



SUBMISSION ON WATERLOO METRO
AMENDED CONCEPT PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

New South Wales now enjoys the unusual benefit of having a “Minister for Planning and Public Spaces”. This positive step would lead to the impression that there would be a greater emphasis upon “place-making”, especially for projects sponsored by the NSW Government.

In recent years, the Department of Planning has promoted increased densities along existing transport corridors but without any significant enhancement of the extent and quality of the public realm within these reconstructed precincts. Regional centres such as Hurstville, Bondi Junction and Chatswood do not demonstrate improvements in the public environment despite the investments of many hundreds of millions in new high-rise buildings and expanded retail activities.

Efficient public transport infrastructure is the greatest determinant of metropolitan urban form and the Government must be commended for its application towards this task. Developments along new Metro lines present unique opportunities to make the metropolis of Sydney more vivid, enjoyable and memorable for its inhabitants.

Sixty years have elapsed since M.I.T. professor, Kevin Lynch, published his landmark work, “The Image of the City”, in which he promotes “imageability” as one of the most important criteria for the building and rebuilding of cities.

Sydney’s city centre, harbourside and ocean-fronting areas benefit from beautiful and memorable imagery. This is in strong contrast with the featureless suburban sprawl of metropolitan Sydney as a whole.

The proposed development of the Waterloo Metro Station presents a unique opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the image of Sydney. Situated between the major road corridor of Botany Road, likely to be a part of the extension of Sydney’s CBD and large park, the centrepiece of the redevelopment of the Waterloo Public Housing estate, the context of this site has all the ingredients necessary to enrich the perception of our city. Sadly, it is submitted that the proposed exhibited development does not satisfy these aspirations.

CRITERIA FOR CONCEPT PROPOSAL

Aside from providing for the new Metro station, the concept proposal proposes extensive podium and mid-rise development blocks as well as three high-rise towers. On the east side, a modest public space faces a future park in a redeveloped Waterloo housing estate.

Presumably, the associated commercial and residential development is meant to offer some compensation for the cost of building the metro station. However, there is a dull, pragmatic quality to this concept, devoid of a major public space or memorable formal invention for the associated buildings that would engender the qualities this location deserves.

