

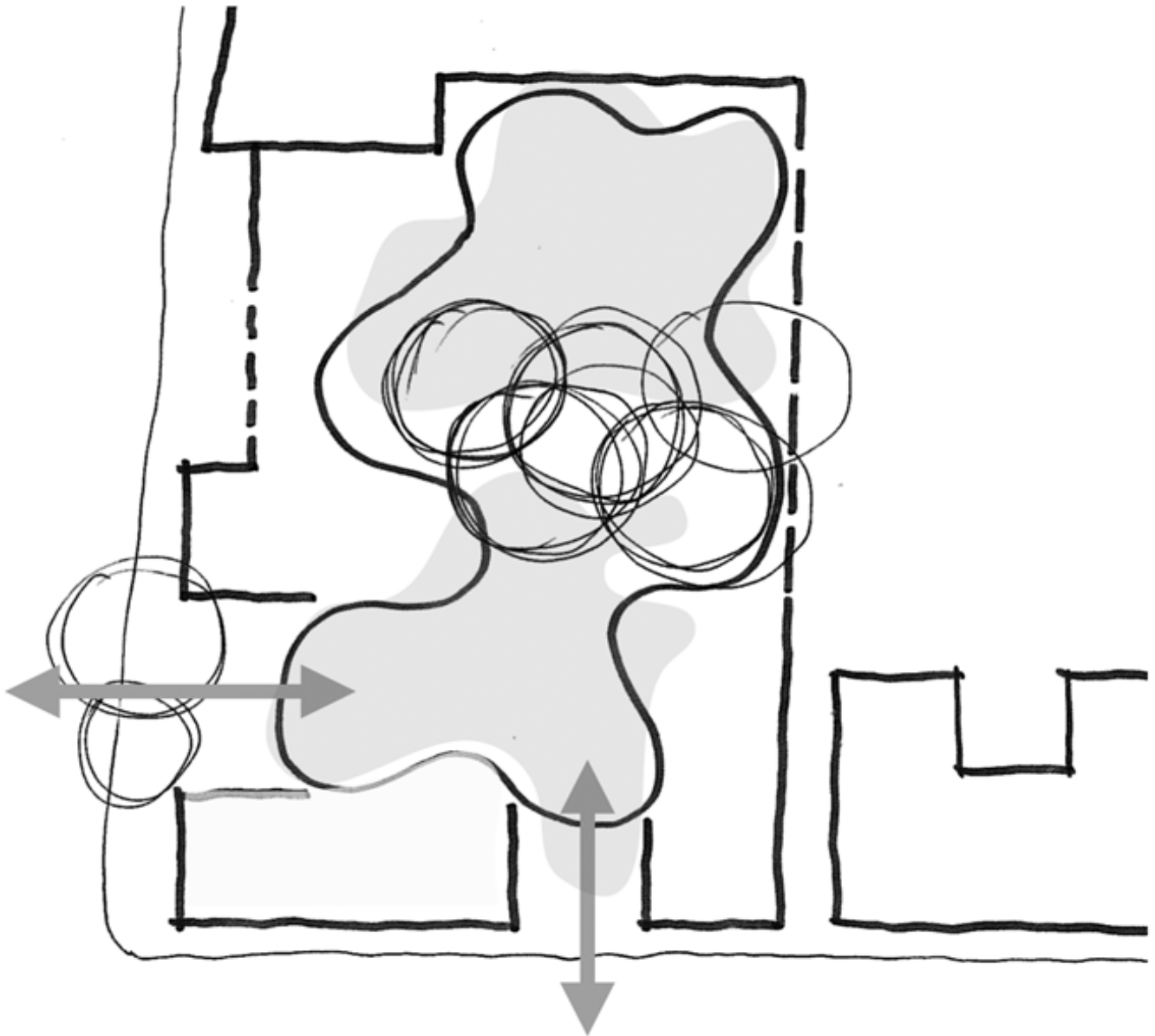
DARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOL REDEVELOPMENT

