



23 December 2020

Mr Brendan Baxter
City of Port Phillip
Private Bag 3
St Kilda, Victoria. 3182

Dear Mr Baxter,

1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne - Design Review December 2020

We thank City of Port Phillip for requesting a review of the proposal for 1-7 Waterfront Place Port Melbourne by the Victorian Design Review Panel.

The Office of the Victorian Government Architect's views, which are based on a meeting with Elenberg Fraser on 1 December 2020, discussions with City of Port Phillip on 3 December 2020, a site visit on 9 December 2020 and the Victorian Design Review Panel discussion are as per the following report.

If you require further clarification, please contact our office on 9651 6583 to discuss.

Yours sincerely,

Stefan Preuss
Associate Government Architect

cc: Caleb Smith, Principal -Elenberg Fraser
Karen McWilliam, Principal - Elenberg Fraser
Mel Curry, Landscape Architect -Tract
Aiden Robinson, Pro-urban Planning
Tim Ryder, Pro-urban Planning
Andrew Nehme, Site Owner
Shelley Bennett, Principal Strategic Planner - CoPP
Jock Farrow, Principal Planner - CoPP
Georg Borg – Manager City Development - CoPP
Scott Parkinson – Coordinator Statutory Planning Group - CoPP
Craig McLean – Head of City Design - CoPP

Panel Members

The VDRP members who attended the design review session were Stefan Preuss (Chair), Don Bates, Amanda Roberts, Ben Duckworth and Robert Stent.

Confidentiality

The advice contained in this letter and attached report is offered in confidence.

The OVGA will use reasonable endeavours to keep information confidential. For instance, VDRP panel members are subject to a duty of confidentiality.

The advice contained in this letter and report is confidential but the OVGA reserves the right to provide its reports, advice and documents relating to panel hearings to other parties, such as the Minister, responsible authority or decision maker. The OVGA also reserves the right to authorise others to distribute its advice and reports more broadly where it deems necessary to do so; for instance, to accord natural justice.

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VICTORIAN DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne

DECEMBER 2020

Documentation

Information presented at review:

- Digital presentation by Elenberg Fraser

Information provided to panel ahead of review:

- 1-7 Waterfront Place Port Melbourne - Advertised Plans.PDF
- 1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne - Wind Report.pdf
- 1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne - UCR.pdf
- 1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne - Shadow Diagrams.pdf
- 1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne - Render images.pdf
- 1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne - Landscape Plan.pdf
- 1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne - Clause 58 Assessment .pdf
- 1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne - BADS plans.pdf
- Design and development Overlay 23
- Port Phillip C104 Panel Report.pdf

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1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne Design Review Report – 10 December 2020

The City of Port Phillip requested an independent design review of the mixed-use proposal for 1-7 Waterfront Place, Port Melbourne by the Victorian Design Review Panel. We thank Elenberg Fraser and Tract for their presentation of the project, and the City of Port Phillip for attending the review. This is the first review of this scheme by the VDRP.

The site is a significant waterfront location and part of a cluster of buildings surrounding Station Pier forming a backdrop at the water entry to Melbourne. As a maritime gateway to the city, Station Pier provides a docking port for cruise ships and welcomed over 320,000 passengers and crew in 2018-2019.¹ Station Pier and the surrounding built form are the first glimpse of the city when landing, so there is a strong desire from the City of Port Phillip to ensure a compelling design and high quality public realm on this site. The site has been vacant for some time and has been the subject of several unsuccessful planning applications.

This proposal by Elenberg Fraser is a current planning application with the City of Port Phillip [490/2020], has recently completed the 'Request for Further Information' stage and is to begin advertising shortly.

The proposed form is a stepped 10 level building with 2 levels of basement carparking, a mix of uses on the ground level, pedestrian connections north-south and east-west through the site. It includes an annex building to the west corner facing Waterfront Place accommodating a ground level food and beverage area and upper level communal facilities. The scheme is considered generally consistent with the Design and Development Overlay for the site by respective authorities.

Summary issues

The proposal is a generally well-conceived design that is responsive to the site constraints and planning framework. This report aims to provide an overview of the VDRP discussion and issues raised in the review. A summary of key issues includes:

- The proposal is a coherent architectural idea and will fit comfortably into the waterfront setting.
- The western north-south link should achieve a more generous public space. This could be achieved through pulling the annex building eastward hard up against the central building.
- If the annex remains in its present location removing the air lock at ground level and achieving wind comfort in other ways should be considered.
- Finesse the annex building circulation core to enable a north facing opening and passive surveillance of the north-south link.
- Ground level facades should be finessed to support activity of the adjacent public spaces. Ensure a permeable edge or a smaller tenancy with direct access to the eastern corner.
- As a key requirement of the DDO the design of the western north-south link requires further design consideration to declutter the public realm, use surface materiality to signify a shared space and reduce the extent of canopy.
- While on neighbouring land, the removal of the Council leased and additional toilets is

¹ <https://www.vicports.vic.gov.au/cruise-shipping/Pages/cruise-shipping-statistics.aspx>

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supported. New public toilets could be incorporated in the proposal but might be best located on the foreshore.