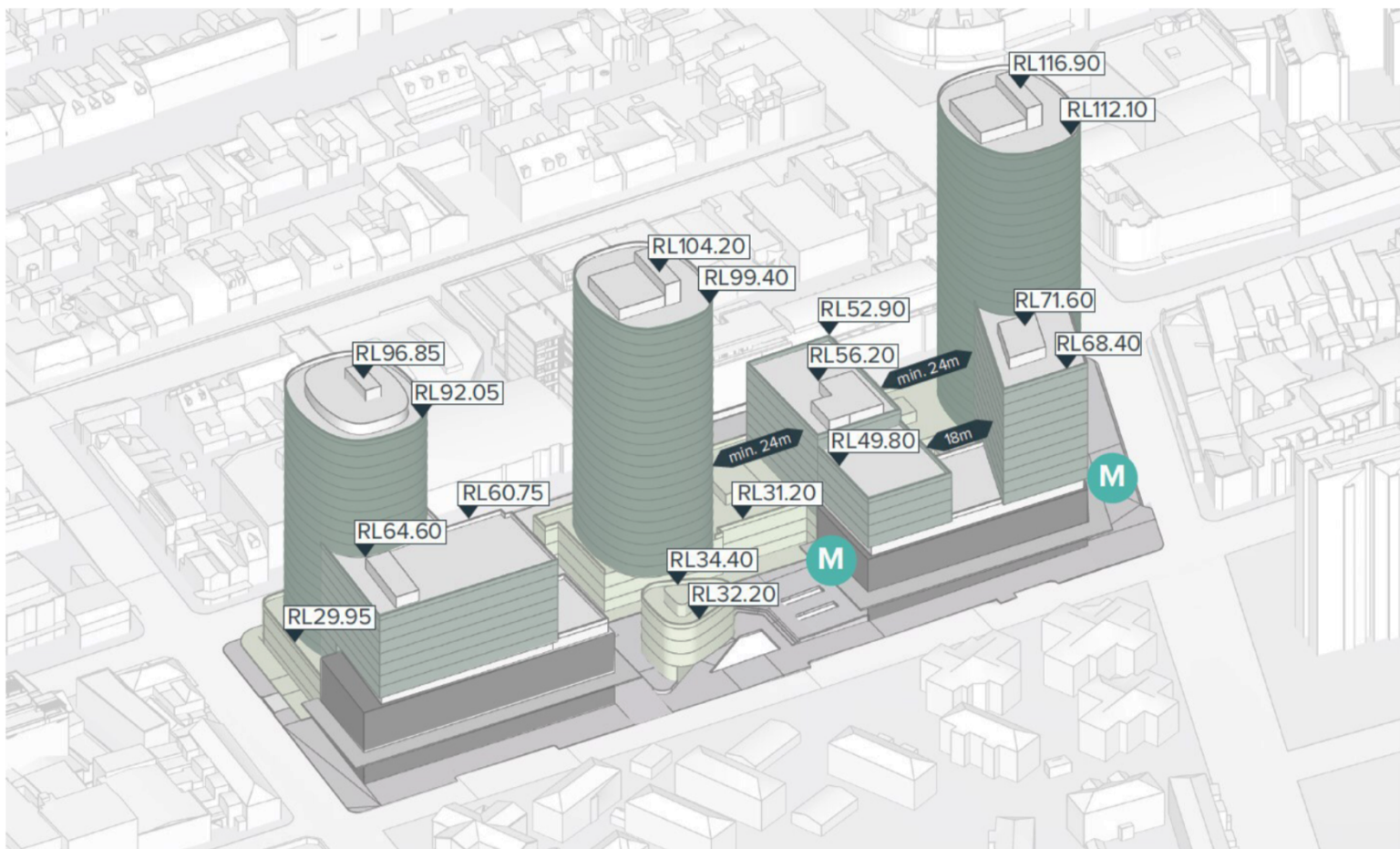


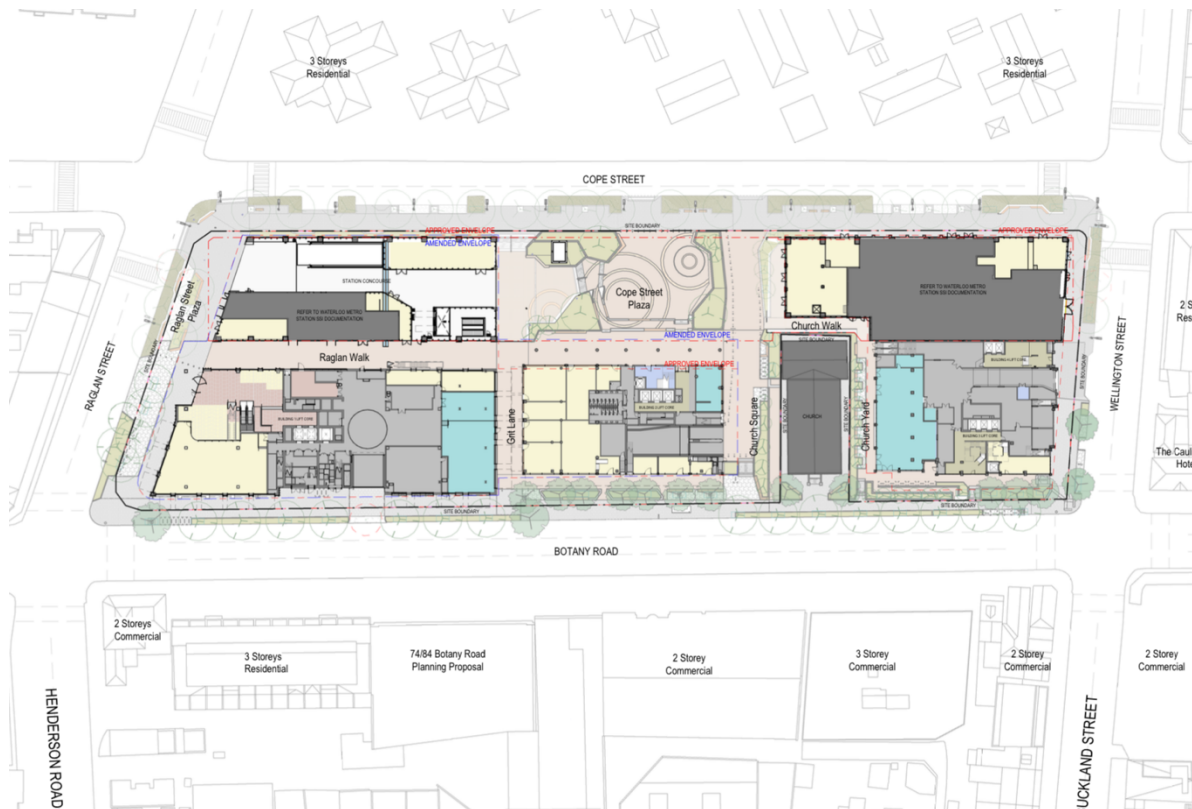
Figure 1 – The concept proposal

AMENDED CONCEPT PLAN