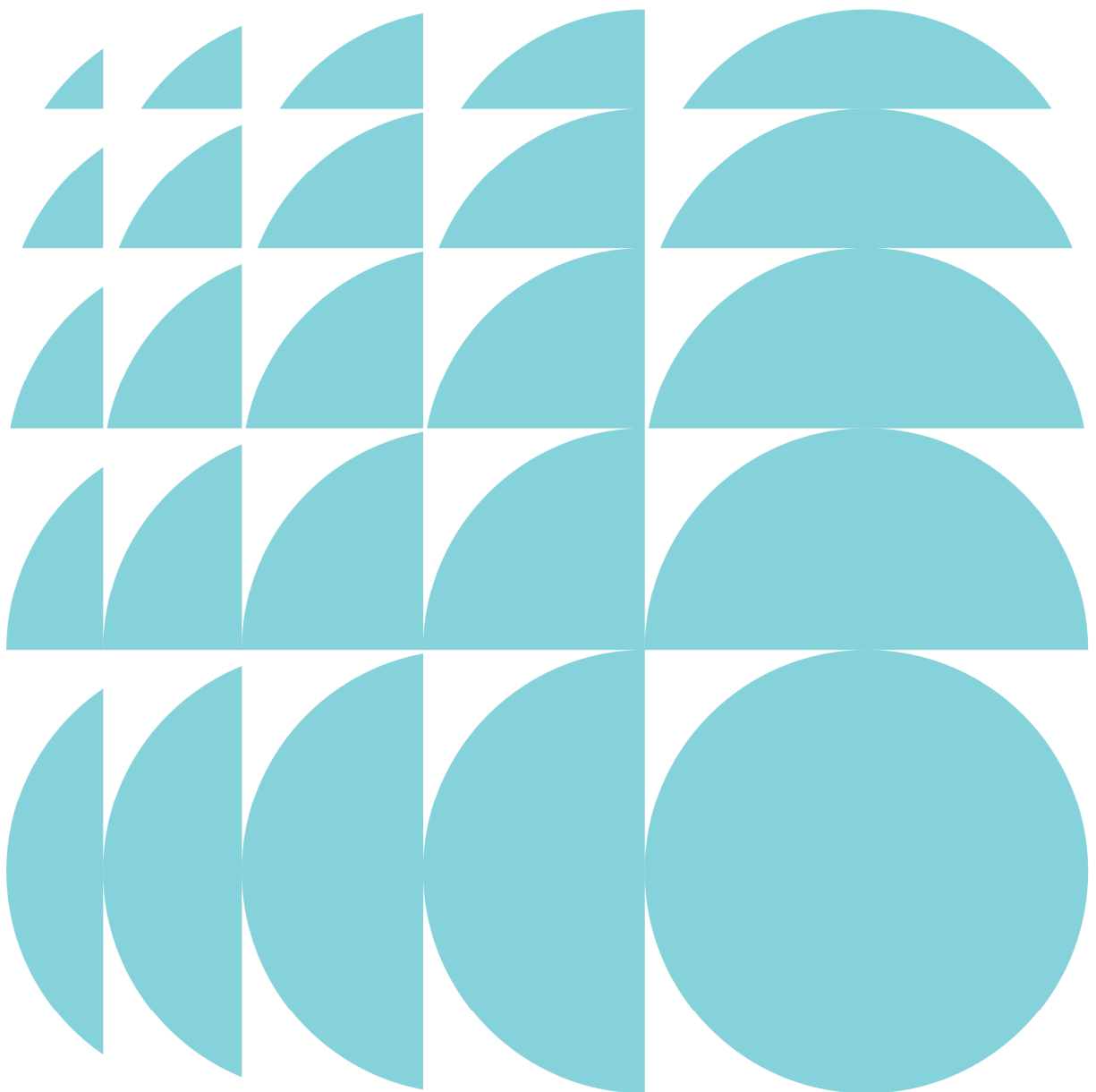
Appendix EE — Visual Impact Assessment

SSD-9914

Prepared by Ethos Urban

For NSW Department of Education





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Contents

1.0 Introduction

This document is a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) and has been prepared by Ethos Urban on behalf of Schools Infrastructure NSW to support a State Significant Development Application (SSDA) seeking redevelopment of the Darlington Public School (the school).

