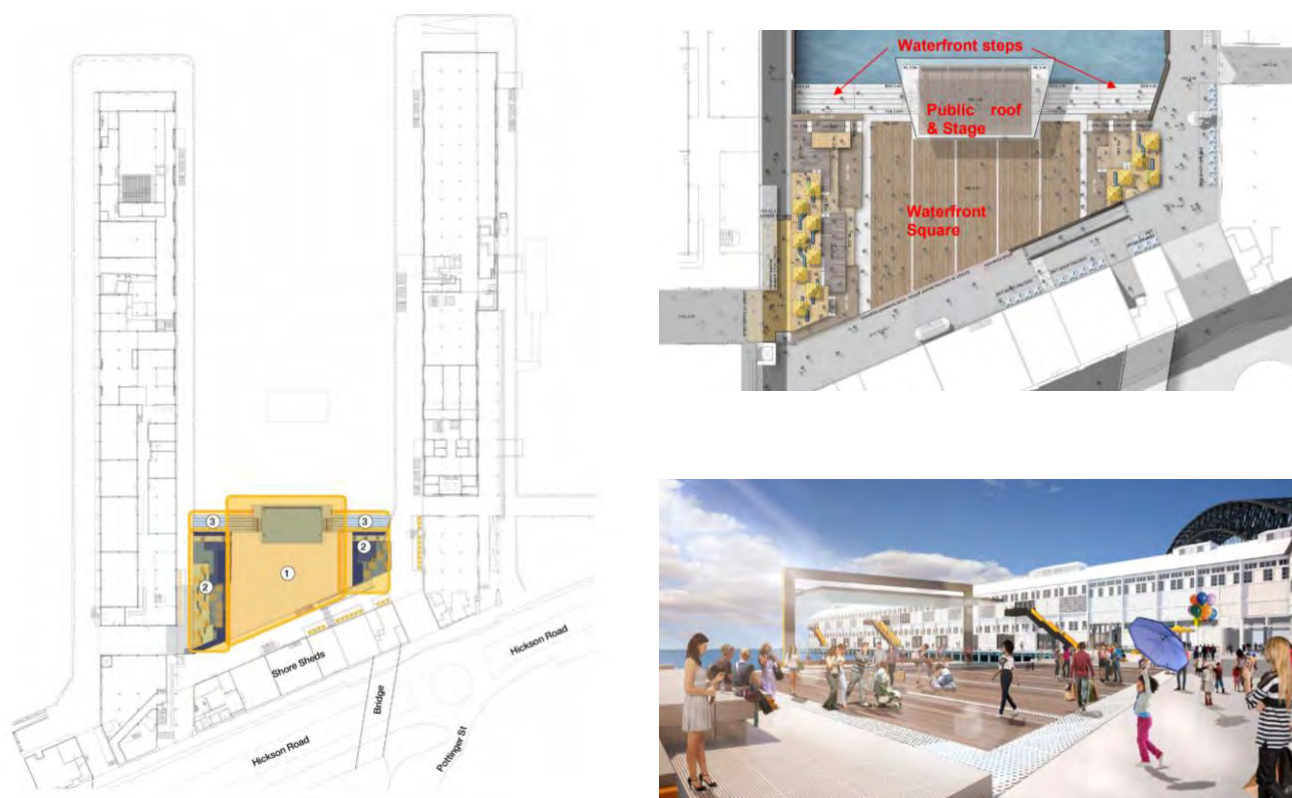


Figure 1 – Originally proposed Waterfront Square

Source: TZG

3.0 The site

Figure 2 shows the location of the site. It comprises Pier 2/3, Wharf 4/5, Wharf 4/5 Shore Sheds and an area of water beneath the Pier and Wharf. The site has an area of 1.809ha and has frontage to Hickson Road.

The site forms part of the broader Walsh Bay precinct (the Precinct), which is located in the suburb of Dawes Point. Walsh Bay is dominated by a number of former shipping wharfs that have been adaptively reused to house a number of new uses, including arts and entertainment and hotel uses. The wharfs are listed on the State Heritage Register.

The site is located within the City of Sydney local government area (LGA). However, it is not covered by the provisions of the City of Sydney LEP 2012 or the City of Sydney DCP 2012. Rather, the main environmental planning instruments (EPIs) applying to the site are the Sydney Regional Environmental Plan No 16—Walsh Bay and the Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005.



Figure 2 – The Site

Source: TZG

4.0 The proposal

The proposal is intended to create a public arts and culture hub on Sydney's waterfront.

To achieve this outcome, the proposal involves a number of modifications to Pier 2/3 and Wharf 4/5. These modifications mainly relate to existing internal areas, and do not increase the useable, physical footprint of the structures. Waterfront Square no longer forms part of the proposal.