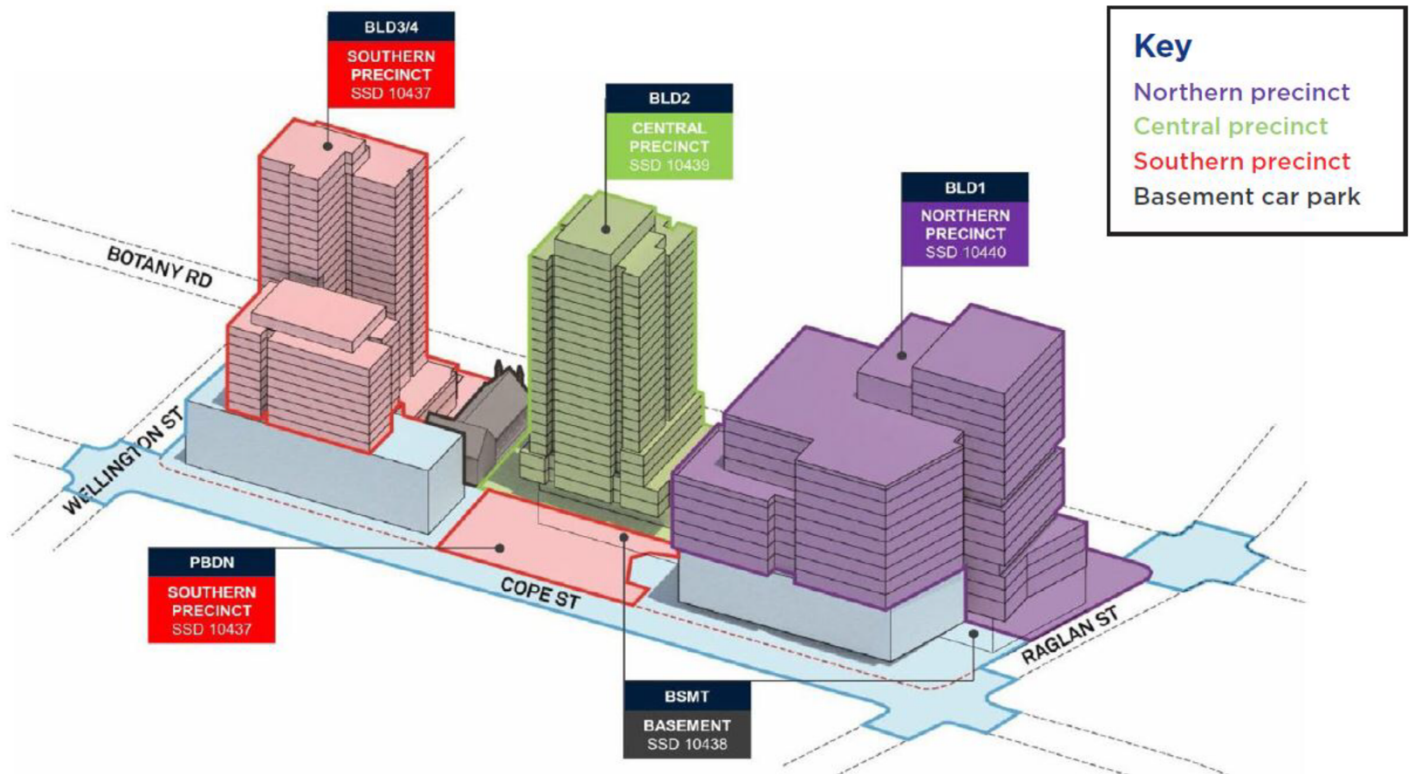
The amended concept plan shows little enhancement in the formal qualities of the scheme.