A VIA was prepared to inform design development for the school by Richard Lamb and Associates (RLA) in February 2019. Since this time, the proposal has been developed. Ethos Urban was requested by Schools Infrastructure NSW to update the RLA VIA to reflect this proposal. To enable better comparison between the masterplan and concept plan, the report structure follows that of the original RLA report. This document is to be read as part of the broader suite of documents that comprise the SSDA, in particular the FJMT design report.

On this basis, the structure of the document is as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The site and its context
3. The planning framework
4. The proposal
5. Background
6. Existing visual character
7. Visual impacts
8. Visual impact assessment
9. Assessment against planning framework
10. Conclusion.

2.0 The site and its context

2.1 The site

Key information for the site is shown in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: The site - key information

Key information	Details
Street address	417-445 Abercrombie Street, Darlington
Lot and DP	Lot 100 DP 623500 and Lot 592 DP 752049
Owner	NSW Department of Education
Area	7,253sqm
Frontage	Abercrombie Street, Golden Grove Street and Darlington Lane
Shape	Rectangular
LGA	City of Sydney
Current use	Local primary school

2.2 Context

The site context is shown in **Table 2** below.

Table 2: Site context

Direction	Details
North	Sydney University Regiment building; Darlington Lane; terrace rows; future student accommodation
South	Terrace rows; former corner commercial premises
East	University of Sydney Abercrombie Building and student accommodation
West	Flat buildings; Melkite Catholic Church and former annexe (separate building)

3.0 Planning framework

The planning framework applying to the subject site is shown in **Table 4** below.

Table 3: Planning framework

Key information	Details
Act	Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
SEPP (primary)	State Environmental Planning Policy (Educational Establishments and Child Care Facilities) 2017
LEP	City of Sydney LEP 2012
DCP	City of Sydney LEP 2012
Zone	SP2 - Educational Establishment
FSR (max.)	1.25:1
Height (max.)	9m
Locality	Darlington/West Redfern

4.0 The proposal

Key information for the proposal is shown in **Table 3** below and is shown in **Figure 1** to **Figure 5**.

Table 4: The proposal - key information

Key information	Details
Applicant	Schools Infrastructure NSW
Lead architect	FJMT
Use	Local primary school
Students	418
FSR	5,567.18sqm
Height	4 storeys (LG, UD, 1 and 2)
Carparking	Nil
Play space	4,334.29sqm



Figure 1: The proposal, aerial

Source: FJMT



Figure 2: The proposal, intersection of Abercrombie Street and Golden Grove Street