A number of figures illustrate the proposal:

- **Figure 3** shows the ground floor site plan
- **Figure 4 to Figure 15** shows impressions of the proposal, including comparison with existing building elevations
- **Figure 16 to Figure 29** are the photomontages that this report relies on to show visual impact.

In addition, detailed floor plans and additional imagery are located in Appendix 1 and the TZG Design Report that forms part of this SSDA.

Specifically, the proposal is for:

- Pier 2/3:

- adaptive re-use providing for new arts facilities including performance venues for the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Bell Shakespeare and Australian Theatre for Young People
- retaining a large heritage function space for events such as the Sydney Writers Festival, Biennale of Sydney and a wide range of commercial and artistic events
- a series of stairs, external lift and balconies designed as a contemporary interpretation of the original gantries reflecting the precinct's former industrial heritage
- modifications to the roof.
- Wharf 4/5 (including store sheds):
 - refurbishment of the ground floor arts facilities and its associated Shore Sheds for Bangarra Dance Theatre, Sydney Dance Company, Sydney Philharmonia, Gondwana and Song Company
 - new commercial retail opportunities
 - a series of stairs, external lifts and balconies designed as a contemporary interpretation of the original gantries reflecting the precinct's former industrial heritage
 - modifications to the roof.



Figure 3 – Proposed ground floor plan

Source: TZG

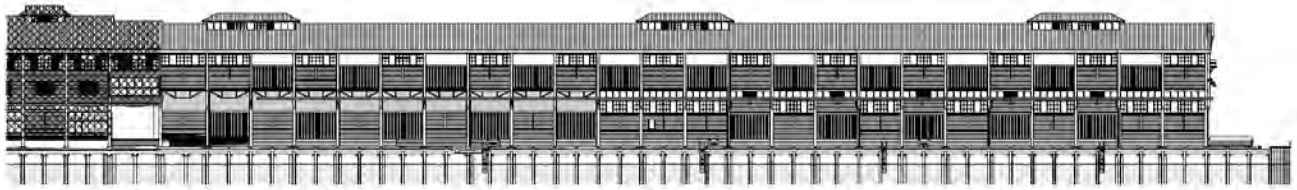


Figure 4 – Existing and proposed east elevation to Pier 2/3 (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: TZG



Figure 5 - Existing and proposed west elevation to Pier 2/3 (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: TZG



Figure 6 - Existing and proposed east elevation to Wharf 4/5 (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: TZG

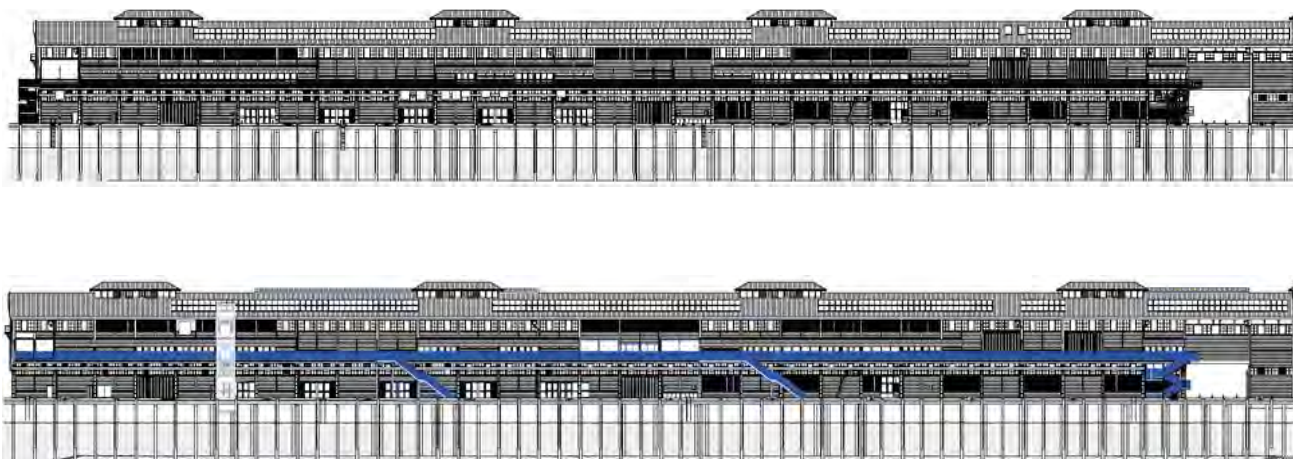


Figure 7 - Existing and proposed west elevation to Wharf 4/5 (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: TZG



Figure 8 - Existing and proposed north elevation to Pier 2/3 (proposed alterations shown in blue)