The removal of the low-rise “community” building improves the perception of the modest public space but the massive aggregated bulk of building 1 in the northern precinct and the prosaic shapes of building 3/4 in the southern precinct are unlikely to engender the image quality the site deserves.

Building 2 has an awkward proximity to the historic church building facing Botany Road, totally overshadowed by its high-rise mass. Unfortunately, the public space facing Cope Street is also in shadow from lunchtime onwards for most of the year.



Presumably because of flooding constraints, the levels of the Botany Rd frontage of building 3/4 do not coincide with street level with a series of access ramps destroying a potentially active street frontage. The future development of Botany Road as a major thoroughfare deserves a better solution.

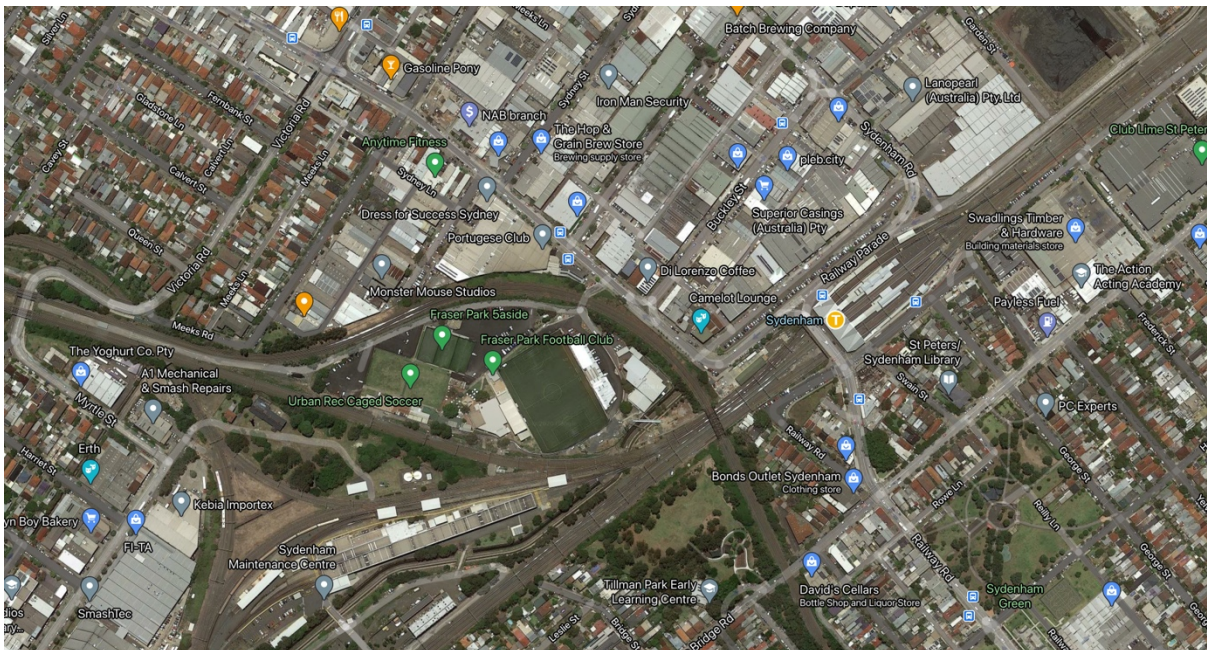


It is unfortunate that much of the podium element along the Cope St frontage contains technical and plant equipment for the metro line, creating a dead frontage of considerable length. It is inappropriate that this should be proposed at this important urban location.