Source: FJMT



Figure 3: The proposal, Golden Grove Street elevation

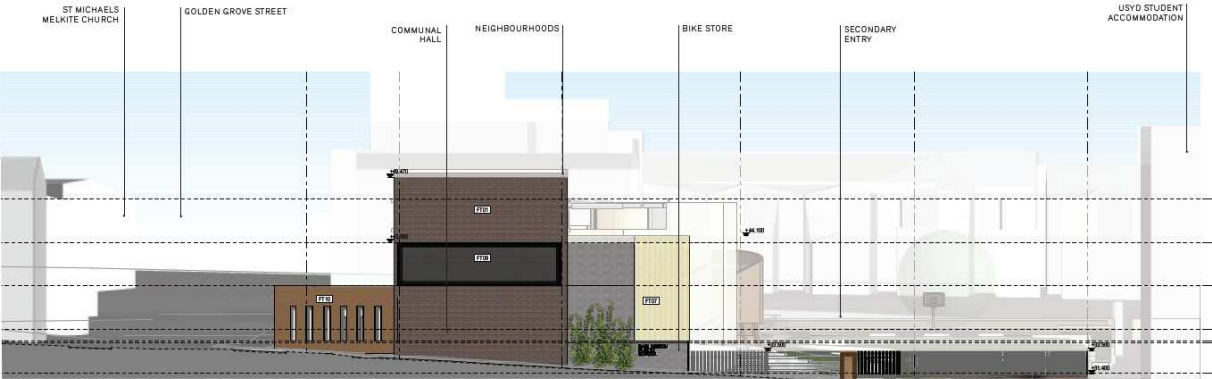


Figure 4: The proposal, Abercrombie Street elevation

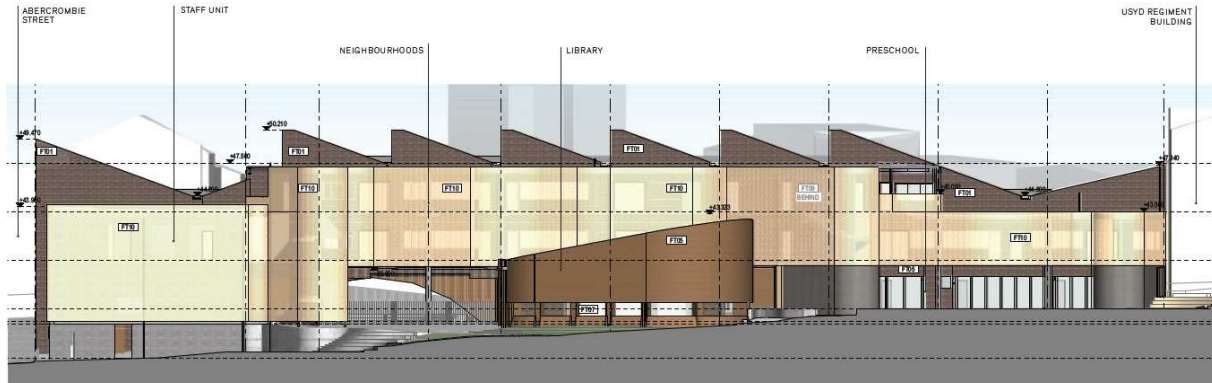


Figure 5: The proposal, eastern elevation

5.0 Background

The proposal has been subject to a comprehensive development and review process.

A range of technical inputs were commissioned to inform the initial design development. This included the RLA VIA report, which provided a number of recommendations.

A number of masterplan options were developed and presented for feedback to the State Design Review Panel (SDRP), with the two most recent occasions being in August and November 2019. The SDRP indicated their support for key design aspects, including massing and scale, and did not raise any visual impact concerns.

The masterplan has since been further developed to create the proposal. The proposal represents an amalgam of masterplan options C and D (refer **Figure 6** and **Figure 7**). The key changes are:

- removal of floor area to create more open space along the eastern boundary of the site
- removal of full length built form to the Abercrombie Street frontage.