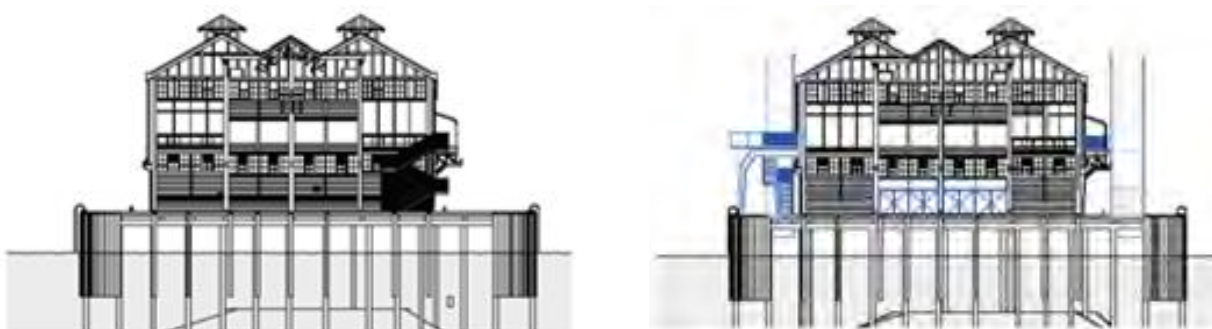


Figure 9 - Existing and proposed north elevation to Wharf 4/5 (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: TZG

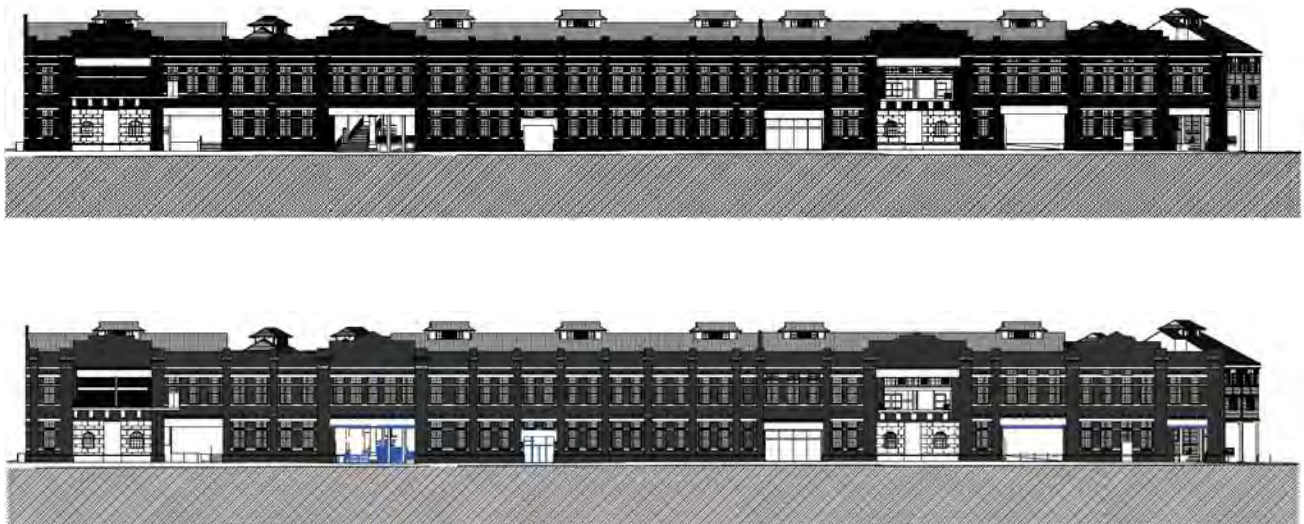


Figure 10 - Existing and proposed Hickson Road south elevation through shore sheds (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: TZG