- Further design development is needed for the public realm and landscape based upon the nature and hierarchy of public spaces and to increase the areas for deep soil planting.
- The massing and setback to the west are considered acceptable. The edge should be considered three-dimensionally however, with the proposed canopy and a façade strategy that addresses the challenges of the sun-exposed western orientation.
- A secondary layer of sun shading should be integrated into the proposal to improve internal environment quality for building occupants
- Methods and design detailing for dealing with salt build up across the extensive glazing are needed
- Further innovation is needed to achieve at least a 70% BESS rating

Building Scale and Massing

The 3-storey podium and mandatory 2 metre ground level setback achieves a pedestrian friendly interface to the waterfront. The upper levels are pushed away from the primary facade and are expressed more vertically to Beach Street, resulting in an abrupt transition to the lower scaled residential areas to the north. Pedestrian links through the site serve to break down the length of the Waterfront Place elevation into 3 segments and the proposal adopts the preferred tower separation of 10 metres between towers.

While a more traditional podium and tower form was tested through the planning panel for DDO 23, the proposed stepped and curved form responds well to Beach Street and Waterfront Place. There is some difference of opinion between proponents and authorities on the interpretation of the preferred western setback. The tower is set back 3 metres above the podium achieving a total of 8 metre setback of the tower from boundary. Given the podium is setback 5 metres to facilitate the north-south link, the massing at this interface is considered acceptable.

The massing minimises overshadowing of the waterfront and appears to be following the requirements of the DDO. Less overshadowing of the waterfront footpath would be preferable.

Response to the prescriptive envelope

The parameters of the Design and Development Overlay provide sound urban design aspirations such as; visual and physical permeability, protection from overshadowing, seeking a range of uses and dwelling types and an urban form that responds to the valued maritime heritage and character of the precinct. The proposal represents a well-conceived design that is generally responsive to the constraints of the site and aspirations of the planning framework. There are some aspects that need refinement through the next phases of design development.

Movement and key public spaces need further interrogation, definition and generosity. The proposed tram terminus in front of the heritage station building and existing pedestrian crossing on Waterfront Place create strong desire lines for movement along the west of the site. The ground level of the annex building provides undercroft seating which will signal this edge as safe and desirable.

Some of the public realm requires more generosity. For example, the journey through to Beach Street is compromised by the existing Council leased public toilet and bollards separating vehicle and pedestrian movement north-south. Underground easements are complicating the bollard

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placement, but this will not be discernible to pedestrians. A negotiated outcome with the adjacent landowner is required to align the bollards coherently away from the building edge or remove them entirely and use pavement material to denote a shared accessway.

While the design requirements of the DDO seek a 'direct' connection and clear line of sight for the laneway, the mandatory requirements are hindering a better urban design outcome in this particular case. Separating the annex building to achieve the direct line of sight while not actually aligning with any specific feature comes at the cost of a more generous north-south link and the need for a lobby as wind-break. The annex building also obstructs clear views of the Council public toilets from the bay side interface. There is a case for defining a 'direct' link based upon an origin and destination argument rather than a straight line, in support of shifting the annex building east and hard up against the central building so a kinked but more generous link aligns with the existing crossing point. Flow on benefits would allow more space for the café and facilities to open out to the tram stop; enlarging the perception of public space to the west along with less encroachment of built form into the Heritage Overlay.

Quality and character of the public spaces

Whilst the location of public spaces, connections and courtyard spaces is prescribed in the DDO the quality and purpose can be interpreted to greater effect. Consideration of what it feels like to walk and use these spaces is needed to establish public perceptions of use and ensure there is enough activation to ensure that the links through the site feel safe and are desirable public spaces. This design must work harder to achieve a better public experience.

The western north-south link's building edge is sub-optimal as a good public interface. The full height glazing extends along the length of the building edge including in front of the toilets. This is not practicable and techniques such as a plastic film on the glazing for privacy would be a poor outcome. A 1:50 scale elevation is required to interrogate fine grain detailing at street level and identify where an alternative edge detail can support the objectives for the public realm and provide depth and tactility to the façade.

The proposed canopy of the north-south pedestrian link is in part to mitigate the downward wind flows of the tower and in part for weather protection. The inclusion of a canopy changes the nature of the laneway where traditionally Melbourne laneways are not covered and prevents passive surveillance from dwellings above. Open to sky connections within an urban block improve legibility and reinforce a sense of publicness and this would be a preferable outcome if amenity impacts can be addressed through the building's design. The proposed 5-metre-wide canopy is also a considerable appendage to the building, a slimmer profile would work better with the proportions of the upper level slab projections.