Figure 6: Master plan option C

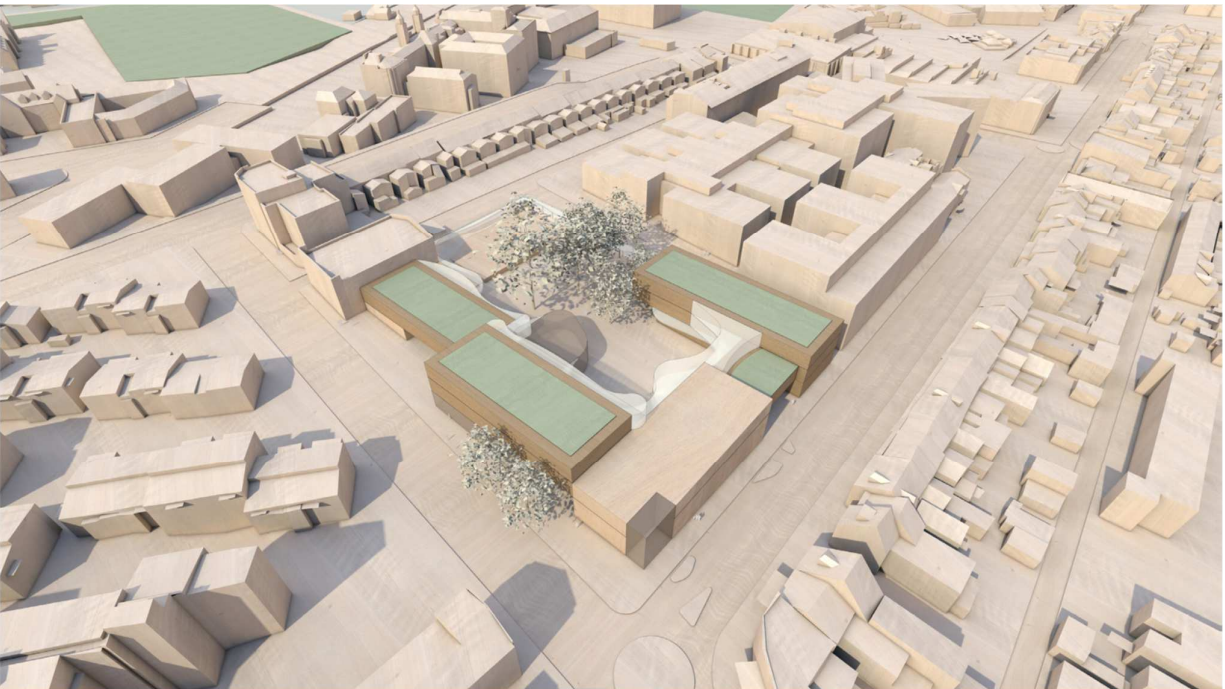


Figure 7: Masterplan option D

6.0 Existing visual character

6.1 The site

The site is occupied by a local primary school that has the following elements:

- buildings are sited in the southern half of the site, with the northern half comprising paved open space used for recreation
- individual buildings comprise smaller pavilion form linked by enclosed walkways
- buildings having nil setback fronting almost the entirety of Abercrombie Street
- buildings are setback a short distance from Golden Grove Street
- buildings are one or two storeys in height
- buildings are constructed from brick, with skillion steel roofs
- a high brick wall surrounds the Abercrombie and Golden Grove frontages of the site where buildings do not meet the street alignment
- building dates from the 1970s
- buildings have minimal architectural detailing, however parts of the Abercrombie Street elevation feature vertically emphasised recesses within which large windows are located for each storey
- there is some signage on the Abercrombie Street elevation
- there is a cluster of larger trees in the centre of the site, along the Darlington Lane frontage and at the Abercrombie Street frontage in the space separating the southern and northern street facing buildings

A visually prominent feature of the school is the building in the south-east corner of the site, which provides a strong marker to the corner of Abercrombie and Golden Grove Streets.

Overall, these elements and features combine to evoke the perception of a secure 'compound', with limited engagement with the adjoining public domain.

6.2 Visual catchment

The visual catchment of the site (ie, from where the site can be seen) is contained to parts of Abercrombie Street, Golden Grove Street, Darlington Lane and the site to the east largely due to the relatively level topography, continuous or near continuous terrace rows and taller nearby buildings.

While not within the visual catchment, the nearby Carriageworks complex is a notable feature of the broader surrounding urban landscape.

6.3 Landscape character types

As shown in FJMT's design report (page 13), the visual catchment is diverse and broadly comprises four landscape character types:

1. terrace rows
2. late 20th century flat buildings
3. community uses
4. institutional uses.

The terrace rows are located to the south along Abercrombie Street, north along Darlington Lane and the south west on Gold Grove Street. They comprise late 19th and early 20th century terrace rows that:

- two storeys in height
- narrow widths
- vertically proportioned
- nil street setback (noting the main face of the building at both levels is setback behind a street facing, ground level porch)
- pitched, tiled roofs with some incorporating dormer windows
- chimneys, wrought-iron balustrading and other architectural detailing common that era
- brick construction, often with a concrete covering
- neutral colours, in particular greys and light browns.

Given the orientation of the terrace rows to face directly to the site, their inclusion in a Heritage Conservation Area under the CoS LEP 2020 and being more likely to be home of permanent residents, it is the most sensitive of the landscape character types to change in the visual catchment.

The late 20th century flat buildings are located to the south of the site on Golden Grove Street. This is a single, large complex comprising 4 narrow rows of long flat buildings of up to 3 storeys constructed from brick with steel roofs separated by paved carparking areas. Due to the arrangement of rows of flat buildings generally at a 45-degree angle to the subject site, it is likely that view from individual dwelling will be limited.