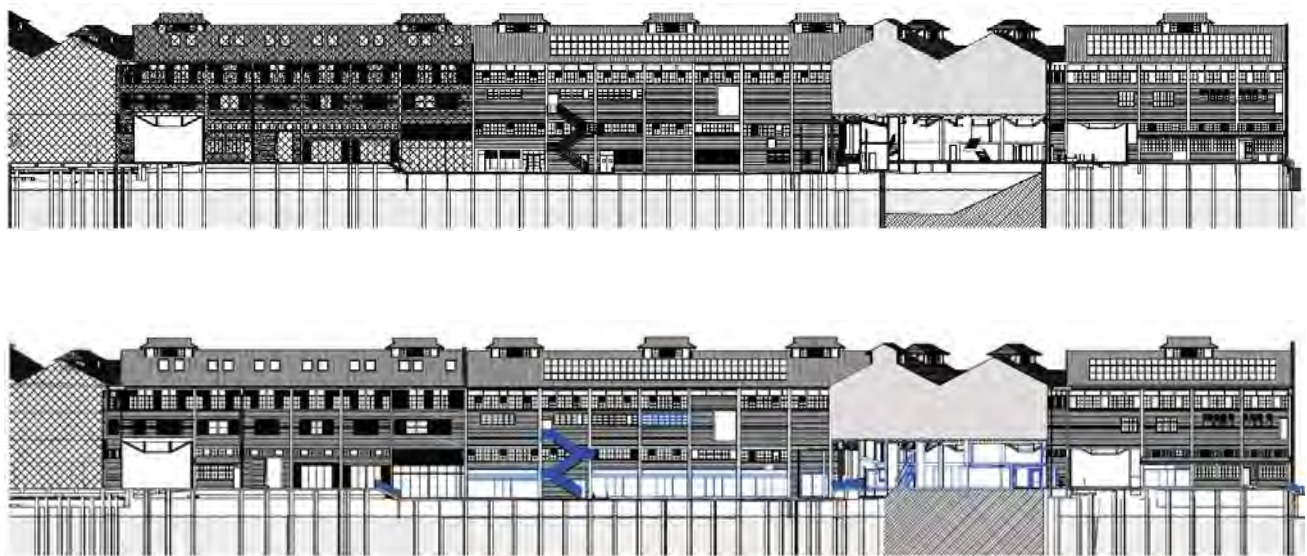


Figure 11 - Existing and proposed Hickson Road north elevation through shore sheds (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: TZG



Figure 12 – Artist impression of proposal looking north

Source: TZG



Figure 13 – Artist impression of proposal looking west

Source: TZG



Figure 14 – Artist impression of interior of buildings showing proposed openings to external fabric

Source: TZG



Figure 15 - Artist impression of interior of buildings showing proposed openings to external fabric

Source: TZG



Figure 16 – Original view: Sydney Harbour Bridge Pylon Lookout

Source: RLA



Figure 17 – Analytical photomontage: Sydney Harbour Bridge Pylon Lookout (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: Mogamma, with input from RLA and TZG



Figure 18 – Original view: Lower Fort Street

Source: RLA



Figure 19 - Analytical photomontage: Lower Fort Street (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: Mogamma, with input from RLA and TZG



Figure 20 – Original view: Hickson Road / Pottinger Street intersection

Source: RLA



Figure 21 - Analytical photomontage: Hickson Road / Pottinger Street intersection (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: Mogamma, with input from RLA and TZG



Figure 22 – Original view: West apron of Pier 3

Source: RLA



Figure 23 - Analytical photomontage: West apron of Pier 3 (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: Mogamma, with input from RLA and TZG



Figure 24 – Original view: East apron of Wharf 4

Source: RLA



Figure 25 - Analytical photomontage: East apron of Wharf 4 (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: Mogamma, with input from RLA and TZG



Figure 26 – Original view: east apron of Wharf 4

Source: RLA



Figure 27 - Analytical photomontage: east apron of Wharf 4 (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: Mogamma, with input from RLA and TZG



Figure 28 – Original view: Sydney Harbour north of site

Source: RLA



Figure 29 - Analytical photomontage: Sydney Harbour north of site (proposed alterations shown in blue)

Source: Mogamma, with input from RLA and TZG

5.0 Assessment criteria

The SEARS identify the criteria against which a determination of the appropriateness of the visual impact of the proposal is to be undertaken. These criteria, as well as their source (where relevant) are identified in **Table 1**. The SEARS further require the preparation and submission of a VIA undertaken in accordance with LEC requirements.

Table 1 – Assessment criteria

Number	Source	Subject	Assessment criteria
1.	Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005	Foreshore and waterways scenic quality	<p>The matters to be taken into consideration in relation to the maintenance, protection and enhancement of the scenic quality of foreshores and waterways are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the scale, form, design and siting of any building should be based on an analysis of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) the land on which it is to be erected, and (ii) the adjoining land, and (iii) the likely future character of the locality,

Number	Source	Subject	Assessment criteria
			(b) development should maintain, protect and enhance the unique visual qualities of Sydney Harbour and its islands, foreshores and tributaries, (c) the cumulative impact of water-based development should not detract from the character of the waterways and adjoining foreshores.
2.	Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005	Maintenance, protection and enhancement of views	The matters to be taken into consideration in relation to the maintenance, protection and enhancement of views are as follows: (a) development should maintain, protect and enhance views (including night views) to and from Sydney Harbour, (b) development should minimise any adverse impacts on views and vistas to and from public places, landmarks and heritage items, (c) the cumulative impact of development on views should be minimised.
3.	Sydney Regional Environmental Plan No 16—Walsh Bay	Maintenance, protection and enhancement of views	(h) to ensure that development: (i) provides appropriate parking facilities and traffic management which minimises impact on the amenity of the area, adjoining residential areas and the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Area, (ii) does not adversely affect the arterial road network in the City of Sydney, (iii) preserves views to and from Sydney Harbour, (iv) is compatible with the adjacent existing residential community, and (v) provides a public transport system which can be integrated with the existing public transport services in the City of Sydney.
4.	SEARS	Amenity	Address and demonstrate a suitable level of environmental amenity in respect of solar access, acoustic and visual privacy, servicing requirements (including waste management, loading zones, mechanical plant) and access to views
5.	SEARS	Built form and urban design	Address design quality, with specific consideration of the overall site layout, axes, vistas and connectivity, open spaces and edges, primary elements, gateways, façade, rooftop, mechanical plant, massing, setbacks, building articulation, materials and colours
6.	SEARS	Heritage and archaeology	Describes the potential impact of the proposal on the significance of the site, its components, significant views and values, and includes measures to mitigation (sic) any impacts