More could be made of the north facing space in the elbow framed by the green wall and north-south link to develop place making and the experience of the space. While at present it is the back of house for the adjacent station building, with some vision the urban design within this proposal could be a catalyst for this small precinct's renewal. Uses and visibility of the space from within the annex should provide better surveillance and opportunities to open out to this north facing space. While outside of scope, we recommend removing the Council leased toilet block to improve sight lines and open the opportunity for the station building in the round, activating its rear and creating an attractive open space with generous solar access in the mid term. We support the provision of public toilets within the development but also for Council to provide a secondary block on the foreshore.

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To the east, the small pocket space to the roundabout is compromised by limited interaction with ground floor uses and the extensive paving. More could be made of this space to create a landscape moment off the movement spine, with deep soil plantings and less paving capitalising on the easterly aspect over the beach and water.

Building Program

The arrangement of the ground level is well designed to accommodate a range of uses and has capacity to adapt to other uses over time. The proposed uses offer building occupants and the broader precinct an appropriate mix that will improve the offer and activate this end of the promenade. The gym and emergency egress to the eastern edge is perhaps less desirable as an interface to the highly visible corner. Ensuring a visually permeable edge is critical and an alternate smaller tenancy with direct access to the corner might be a better outcome to support the public space.

It may not be commercially viable to have retail facing all public interfaces and on balance the art/gallery space and meeting rooms are acceptable uses facing less trafficable areas if there are other more active uses to balance this out.

Basement car parking is supported. The access arrangement via Beach Street and substation in the basement has limited the extent of infrastructure impacting the street level building edge. The proposed bookending the entrance with the retail and gallery spaces minimises the impact of car parking and building services on the public realm.

The urban form has produced some irregular shaped apartment layouts and some overly deep floor plans but generally the apartments appear to have acceptable layouts.

Architectural Expression

The architectural expression is resolved and works well in the maritime context reflecting the constraints of the site and location. The form has an air foil like quality achieving a contemporary nautical look. The curves are successful in breaking up the façade and could be used more on the west elevation. The high degree of glazing provides a lightness to the upper levels. As glazing areas are not easily accessible for cleaning, strategies are needed to address salt build up common in the coastal environment.

At the ground level solid sections could be included in the long building edge on Waterfront Place to better anchor the building to the ground and provide a more tactile interface.

We support the angling of the annex building – if maintained – at ground level to entice pedestrians through to Beach Street and provide sheltered outdoor dining.

The simple material palette of concrete and glazing applied across the form creates an enticing architectural composition.

Landscape and Vegetation

The proposed green roof areas soften the exposed lower areas, however access was not evident in the reviewed plans and needs to be provided though the next phase of design.

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The landscape architectural design is still developing. The intention and direction so far are sound although the extent of deep soil planting needs to be expanded to support a shaded and green pedestrian journey and design for a hierarchy of spaces.

Wind Impacts

The Port Melbourne weather can be variable, with the winds off the Port Phillip Bay harsh and impacting the amenity of the public realm. The wind tunnel testing illustrates the impact of the urban form on street level and balcony spaces many of which achieve only a walking criterion. Not including vegetation to mitigate the wind conditions is supported however we are concerned about the single aspect apartments facing into the building separation zone where wind conditions will be particularly impactful, we note that mid-level balconies did not appear to be specifically tested. It is also noted that the ground level east-west pedestrian link is advised not to be activated due to wind impacts. Accepting a walking criterion for courtyard- public spaces is a low bar if it is to be a genuine public space. We strongly encourage measures to achieve a seating criterion for at least one of the public spaces.

While accepting the lobby air lock may be required between the towers to mitigate ground level wind conditions, this has implications on the perception of publicness and accessibility. If alternative ways for wind mitigation could be found, it would be preferable to maintain this as an open link without the air lock while maintaining the bridge levels above.

Building Performance and Environmentally Sustainable Design

While the slab overhangs provide some shading, there is an opportunity to integrate operable screens or work a secondary layer of sun shading into the proposal to suit individual needs and to minimise excessive heat gain, particularly to the west. We suggest running the ESD modelling on hot days without the air conditioning system to test potential over-heating of west facing apartment spaces in case of power outages.

Given the extensive use of glazing the realities of the built outcome versus the renders must be managed. The ceiling heights will be lower than the slab projections and we question if the slab projections will achieve enough shading given the broad aspects to the north and west.

The water and energy strategy for the proposal should aim higher and we strongly suggest that a development of this prominence in Melbourne should achieve at least a 70% BESS rating, representing excellence rather than best practice.

This advice is to supplement the advice provided by City of Port Phillip in their negotiations with all parties. There may be both strategic and technical issues not raised in this letter that will require resolution.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this important project - we wish you all the best for the next stage of the project.



Stefan Preuss
Associate Government Architect