The community uses are located to the west of the site and comprise the Melkite Catholic Cathedral and the adjoining former annexe. The cathedral is two storeys in height and is of brick construction. A notable feature of its street facing northern elevation is the incorporation of semi-circular elements, including three archways at the ground floor entrance, semi-circular windows including a single large window at the first level and a semi-circular roof form accentuated by lighter colour decorative banding. The cathedral is listed as a local heritage item under the CoS LEP 2012. The adjoining former annexe (noting it is physically separate) has considerable bulk (three storeys in height, relatively wide street facing elevation and long depth), making it visually prominent. This visual prominence is further accentuated by a parapet projecting above the third storey, and a lighter colouring compared to other buildings in this part of Golden Grove Street.

Institutional uses are located to the east and north of the site. University of Sydney buildings adjoining the subject site to the east. This comprises the Abercrombie Building, and student accommodation at the Abercrombie Street frontage. These buildings are of contemporary design and have a greater height (5 storeys) and bulk compared to other buildings in the visual catchment. University Regiment House adjoins the site and on the corner of Golden Grove Street and Abercrombie Lane.

The intersection of Abercrombie Street and Golden Grove Street is of note as visually it comprises the Melkite Catholic Cathedral and its adjoining former annexe and the school and a former corner business premises, both of which present in a way that accentuates their corner. The former business premises is also painted in a shade of red, which is different to the dominant colour palette and as such draws the eye to its presence.

As noted, while not within the visual catchment the nearby Carriageworks complex is a large, visually prominent and memorable feature of the surrounding urban landscape. In particular, Carriageworks has a distinct saw tooth roof which is evocative of an industrial / warehouse character.

6.4 Streetscape

The streetscape itself has a character that is common amongst parts in the inner west of Sydney, including two way bitumen paved roads adjoined by bitumen paved or concrete footpath punctuated by generally widely spaced, not yet mature street trees (often eucalypt) and power poles and lines.

6.5 Scenic value and amenity

As is often highly influenced by context, in the first instance it is best practice to refer to existing environmental planning instruments to identify local area scenic value and amenity. For this locality, the CoS DCP assigns value to character and heritage:

‘the consistency of the scale and proportions, roof design and materials palette of the terrace rows is important to the quality of the streetscape’ (CoS, 2012).

In general, value is often influenced by objective factors such as rarity, representativeness and condition (LI and IEMA, 2013). However, the perception of people is critical to better understanding value. The following principles have been consistently found in scenic preference studies and community consultation (AILA, 2018):

- water and natural elements are preferred over urban scenes
- mountains and hills are preferred over flat land
- views are preferred which include both mid-ground elements (with some detail discernible) and a background
- views with skyline features and views which include focal points are preferred.

More specifically, the following elements have been found to be of high scenic value (Queensland Government, 2007):

- sandy beaches
- ocean, rivers, creeks and dams
- eucalypt forest and native plantations.

The visual catchment does not contain any of the preferred elements or elements of high scenic value. Although in part obstructed by planting in the adjoining roundabout, the Melkite Catholic Cathedral's location terminating the vista along Abercrombie Street increases its visual prominence, and in some respects can be considered to be a focal point.

As RLA have stated, the relatively large number and visibility from the public domain of mature trees on the site positively contributes to the scenic quality of the visual catchment.

6.6 Overall visual character

The interplay of these factors combines to create an overall visual character of the visual catchment is of a typical urban, fairly dense inner west Sydney residential neighbourhood with diversity of lower rise but broadly finer-grained built forms, in particular terrace rows, and clusters of trees, using within the road reserve and typically eucalypt.

6.7 Visual receptors

The number of visual receptors (people exposed to views of the subject site) is relatively limited as:

- the relatively, small visual catchment contained to parts of Abercrombie Street, Golden Grove Street, Darlington Lane and the site to the east
- its location primarily as part of a medium density residential area
- it not being located on a major, highly trafficked street (vehicles, cyclists or pedestrians).

On this basis, the main visual receptors will be:

- permanent residents, either as owner occupiers or renters
- students
- school staff, parents, students and visitors
- visitors to the Melkite Catholic Cathedral and adjoining business.