6.0 Visual impact assessment

6.1 Dealing with views in the planning framework

The regulation of the location of nature of development to avoid adverse impact on the visual quality of cities is a feature of number of contemporary planning frameworks. Cities such as London have enshrined the protection of key views from public spaces to buildings and landscapes that help define their character in planning instruments. In Australia, the Queensland Government has prepared a state scenic amenity guideline that seeks to protect view corridors between public viewing locations, in particular significant and popular viewpoints, and areas of high scenic amenity.

In NSW, the subject has mainly been advanced by the Land and Environment Court. This has occurred on two key occasions. The first dealt with view loss from the private domain in *Tenacity Consulting v Warringah [2004] NSWLEC 140 - Principles of view sharing: the impact on neighbours* (Tenacity). The second dealt with view loss from the public domain in *Rose Bay Marina Pty Limited v Woollahra Municipal Council and anor. [2013] NSWLEC 1046* (Rose Bay). These cases established a series of principles to guide decisions on whether the visual impact of development was appropriate.

In addition to these principles, the LEC has also published policy on the procedure for preparing photomontages to be used to inform VIA.

For the purposes of the proposal, the Department has distilled the principles of visual impact assessment into the draft SEARS.

6.2 Methodology

The methodology used by RLA was derived from relevant aspects used in landscape assessment, modified to suit an urban and maritime context. **Appendix 1** (the original RLA report) outlines the methodology in detail. In summary, it comprises 4 main parts:

1. **Visual effect analysis** – understanding the nature of the existing visual environment, considering constant and variable factors such as scenic quality and viewing period, and determining the visual effect of the proposal on this environment
2. **Visual impact analysis** – evaluating the significance of the visual effect on the existing visual environment, and therefore the overall visual impact
3. **Assessment** – considering the compliance of the overall visual impact against relevant assessment criteria
4. **Acceptability of visual impacts** – Determining whether the proposal, including through the imposition of conditions by the consent authority, will result in an acceptable visual impact outcome.

6.3 Visual effect analysis

Visual effect analysis involves understanding the nature of the existing visual environment, considering constant and variable factors such as scenic quality and viewing period, and determining the visual effect of the proposal on this environment.

Key factors considered are:

Constant factors:

- the visual catchment of the site
- visual character
- scenic quality
- view place sensitivity
- viewer sensitivity

Variable factors

- View composition type
- Relative viewing level
- Viewing period
- Viewing distance
- View loss or blocking
- Overall extent of visual affects.

Assessment determines whether the proposal will have a low, medium or high effect on these factors. The meaning of low, medium and high impacts in this context is outlined in **Appendix 1**.

The visual catchment of the site

The external visual catchment comprises:

- part of Sydney Harbour west of the Harbour Bridge
- CBD and The Rocks
- Harbour Bridge
- Millers Point and Dawes Point.

The site has high visual exposure to part of Sydney Harbour west of the Harbour Bridge. This includes Lavender and Berrys Bays and their associated headlands and foreshores, the eastern side of Goat Island and part of Balmain.

Due to local topography, except for partial visibility from taller commercial and residential buildings in the CBD (including Barangaroo), the site is generally of low visibility from the CBD and The Rocks.

Other than cyclists, Bridge Climb users and users of the south-east pylon outlook, the site has relatively low visual exposure to the Harbour Bridge.

Due to the predominant orientation of dwellings and the presence and height of existing buildings such as shore sheds between these dwellings and Hickson Road, except for parts of roofs, there are limited opportunities for views of the site from Millers Point and Dawes Point. Similarly, due to near

continuous wall of existing buildings, the site has an overall low exposure of views from Hickson Road. However, some valuable views are possible through openings (refer to **Figure 21**).

In summary, little detail is evident and views are commonly distant within the external visual catchment.

Due to the Walsh Bay wharves, the internal visual catchment features close range, detailed views and longer range focal view corridors.

RLA concluded that as no significant changes are proposed to footprint, envelope or heights of the buildings, there would be no change to the visual catchment resulting from the proposal.

Visual character

The visual character of the pier and wharves exhibits similar attributes to the built form, scale, materiality and character of the federation period and utilitarian maritime architecture of other Sydney wharves built during a similar time period.

