

16 May 2021

To NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

SECTION 4.55(2) MODIFICATION FORT STREET PUBLIC SCHOOL (SSD 10340)

- A. I am submitting comments on the above project.

I know I am not alone in making these comments.

Overall I am supportive of the existence and operations of the school. I know also that losing views is something we all at times have to accept, and my comments reflect that.

What is more important is the overall experience of living in the area, which include views but also what we see and feel as we move around the whole area, and our perceptions of what is significant and important in the longer term. Observatory Hill is almost unique in the significance and opportunities for these reactions.

I have been privileged to live in Observatory Tower for 25 years overlooking the FSS and its surroundings. The foreground is dominated mainly by the National Trust and the Met Buildings, and I look over them to the School building, then the Observatory and out to North Sydney. It is an encompassing and balanced view, displaying its history, its deeply historic buildings, its grass and trees including the fig trees, and its pleasing combination of all these things.

The School is prominent in all that.

- B. The original documents for the upgrading of the school displayed to me an increase in building bulk, hid most of the Met Building, and detracted from the balance in the current appearance of our foreground. However I accepted the documents because I am supportive of the school and recognize that changes may need to occur. I accepted that the balance between the functionality of the school and the recognition of the heritage of the area in the proposed built form was not objectionable.
- C. The current proposed modifications to the original design are however **not** acceptable to me, based on the following:
1. The school student numbers have not been increased so extra space is not required.
 2. The site and the existing buildings have clearly been well examined and considered before the original plans were prepared and displayed to us, and nothing has changed in the meantime. It appears that it has been decided to now remove the basements under Buildings G and J and insert that space elsewhere above ground, resulting in Building J gaining the additional storey. This can easily be interpreted as saving costs. It cannot be to save time because the construction period is already generous. In itself these are not reasons to now make changes.
 3. Neither is the purported newly found difficulty in including the liftshaft in the Met Building. That building has been boarded up and neglected for more than 20 years. Of course the building has deteriorated, and this is described in the Curio CMP, but I say so what. I am a

long-time structural engineer with experience in historic buildings, and I cannot conceive that the building is so far deteriorated that the new liftshaft cannot be built in. There will always be a solution, even though it may be more expensive now than previously considered. And that is to me not a valid reason to add an extra storey to Building J.

4. It is surprising to see the Modifications being promulgated so soon after the original documentation. This suggests that cost saving measures or other secondary issues are now being applied. I could easily say it reminds me of the processes that have been applied to the Barangaroo site. On such a significant site money should **not** be the driver.

I am therefore not convinced of the basic premise that the changes need to be made. And I do not believe that the attempts made by Curio Projects to then justify and accept the changes are credible.

The Heritage Impact Statement (Curio Projects 11 March 2020) and the Conservation Management Plan (Curio Projects 17 March 2020) for the original development are comprehensively and clearly defined. The CMP is surely is the benchmark for the future. Despite that, the Curio assessments of the now-proposed modifications smack of arbitrary changes of opinion, and in some areas are transparently wrong when considered against the original CMP. There is no logical argument applied by Curio in now accepting the results of the proposed modifications; the basis seems to be “feelings in the water”. It is unacceptable that the original conclusions and recommendations can now be so easily discarded.

Original CMP clauses that have been over-ridden in the proposed modifications are:

1. Policy 21.4, *Any future development should retain the general bulk and massing character of precinct (i.e. complement single storey Messengers Cottage as well as three stories of MET...*
2. Policy 25.2, *Any future development/new buildings should retain the general bulk and massing character of the Fort Street Public School site precinct (i.e. complement single storey Messengers Cottage as well as three stories of MET)....*
3. Policy 25.3, *Maximum heights of new buildings should not exceed those of the existing heritage items to which they are locationally and visually related.*
4. Policy 25.5, *The Bureau of Meteorology should remain as a dominant building on site (both in height, and architectural form)....*

It is unfortunate that the original plans showed the new large and intrusive wall facing to the south, being significantly different from what we all see now. But I reluctantly accepted that as part of a reasonable overall proposal.

It is repugnant now that the proposed Modifications will make that intrusion much worse, especially when it appears that there is no compelling reason to make the changes, and even more so when the independent assessment of those changes seems transparently wrong when based on principles adopted by the design team before the original development proposals were promulgated on us.

- D. The intention to investigate and possibly develop Building E, to the west of the Met Building, is vague in respect to whether it will meet the policies in the original CMP. Allied, it not clear to me whether the planned total number of pupils will be 600, 550 now and 50 later, such that the 50 might be housed in Building E; or whether the total number before developing Building E may

become 600, and an extra undefined number will be housed in Building E. Clarification would be appreciated.

It is clear in the CMP that Building E is to be higher than the Met Building.

- E. An additional minor matter of concern exists in Appendix P, Consultation Survey; Appendix 1, Stakeholder Consultation Summary. Members of Observatory Tower are recorded correctly as meeting with members of Dept of Education on 29 March 2021. Appendix 1 records the meeting as follows:

Section 4.55 (2) Planning Modification Stakeholder Consultation Observatory Tower	25-Mar-21	Observatory Tower	Margaret Wright (MW) Brian Wood (BW) David Stanger (DS)	No concerns raised over the SSD Modification	NA
		Schools Infrastructure NSW (SINSW)	Louisa Berlino-Clarke (LBC) Karlissa Kendall (KK)		

That no concerns were recorded as being raised by us was not because we had none. This meeting was **not** called to discuss the school plans. It was to discuss the cycleway and how to minimize the period when cyclists could not use the existing path and would have to use public streets in the area. It may be a simple error to include it in the documentation, but it also suggests the possibility that it was deliberately included to build the case for the state. It adds to the seemingly arbitrary acceptance of height changes previously noted and raises the possibility that other manipulations may have occurred, or may be occurring, as yet undiscovered. Let us hope not.

- F. The original plans should be retained. **The proposed modifications must not be allowed to proceed.**

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