

## 626 HEIDELBERG ROAD, ALPHINGTON THE VILLAGE, ALPHINGTON (AMCOR PAPER MILLS PRECINCT – STAGES 2A AND 2B)

Urban Design Referral

<b>Date</b>	15 March 2019
<b>Council reference</b>	PLN17/0703.01
<b>To</b>	Amy Hodgen
<b>From</b>	Mark Sheppard, David Lock Associates

### INTRODUCTION

This report assesses a s.72 application to amend the permit for the above site.

In undertaking this assessment, we have had regard to the following:

- The existing permit for the site, including the permit conditions;
- The application material, including architectural drawings, reports and RFI responses;
- The relevant provisions of the Yarra Planning Scheme and relevant Reference and Incorporated Documents (particularly the *Alphington Paper Mills Development Plan (2016)*);
- The relevant provisions of the Darebin Planning Scheme (insofar as they apply to the northern side of Heidelberg Road);
- The physical context of the subject site and wider area; and
- The emerging scale of approved and proposed development in proximity to the Amcor Precinct.

### ASSESSMENT

From an urban design perspective, there are three key aspects of the application that need to be considered:

- Building heights and setbacks
- Public realm interfaces
- Architectural quality

Therefore, the assessment below is organised under these headings.

#### Building heights and setbacks

The application seeks to amend the proposed built form in the following ways:

- Extend the community facility to the Heidelberg Road boundary and introduce a serviced apartment building above, reaching a total height of 8 storeys
- Increase the height of The Mill office building at the corner of Heidelberg Road and Mills Boulevard from 5 storeys to 6 storeys

- Increase the height of the school and childcare centre to 6 storeys

The Development Plan (DP) provides for a height of 6-8 storeys in this area. Therefore, the proposed height increases conform with the DP.

The DP prefers a street wall height of 6 storeys in Precinct 2B, with levels above set back at least 2.2m from the street edge. The proposed serviced apartment building has a street wall of 8 storeys, exceeding the 6 levels preferred by the DP. However, this is considered to be acceptable because setting back the upper two floors 2.2m would achieve little in terms of the visual presence of the overall family of buildings given the substantial width of Heidelberg Road and the scale of the neighbouring buildings. Further, it is considered that setting back the upper levels would detract from the coherent architectural quality of the building as a singular form. The perspective images demonstrate that the proposed serviced apartment building form will contribute to an effective transition in scale between its neighbours, as sought by the DP.

The slightly increased height of The Mill building will reinforce the gateway location of this intersection, as identified in the DP (to be marked with *“more visually prominent built form”*), without compromising the stepping down in scale sought by the DP from the landmark building at the corner of Chandler Highway and Heidelberg Road.

Together, the three buildings fronting Heidelberg Road will provide an appropriate ‘urban’ scale for framing this wide arterial road. Although they represent greater consistency in height than the current permit, they will still create a varied and interesting composition as sought by the DP.

Levels 3 and 4 of the ‘Urban Anchor’ building have been set back 2.2m from the western edge of the podium, in accordance with the presumed intent of condition 1(a). Above that, the building marginally encroaches beyond the western edge of the podium. However, this encroachment is substantially less than that to which condition 1(b) applies. It is considered that this minor encroachment is acceptable.

In summary, it is considered that the proposed amendments to the approved building heights and setbacks respond appropriately to the DP and the conditions that form part of the current permit.