In views from the harbour, the pier and wharves relate closely to the form, scale and colour palettes of the other wharves in Walsh Bay. They also relate closely in vertical scale to the backdrop of buildings in Millers Point.

Overall, no significant changes to these attributes will result from the proposal.

Scenic quality

The site is of moderate-high scenic quality with regard to the opportunity for views presented to users of the precinct. These views include those of water, iconic features and historically significant items.

The pier and wharves rank as moderate scenic quality. However, they are also outstanding examples of federation period and utilitarian maritime architecture.

View place sensitivity

Due to small viewer numbers, the site currently is currently of moderate view place sensitivity.

However, this is expected to increase to high view place sensitivity due to the increased visitation associated with the proposal.

Viewer sensitivity

Due to an absence of private realm residential viewers who could view the site in the close sensitivity range (within 100m), viewer sensitivity is low.

There are limited ways in which the proposal could have any tangible negative or significant effect on private views, such as view blocking.

View composition type

External, long range views of the site contain a significant proportion of the site. However, while they are expansive in composition, due to their long range, detail cannot be readily discerned.

Due to the shore sheds or other piers or wharves, most medium range views, except those from Sydney Harbour, are restricted in composition.

Close range views are also restricted and focal or feature in composition, with the wharf buildings acting to contain and direct views.

Relative viewing level

Most viewing places are level with or above the site. In general, viewing places significantly above the site have no substantial view of the elevations of the pier and wharves. However, close range views that are level with or below the site are vulnerable to loss or blocking by relatively small objects or those close to the viewer. In particular, views from Hickson Road through the shore shed openings are particularly vulnerable to loss or blocking (refer to **Figure 21**).

Viewing period

Due to increased opportunities for views from windows and upper levels of buildings, the proposal will provide scope for longer viewing periods than what is currently experienced from the site. Longer viewing periods are correlated with more reflective and analytical viewing and therefore higher engagement with the visual environment.

Viewing distance

Viewers from distant locations are unlikely to perceive the proposal. Viewers at a medium distance would be able to perceive changes to colours and patterns of openings or of structures such as stairs, windows and changes to the roof. Viewers at close distance would perceive a high level of detail of all aspects of the proposal.

View loss or blocking

It is unlikely any private domain views would be affected by view loss. However, under principles established by the NSW Land and Environment Court through *Rose Bay Marina Limited v Woollahra Municipal Council and anor. [2013]* NSWLEC 1046 (*Rose Bay*), further consideration of view loss or blocking from the Hickson Road public domain is necessary.

Overall extent of visual affects

RLA undertook an assessment of the proposal against the constant and variable visual effects factors. The results of this assessment shown in **Table 2**.

RLA noted that the high visual effects would predominantly be due to the no longer proposed Waterfront Square, with the remainder of the proposal the subject of the current application causing medium or low visual effects.

Table 2 - Summary of overall extent of visual affects

Factor	Low Effect	Medium Effect	High Effect	Comment
Scenic quality				There would be low visual effects on scenic quality
Visual character				There would be medium visual effects on character of the buildings, wharves and overall setting
View place sensitivity				Sensitivity would increase to high due to the proposal drawing more people into the site due to

Factor	Low Effect	Medium Effect	High Effect	Comment
				repositioning it as a destination venue for arts and culture
Viewer sensitivity				There are no residences in the high or medium sensitivity range that could be negatively affected by the project
View composition				The project would not cause substantial change to view compositions
Relative viewing level				Views from Hickson Road through one opening in the shore sheds would be moderately altered but not blocked
Viewing period				Higher visitor numbers, as well as the use and design of parts of the proposal would facilitate longer, reflective viewing that would result in increased viewing periods
Viewing distance				Internal views are within the close viewing distance range
View loss or blocking effect				There would be a low level of view loss. Where there is minor loss, for example caused by lifts or stairs, the unaffected view composition is available from immediately adjacent alternative locations

Source: RLA

6.4 Visual impact analysis

Significance does not automatically equate to the level of effect. For example, a high effect may be acceptable, whereas a small one may be unacceptable. The significance of visual impact is determined by consideration against physical absorption capacity and compatibility (both urban and natural features and maritime/industrial features).

Physical absorption capacity

RLA define Physical Absorption Capacity (PAC) as the extent to which the existing visual environment can reduce or eliminate the perception of the visibility of a proposal. It is impacted by factors such as prominence in the landscape, the ability of existing elements such as buildings to screen a proposal or the scale, character and design detail (eg colours) of a proposal enabling it to blend with or reduce contrast to other features. The higher the PAC, the lower the visual impact.

Due to views either being distant or obstructed or blocked by buildings, the detail of the proposal is not easily perceived and would not be prominent. More subtle changes such as those involving altered openings and windows would not significantly alter the existing pattern of infill panels on the most exposed façades of Pier 2/3 or the character of the less visible façades of Wharf 4/5. On this basis, for most viewers outside the precinct the environment has a high PAC.