7.0 Visual impacts

The main visual impact is increasing the amount of built form fronting Golden Grove Street and a corresponding reduction in that fronting Abercrombie Street. More specifically, this includes:

- a more consistent elevation to Golden Grove Street, including a single storey street wall featuring a distinct arched entrance the main, larger building setback behind this street wall
- the continuation of built form along Golden Grove Street to join with the University Regiment Building
- the modulation of the elevation facing Golden Grove Street primarily through articulation into smaller 'neighbourhoods' corresponding with parts of the saw tooth roof (evocative of the nearby Carriageworks complex) and a larger number of windows
- the removal of the existing Abercrombie Street perimeter wall and associated mature tree and its replacement with a wide, pedestrian entry that affords views into the centre of the site and retained vegetation
- the replacement of larger buildings on the eastern boundary

- a change in layout to the paved playing area from a north-south to east-west orientation
- a reduction in the height of the corner building relative to the remainder of the Golden Grove Street elevation, a reduction in its length along Abercrombie Street, addition of large transparent glass windows on each street facing elevation and addition of a lighter colouring.
- overall, a departure from the existing pavilion typology.

8.0 Visual Impact Assessment

Assessment has been undertaken against the criteria used by RLA in their original report. While this differs from the industry standard GLVIA3, the impact analysis criteria resemble the key criteria of sensitivity and magnitude in the GLVIA method. In addition, RLA has considerable experience and strong reputation in the visual impact field. On this basis, it is considered to be an appropriate framework for these purposes, in particular given the desire to maintain general consistency in the evaluative approach between the masterplan and this concept plan. The criteria are:

Effects analysis

- effects on visual character
- effects on scenic quality
- effects on composition
- effects on public domain views
- effects on private domain views

Impact analysis

- visual absorption capacity
- compatibility
- sensitivity
- view sharing.

8.1 Effects analysis

Effects on visual character

The proposal does not introduce any unsympathetic or visually prominent elements, including through shape, line, colour or texture. In this way, it is consistent with the overall visual character of the visual catchment.

The opening up of the site at the ground level provides a visual amenity benefit of reducing the perception of 'secure compound' effect, providing visual relief from the former somewhat oppressive perimeter wall and built form.

Effects on scenic quality

The proposal will not impact the consistency of the scale and proportions, roof design and materials palette of the terrace rows.

Due to their absence in the visual catchment, the proposal does not impact preferred or highly valued elements.

The proposal will remove an existing mature tree within the site fronting Abercrombie Street. However, this will be more than offset by the opening of views into the centre of the site which affords substantially greater visual exposure to the cluster of mature trees.

Effects on composition

Overall, the proposal does not result in major changes to composition such as introduction of a new focal point, drawing of the eye to a new feature or other measure.

The key changes to composition will be:

- the foreground of views from the public domain of Golden Grove Street by the addition of new built form adjacent to the Sydney University Regiment building
- the foreground of views from the public domain of Abercrombie Street by the removal of a long section of wall and its replacement with a new pedestrian entry, and the mid and background of views due to this element which opens up views into the site to open play space and trees.

These changes are considered to be either relatively minor, and in the case of Abercrombie Street, beneficial changes to composition.

Effects on public domain views

Views into the subject site from the upper, westernmost public domain portion of Golden Grove Street would be prevented by the addition of new perimeter built form. Conversely, views into the site would be afforded from the lower parts of Golden Grove Street into the site via the open ground level and from the Abercrombie Street public domain via removal of the section of existing wall.

Effects on private domain views

Assessment of private domain views has not been undertaken. Consistent with the position of RLA, given the nature of the visual catchment, the narrow streets and the low-rise height of most dwellings, consideration of the public domain provides a sound approximation of views from the private domain. Furthermore, when viewed against the planning principle handed down by the Land and Environment Court in *Tenacity Consulting v Warringah* [2004] NSWLEC 140, there is an absence of valuable views in the visual catchment.

8.2 Impact analysis

Visual absorption capacity

It is agreed with RLA that the visual prominence of the proposal is moderate. While its corner location increases its visibility, its prominence is reduced by its relatively low height, conventional street facing form, detailed design measures such as breaking up elevations by roof form and windows and its compatible colours.

It is agreed with RLA that the visual absorption capacity of the existing visual environment is moderate to high. In particular, the lack of a single, consistent landscape character type with instead a diverse range of built form, larger built forms, in particular the adjoining 5 storey Abercrombie Building and student accommodation, and the presence of street trees enable accommodation of the proposal.