There are extensive industrial trackside locations near Sydenham and elsewhere along the metro route where these necessary facilities could have been provided with less damaging effect.



Blank walls of Metro plant detract from streetscape



Industrial curtilage of railway line at Sydenham

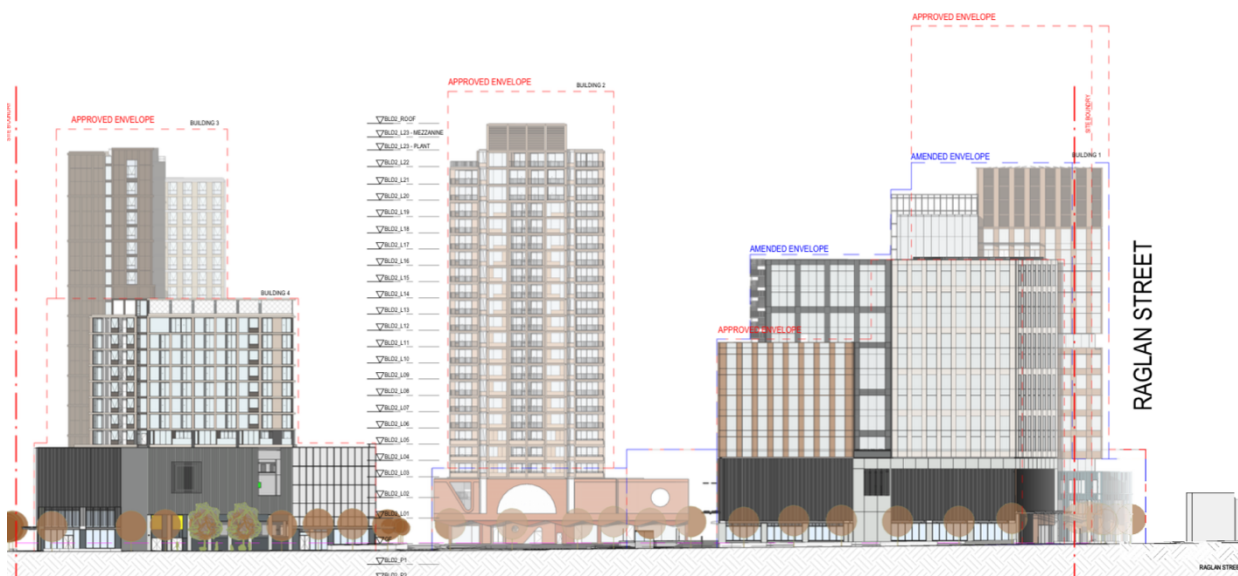
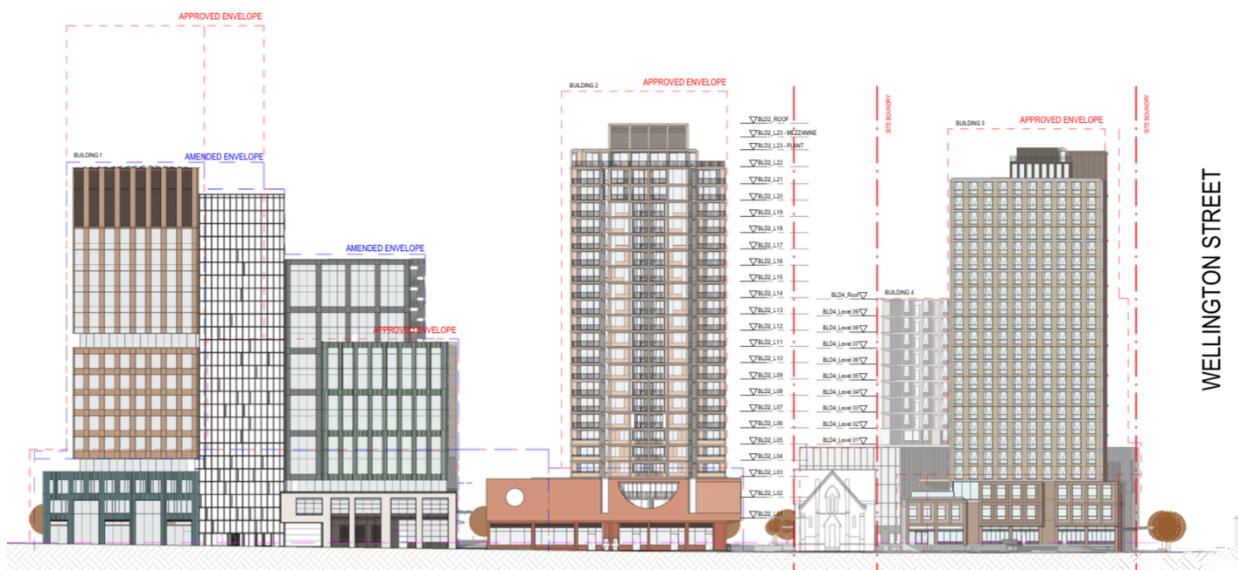
ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY AND FACADE DESIGN