## Public realm interfaces

The DP seeks to *“Ensure street level interface treatments contribute to high levels of pedestrian amenity and safety”*. Guidelines include:

- *Habitable uses such as commercial or residential uses should generally be provided as an interface to the public realm to provide visual activation to the built edge.*
- *Habitable uses should preferably be provided at all levels of the interface, with an outlook oriented towards the public realm to encourage passive surveillance.*

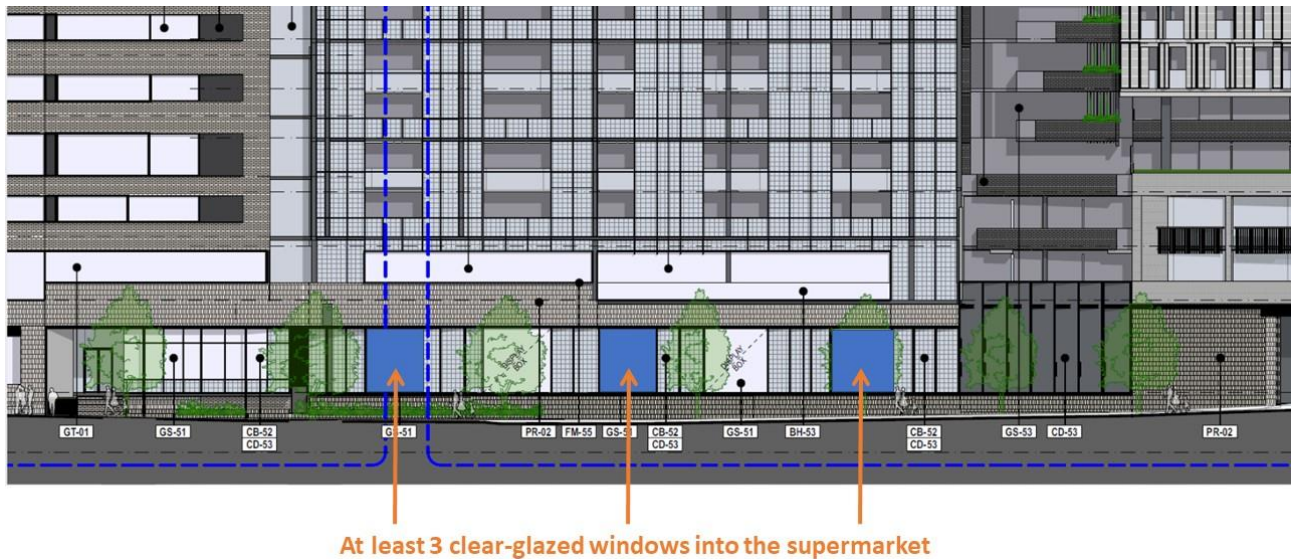
### *Supermarket frontage to Heidelberg Road*

The DP requires that *“Where retail or hospitality uses are provided the interface should provide strong visual connections between public and private spaces through glazed shopfronts or entries.”* Accordingly, condition 1(c) requires *“Full height glazing along the Heidelberg frontage to the supermarket”*.

The amended permit proposal has a completely redesigned supermarket façade to Heidelberg Road, including substantially more ‘full height glazing’. However, all but one of these windows is to a display box, or comprises glass blocks, which will not provide visual connectivity. It is not considered that this meets the intent of condition 1(c) or the DP.

However, it is recognised that developing a supermarket with a fully-glazed external wall is challenging. Therefore, it is recommended that permit condition 1(c) be retained but changed to require at least 3 of the five proposed full-height windows to provide a clear view into the supermarket, with the window

dimensions generally retained and the clear windows distributed relatively evenly along the supermarket wall.



*Extract of North Elevation showing recommended additional clear windows to supermarket*

Three small raised planters are proposed on the Heidelberg Road frontage, generally around the serviced apartment lobby. It is queried whether this is a sufficiently robust form of landscaping in this main road environment. More detail should be sought to understand the merits of this landscaping and its maintenance.

Similarly, the value of the terrace in front of the shop at the base of The Mill building is queried. Who would occupy this space given the nature of Heidelberg Road? More detail should be sought on the likely use of the space, or it could simply be reverted to more shop space.