Compatibility

The proposal is compatible with the overall character of the visual environment. When viewed from the immediately adjoining public domain, it has:

- placement of built form to reinforce the prevailing street edge condition, with open space largely being located to the rear of built form
- generally conventional form
- similar height
- similar lines (eg, rectangles, straight lines)
- similar colours, in particular a series of browns
- similar textures, including the prevailing use of brick in most elevations.
- retaining solar access and other amenity outcomes to the adjoining public domain.

In addition, reference to the sawtooth roof form present in the close by, but well known and memorable Carriageworks precinct, serves to heighten its compatibility with local visual character.

As articulated in FJMT's design report, the inward facing northern elevation has a contemporary, softer and curved form. However, it is likely that this elevation will be visible only to those within the site and from the Abercrombie Building and student accommodation. While this elevation is not considered to be stylistically similar to the overall visual catchment, it of a scale that is not prominent in views and sensitivity from this location is considered to be low.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of most of the visual receptors to change on the subject site is likely to be low. However, the sensitivity of permanent residents, and more likely those who are owner occupiers, is medium. This visual receptor group is concentrated in that part of Abercrombie Street facing the subject the subject site. Given the magnitude of the proposal, in particular its footprint, size and scale, it is not considered to have a significant visual impact on this receptor group.

The proposal will also not have any direct impact on the curtilage or backdrop of the heritage listed Melkite Catholic Cathedral.

View sharing

As the proposal does not interact with a desirable feature in the landscape, it does not impact on view sharing.

9.0 Assessment against planning framework

The CoS DCP 2020 includes the subject site in the Darlington/West Redfern locality.

The DCP character statement for this locality as predominantly residential mainly comprised of terrace rows, and states that the consistency of the scale and proportions, roof design and materials palette of the terrace rows is important to the quality of the streetscape.

Given that the proposal is for institutional development, the following principles are most applicable to visual impact assessment:

- design institutional development to be sympathetic to the low scale and fine grain of the neighbourhood

The following principles are of relevance, albeit to a broader degree:

- development is to respond to and complement heritage items and contributory buildings within heritage conservation areas, including streetscapes and lanes
- retain the low scale of built form and consistent building types particularly terrace rows.

Table 5 provides an outline assessment against these matters.

Table 5: Assessment against planning framework

Principle	Response
Design institutional development to be sympathetic to the low scale and fine grain of the neighbourhood	The proposal is of sympathetic to the neighbourhood by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a low scale (maximum three storeys in height) • its main southern elevation facing Golden Grove Street is articulated into finer grain 'neighbourhoods' largely by the sawtooth roof form • reducing the length of built form to Abercrombie Street.
Development is to respond to and complement heritage items and contributory buildings within heritage	The proposal responds to and complements the adjacent HCA on Abercrombie Street by:

Principle	Response
conservation areas, including streetscapes and lanes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having a height that is compatible with the Melkite Catholic Church local heritage item and the nearby Heritage Conservation Area • reinforcing the dominant street edge condition • articulating the Golden Grove Street elevation, in particular through the sawtooth roof form • incorporating brick as the prevailing elevation material fronting the public domain
Retain the low scale of built form and consistent building types particularly terrace rows	The proposal is of a low scale (maximum three storeys in height)

10.0 Conclusion

Based on this assessment, the original conclusions of the RLA report are considered to stand. This conclusion is:

- the potential public and private domain visual catchment of the site is small
- the external exposure of the school to the public and private domain is limited to surrounding streetscapes
- the proposed development would not create any significant negative visual effects in relation to the character or composition of public or private domain views
- the visual effects of the proposed development are positive in relation to the west and south streetscapes due to the removal of street-wall built form, increased spatial separation to built forms, incorporation of internal open spaces and retention of visually significant tree canopy
- the proposed built forms are unlikely to create any significant view loss in public and private domain views
- the proposed development is compatible with the immediate and wider visual context which includes education and institutional buildings of similar height, bulk and scale.

On this basis the potential visual impacts of the proposal are not considered to be significant, adverse or otherwise unacceptable, and can be supported on visual impact grounds.