The elevations of the proposed buildings provide little comfort that they will lead to the architectural quality of a landmark development that this site deserves for it to make a tangible contribution to the image of Sydney.

There is no sense of urban quality that a more unified podium design could have provided, especially along the Botany Rd frontage.

All three towers have totally disparate design features which will detract from a sense of unified urban design.

The facades of building design demonstrate an unresolved struggle to articulate the massive bulky form of building 1. The elevations have all the qualities of a “cut and paste” from a facade catalogue. This building in particular would benefit from a revised facade design.

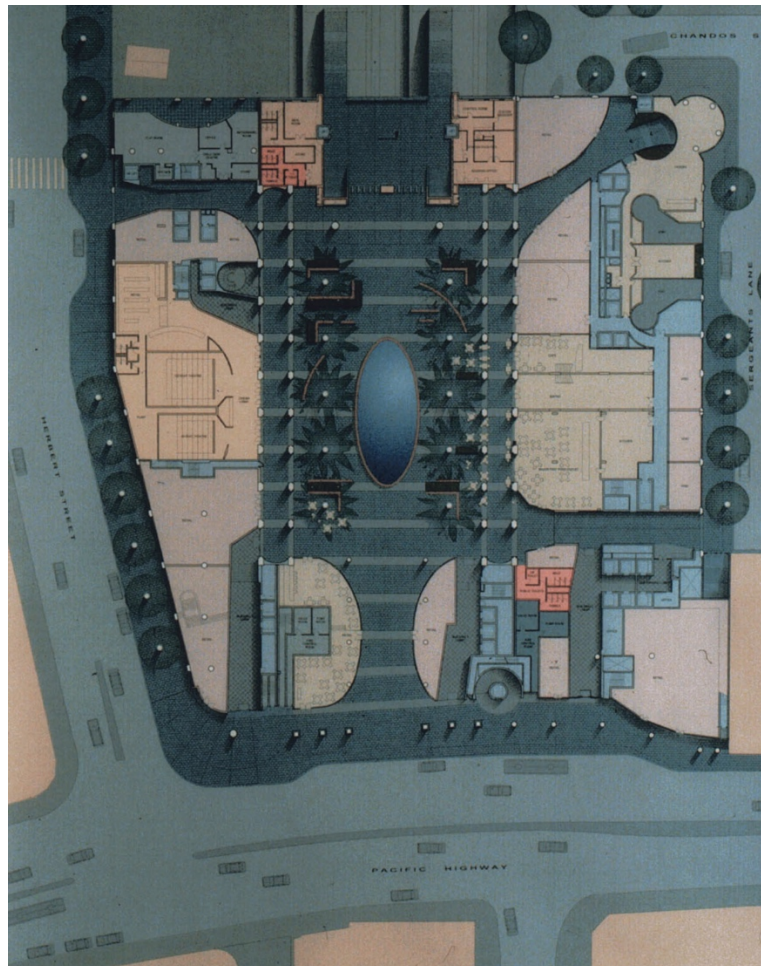


A “SPACE POSITIVE” DEVELOPMENT

The main reason why the proposed Waterloo Metro development is so disappointing is that at the outset, it would appear there was no requirement for a significant public space to form a major component of the development. The design appears to be driven by the pragmatic requirements of associated commercial development. This is in strong contrast with a development such as “Forum” at St. Leonards railway station, which I designed nearly 30 years ago.