### *Circle Mews*

The DP seeks to “Ensure that above ground parking is suitably concealed by appropriate building features such as active podium frontages”. Guidelines include:

- *The interfaces to laneways, private roads and privately owned publicly accessible spaces will generally have a lower level of activation compared to the public realm interface. The details here will be determined in relation to the specific site context and design response.*

Accordingly, condition 1(f) requires “The podium carpark be sleeved with apartments for the full length of the Outer Circle Mews, apart from the area accommodating the stairwell”.

The proposed podium layout adjacent to Outer Circle Mews has improved activation compared with the plans that were the subject of the current permit, particularly at the corner with Nelmoore Lane at Ground Floor, and at Levels 1 and 2.

However, condition 1(f) is not achieved. In particular, there are two significant sections of Outer Circle Mews that are not sleeved at Levels 1 and 2.

The activation provided by apartment sleeving is of considerably greater value at Level 1 than Level 2, due to its greater proximity to pedestrians in the lane. Therefore, it is recommended that at least some of the apartment floor area facing Outer Circle Mews at Level 2 be relocated to Level 1, to improve activation while maintaining the number of car parking spaces. For example:

- Relocate the 1-bedroom apartment at Level 1 to just north of the 'Living Matrix' core.
- Relocate the 2-bedroom apartment at Level 2 to Level 1 just south of the 'Urban Anchor' core, wrapping around the back of the lift to the podium-top open space.



*Extracts of Level 1 Plan and detailed Outer Circle Mews podium elevation showing potential location of additional apartments to activate the lane*

In order to achieve this, condition 1(f) could be retained but amended to limit the requirement to the majority of the length of Level 1.

### **Mills Boulevard**

Mills Boulevard is the only north-south connector street through the whole Amcor development, providing a key access route from Heidelberg Road to the heart of the new community. Therefore, the quality of its public realm is particularly important.

As a result of the reconfiguration of the Lower Ground and Ground Floor accommodation, the activation of Mills Boulevard near its intersection with Nelmoore Lane has been lessened. In particular, the Lower Ground Floor frontage to Mills Boulevard between the shop at the corner and the southern stair to the Village Square, which is largely above footpath level, is largely occupied by 'back of house' functions, (including the bicycle store, car park and services), and clad in black powdercoated steel sheeting or louvred screens. In the approved proposal, this frontage was occupied by a commercial gym.



South of the bicycle store is a stair and DDA lift to the lobby to the commercial office and gym at Ground Floor. The Lower Ground Floor level of the commercial core matches the footpath level in Mills Boulevard part-way along the eastern edge of the shop. Therefore, the commercial lobby could be relocated to Lower Ground Floor, with a level entry from Mills Boulevard, avoiding the need for a stair or lift. This would provide much improved activation of the street.

HER DETAIL

1

Loi

Commercial Lobby

FIRE BOOSTER

MECH RISER

10 x VISITOR/PUB FLOOR MOUNTED FL

Fire escape stairs

Clear-glaze openings to bicycle store

118 x VIS 61 x MEY 27 x MEY 10 x CL 4 x EB

*Extract of Lower Ground Floor plan showing recommended improvements to Mills Boulevard activation*

*Nelmoore Lane*

The activation of the eastern end of Nelmoore Lane at Level 1 has been lessened. This is an important location given that it faces the widened space at the intersection of Nelmoore Lane and Mills Boulevard.

Therefore, a condition should be imposed on any permit requiring the gym to be extended along the full length of the east-west section of Nelmoore Lane at Level 1. If necessary, some car parking could be made up by deleting the 1-bedroom apartment facing Outer Circle Mews at Level 2.



*Extract of Level 1 plan showing recommended extension of gym to activate Nelmoore Lane*

### Architectural quality

The DP requires development to “achieve a high quality architectural response”, “demonstrate sufficient articulation to avoid blank, long and continuous facades” and “collectively form a coherent and identifiable precinct”. It also calls for design to “seek opportunities to introduce breaks in the overall form and to establish street rhythms”, and encourages:

- “modulated building forms with vertical and horizontal breaks in the massing”,
- the avoidance of “flat or continuous facades that (a) repeat the same form without variation, or (b) create a single horizontal form”, and
- “building mass to be broken into multiple buildings with individual expression”.