When viewed from a medium distance such as from Upper Fort Street, Dawes Point, or Harbour Bridge south-east pylon lookout, the proposal is discernible but subtle.

Views from inside the precinct and in part of Hickson Road have a low PAC, and are therefore sensitive to matters such as the siting, scale and design of proposed development.

Compatibility

Compatibility means that the proposal will not unacceptably change the intrinsic scenic character of the locality. The scenic character of the locality has two main components:

1. Urban and natural features
2. Maritime / industrial features.

Urban and natural features

The low visibility of most of the proposal from most locations assists in enhancing its compatibility with urban and natural features. The use of sensitive design, such as enclosing the lifts in transparent glass and encasement of their frame, further increases compatibility.

RLA concludes that:

“considered as abstract items, the works are of high compatibility with the structural expression of the frames of the buildings, the geometry of the forms, and to the patterns, rhythm and modulation of infills to the frames. New external structures other than the amended roofs..... read as separate from and compatible with the urban fabric of the setting. The amended roof forms appear subtly blended into the existing structures”.

On this basis, RLA concludes that the proposal is considered to be of high compatibility with urban and natural features.

Maritime / industrial features.

In relation to maritime / industrial features, RLA's assessment states that the proposal:

“responds positively to, borrows from or appropriately extends the range of features of character, scale, form, colours, materials and overall qualities of maritime/industrial development sites of the surrounding area. New structures such as the gantry balconies and supporting structures are of high visual compatibility with historical precedents.”

RLA concludes:

“considered in detail, the external works are of high compatibility with the building forms, existing structures and materials. The dominance of the expressed frame over infill openings and of surface over void remains. No significant change occurs to the overall form, character and materiality of the buildings. The existing maritime/industrial character of the precinct would remain intact.

The application of PAC and compatibility to visual effects results in the overall extent of visual impact being reduced in significance for all views.

RLA assessed Waterfront Square as having the greatest visual impact. With its removal, the remaining elements of the proposal will have minimal visual impact.

7.0 Assessment

Issue 1: Foreshore and waterways scenic quality	
Source:	Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005
Assessment criteria:	<p>The matters to be taken into consideration in relation to the maintenance, protection and enhancement of the scenic quality of foreshores and waterways are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the scale, form, design and siting of any building should be based on an analysis of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) the land on which it is to be erected, and (ii) the adjoining land, and (iii) the likely future character of the locality, (b) development should maintain, protect and enhance the unique visual qualities of Sydney Harbour and its islands, foreshores and tributaries, (c) the cumulative impact of water-based development should not detract from the character of the waterways and adjoining foreshores.

The proposal is based on a comprehensive and detailed site and locality analysis undertaken by TZG that forms part of this SSDA.

The proposal does not involve the construction of new buildings. Rather, only alterations to existing buildings are proposed. The overall scale, and scale relative to existing buildings, of these alterations is minimal. Together with its small scale and siting, form and design that its compatible with the character of existing buildings, the proposal will maintain the unique visual qualities of Sydney Harbour, and in particular that of the Walsh Bay precinct.

Issue 2: Maintenance, protection and enhancement of views	
Source:	Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005
Assessment criteria:	<p>The matters to be taken into consideration in relation to the maintenance, protection and enhancement of views are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) development should maintain, protect and enhance views (including night views) to and from Sydney Harbour, (b) development should minimise any adverse impacts on views and vistas to and from public places, landmarks and heritage items, (c) the cumulative impact of development on views should be minimised.
Source	Sydney Regional Environmental Plan No 16—Walsh Bay
Assessment criteria:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (h) to ensure that development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) provides appropriate parking facilities and traffic management which minimises impact on the amenity of the area, adjoining residential areas and the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Area, (ii) does not adversely affect the arterial road network in the City of Sydney, (iii) preserves views to and from Sydney Harbour, (iv) is compatible with the adjacent existing residential community, and (v) provides a public transport system which can be integrated with the existing public transport services in the City of Sydney.

Due to its scale, siting and design, the development will not result in loss of blockage of views from either the private or public domains to Sydney Harbour. Similarly, the proposal will not detract from the existing nature of views from Sydney Harbour towards the site and broader Walsh Bay precinct.

Issue 3: Amenity	
Source:	SEARS
Assessment criteria:	Address and demonstrate a suitable level of environmental amenity in respect of solar access, acoustic and visual privacy, servicing requirements (including waste management, loading zones, mechanical plant) and access to views

The RLA assessment found that the proposal would retain the overall quality of existing views to and from the site.