Commenced by Trident Developments, which bankrupted in the 89/90 real estate crisis, the original scheme consisted of a “mass-positive” twin tower scheme at the centre of the site with set backs from the street alignments and no significant public space.

When the site was acquired by the Winton Property Group, it was redesigned as a “space-positive” development with a north-facing public square, at the centre of the site, activated by cafes and retail and the coming and going of commuters using the railway station.



Public space with northerly aspect is the dominant feature of FORUM and St. Leonards. Retail and cafes activate the edges of the space.



Sculptural forms of high-rise towers at FORUM give the site a strong image quality

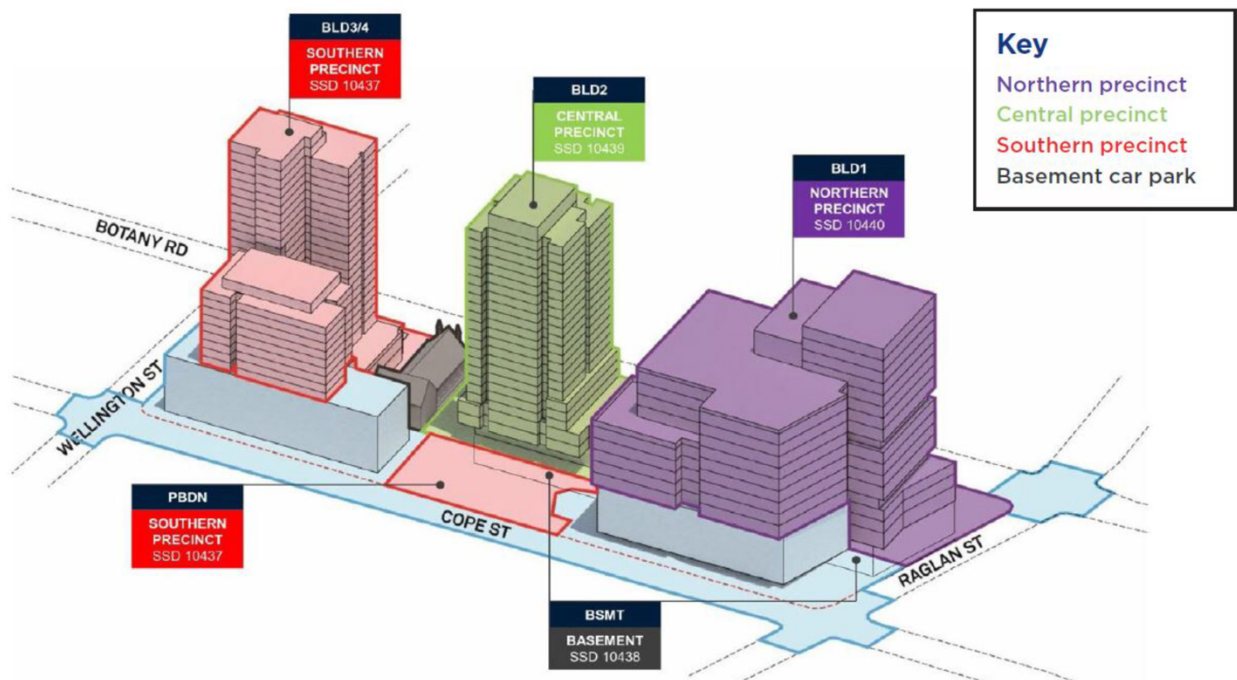
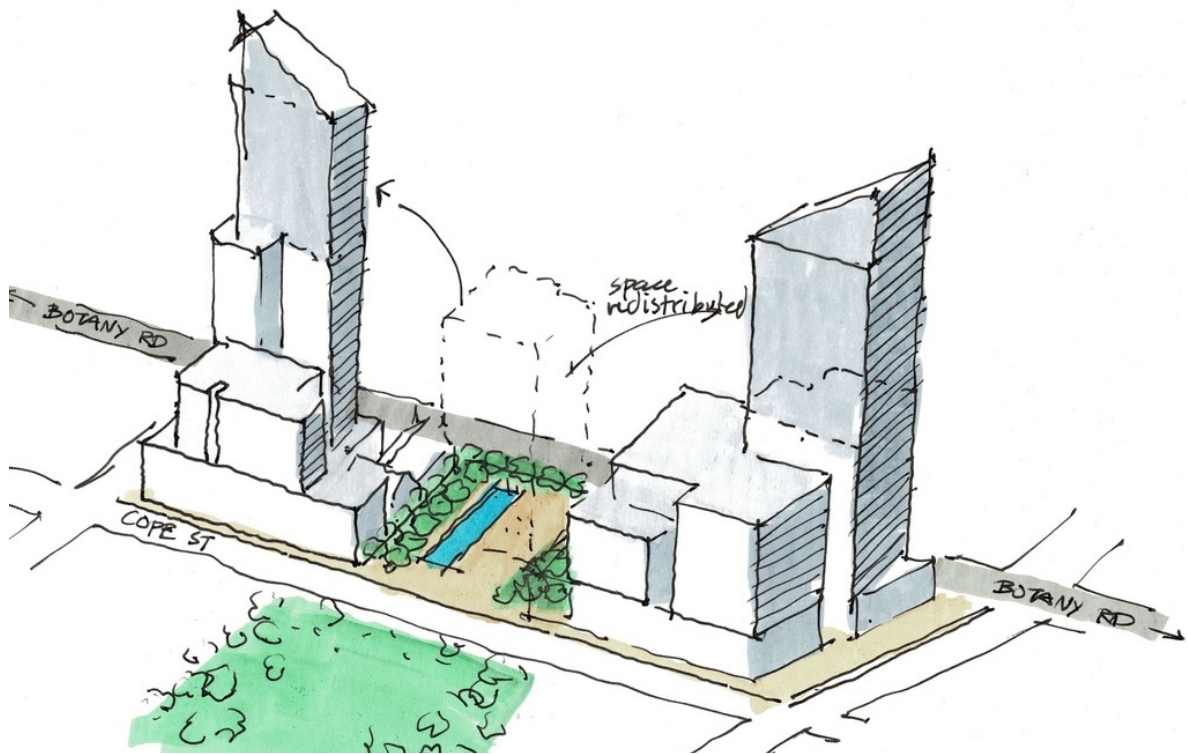