The quality of the architectural expression of the proposed buildings is generally high. There is a clear and bespoke design intent behind each building, which will give them an individual identity, while the use of thematic materials will tie them together into a coherent precinct. Various façade articulation devices have been employed which will provide a high level of visual interest.

The proposed façade design and materials generally represent an improved response to the DP compared with the approved proposal. In particular:

- The ‘rhythm’ and use of brickwork in the ‘Urban Anchor’ podium frontage to Heidelberg Road responds better to the DP.
- The introduction of vertical elements in the façade of the Machinery Hall building, while not required by the permit conditions, are an improved response to the aspirations of the DP.
- The architectural treatment of the western and southern edges of the podium car park has been substantially improved, with metal battens replaced by a masonry wall clad in brick snaps and with punched openings, achieving the ‘street rhythm’ sought by the DP.

The proposed materials largely reflect the industrial heritage of the site, but have been used in a contemporary manner.

Condition 1(d) requires “Decorative screens to the western portion of the northern façade associated with the Urban Anchor applied more irregularly and with variation in sizes, including operability to sections”. This condition is met by the proposal.

Condition 1(k) requires (among other things):

- (iii) Replacement of the decorative precast concrete cladding with a higher quality material and finish;

- (iv) More subdued colour finish applied to the Living Matrix screen, such as copper or bronze;
- (v) Brick snap cladding (PR-53) to the eastern side of the Urban Anchor be finished in a brown shade similar to shown on the perspective;
- (vi) Material FM-53 within the western portion of the urban Anchor to be a single cream colour.

Condition 1(k) (iv) has not been met, so this condition should be retained.

It is considered that PR-56 (concrete with formliner), which has replaced the decorative precast concrete material, should be replaced with PR-51 (midnight blue, stretcher bond, brick snaps) on the podium frontage to Nelmoore Lane, consistent with the Outer Circle Mews podium frontage.

The remaining two conditions are no longer relevant.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the application to amend the permit is generally supported from an urban design perspective. The proposed building forms and architectural quality are an appropriate response to the DP and, in some cases, represent an improvement to the original permit.

However, further work is required to improve the activation of the public realm. In particular, it is recommended that:

- Permit condition 1(c) be retained but changed to require at least 3 of the five proposed full-height windows to provide a clear view into the supermarket, with the window dimensions generally retained and the clear windows distributed relatively evenly along the supermarket wall.
- Condition 1(f) be retained but changed to limit the requirement to the majority of the length of Level 1.
- The openings to the bicycle store at Lower Ground Level fronting Mills Boulevard be clear-glazed.
- The commercial lobby on Mills Boulevard be relocated to Lower Ground Floor, with a direct entry from Mills Boulevard.
- The gym be extended along the full length of the east-west section of Nelmoore Lane at Level 1. (If necessary, some car parking could be made up by deleting the 1-bedroom apartment facing Outer Circle Mews at Level 2.)

More detail is also sought in relation to the following aspects of the design on the Heidelberg Road frontage, given its 'robust' main road nature:

- The design and proposed maintenance regime of the three small raised planters generally around the serviced apartment lobby, to determine whether this is a sufficiently robust form of landscaping.
- The proposed use of the terrace in front of the shop at the base of The Mill building, to determine its value compared with a more direct shop frontage.

In relation to materials:

- Condition 1(k) (iv) should be retained.
- Condition 1(k) (iii) should be retained but amended to require the replacement of PR-56 (concrete with formliner) with PR-51 (midnight blue, stretcher bond, brick snaps) on the podium frontage to Nelmoore Lane.
- Conditions 1(k) (v) and (vi) are no longer relevant.

**Mark Sheppard**

Principal