Despite their location adjoining Sydney Harbour, the buildings are currently underutilised. By adaptively reusing the buildings to house uses such as arts that provide public benefit, allowing extensive public access and introducing new openings in the form of transparent windows and doors, the proposal will increase access to attractive views of Sydney Harbour and landmarks such as the Harbour Bridge. While mainly to demarcate new and existing fabric, the glazing of the lifts will also provide access to new views. In terms of the blocking of views parallel to the façades of buildings in close views from new structures such as lifts and stairs, RLA concluded:

“access to views of the same composition and quality would be possible from closely adjacent locations. Give the horizontal scale of the buildings and wharves and the virtually unlimited access to views from many locations, the overall effect of these minor view losses is not considered significant.”

Issue 4: Built form and urban design	
Source:	SEARS
Assessment criteria:	Address design quality, with specific consideration of the overall site layout, axes, vistas and connectivity, open spaces and edges, primary elements, gateways, façade, rooftop, mechanical plant, massing, setbacks, building articulation, materials and colours

The proposal exhibits a high level of design quality that is the outcome of a considered design process. Comprehensive and detailed analysis of the existing character of the site and broader precinct investigated matters such as overall site layout and materials. These informed development of building design principles, which include amenity and environmentally sustainable design. The design of the proposal is a direct response to this analysis and responds to, and is consistent with, these principles. In particular, the design has acknowledged the heritage significance of the Walsh Bay Wharves by carefully inserting the proposal into its heritage setting and achieving with a clear distinction between original and new fabric.

Both internal and externally visible aspects achieve a high level of design quality. For example, the main foyer of the Lower Shed has been located in the centre of the building to visually integrate the

heritage listed Deadhouse and other elements. Public circulation to the south of the foyer has been located on the eastern side of the building to take advantage of cargo door openings to provide a panoramic view of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Externally visible elements are designed to be compatible with existing visual character, often providing an enhanced amenity outcome. For example, installation of new glazing within the opening of existing cargo doors both provides improved user amenity and access to views while reinforcing the checkerboard façade pattern of the original building. While providing equitable access to all parts of the building, the external lifts the steel framed shafts of the external lifts are glazed to maximise their transparency and to minimise visual impact on both piers

As has already been noted throughout this report, due to scale and design, the proposal will not adversely impact on existing vistas to and from the site.

Issue 5: Heritage and archaeology	
Source:	SEARS
Assessment criteria:	Describes the potential impact of the proposal on the significance of the site, its components, significant views and values, and includes measures to mitigation (sic) any impacts

Part 7.3 - Visual effect analysis and Part 7.4 - Visual impact analysis of this report demonstrates that the proposal will not have a significant impact on the existing visual character of the site or broader precinct. It does not introduce large, prominent or incongruent development. Rather, it has a scale that is not readily discernible from most viewing locations, and is of a design that is compatible with existing visual character.

8.0 Conclusion

The intent of the proposal is to open up an underutilised part of the Sydney Harbour Waterfront for a public use that provides community benefit and promotes local and state government aims of consolidating Sydney as a globally competitive, liveable city. To facilitate this outcome, as well as provide functional outcomes such as enabling the inclusion of necessary mechanical plant and equitable access, alterations are required to existing buildings. The proposal to deliver these alterations has been informed by a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the existing visual character of the site and precinct and the consequent development of responsive principles to achieve a high standard of design. Following the removal of the originally proposed Waterfront Square, the externally visible parts of the revised proposal are minor in scale and compatible with the federation period maritime / industrial visual character of the site and precinct. Assessment by

RLA has concluded that the proposal would not result in significant change to the visual catchment of the project or to the visual character, scenic quality or private domain sensitivity of the site.

On this basis, and having due regard to the relevant assessment criteria, the overall visual impacts of the proposal are minor and acceptable. Due to this, should development consent be granted, it is not recommended that extensive conditions be imposed to mitigate visual impact.

9.0 Recommendation

Based on the RLA assessment, the following considerations should be used to guide the setting of conditions of development consent.

General	
Consideration 1	Stairs should be designed to minimise view blocking
Consideration 2	The visual impacts and view blocking effects of external lifts should be minimised
Consideration 3	No further obstruction of view through the shore shed opening leading to Wharf 4/5 should be permitted
Consideration 4	No new permanent structures that could obstruct views to the harbour through the openings in the shore sheds and the breezeway through Pier 2/3 should be approved
Impact mitigation measures	
Consideration 5	External stairs are to be detailed to maximise visual transparency as well as the appearance of lightness and openness, as recommended in the NSW Heritage Council response to the request for SEARs
Consideration 6	The design of the risers should maximise transparency to views
Consideration 7	Lifts are to be encased in glass as proposed
Consideration 8	Internal framing and structure is to be minimised to increase transparency in views and to reduce the visual presence of the lifts in views
Consideration 9	Non-reflective glass should be used on the lifts to increase the transparency of the lift glazing to views

Appendices

Appendix 1: Visual Impact Assessment Report, RLA, November 2016