An active sunny courtyard is the centrepiece of the development

HOW TO MAKE A LANDMARK DEVELOPMENT

It is suggested that the Waterloo proposal could be enhanced through the elimination of Building 2 and its replacement by an enlarged public square. There need be no loss of GFA as this could be redistributed on the sites of Buildings 1 and 3/4, generating the opportunities for more elegant forms and more memorable architectural quality.

Much of the planning would remain unaltered but the scheme would then realise its potential as making it a memorable place for the citizens of Sydney and contributing to the image of the city.



LIMITATIONS OF PROCESS

While the planning documents do not spell out exactly what the procurement sequence has been, it would appear that the concept proposal was a commission arising from an EOI process rather than a design competition.

It seems that modest requirements were incorporated for the public realm intended and that a pragmatic rather than memorable development was called for.

Following the approval of concept proposal as a reference design, it would appear that design, finance and construction proposals were sought incorporating the cost of building the metro station and offering a bid to the Government for the opportunity to build the commercial and residential developments.

It is understood there were two development bids but one is left wondering as to the design quality of the alternative bid which was designed by an outstanding team of professionals.

It is a pity that the public does not get to be informed about the alternate design and that the winner is determined by the total financial benefit of both parts.

Given the significance of the site and its opportunity for memorable place-making it seems a pity that a more rigorous design process was not adopted at the initial concept stage.

Notwithstanding the above it is suggested the scheme is capable of major transformation by modifying its formal concept or at the very least by improving the design quality of the facades.