

# 81 Latrobe Avenue, Alphington / Urban Design Referral

<b>Council Reference</b>	PLN19/0841
<b>To</b>	Amy Hodgen - Senior Coordinator - Statutory Planning
<b>From</b>	Mark Sheppard - Principal

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In May 2020, City of Yarra requested that **kinetica** undertake an urban design assessment of a proposed development at 81 Latrobe Avenue, Alphington (the Site) based upon the RFI plans prepared by DKO Architecture and dated 21 February 2020.

I consider that the key urban design matters raised by this proposal are:

- Site layout;
- Overall height;
- Streetwall;
- Public realm interfaces; and
- Facade design detail.

Therefore, this referral is organised under these headings.

## 2.0 ASSESSMENT

### Site layout

Clause 21.05 and DPO11 seek to enhance the public domain and promote urban legibility and public access to and through the Site. Further, the Development Plan specifies that a Pedestrian Priority Route is to run through the middle of the Site. This route is also intended to establish a Significant View Line to the north to Heidelberg Road, and to the south through the Paper Trail link.



The proposal incorporates distinct buildings on each of the four corners of the Site, with three of the buildings abutting each other. The buildings have been sited and configured to maximise internal amenity through good separation, orientation away from each other where they are closest, and the provision of communal open spaces at upper levels.

At ground level a large publicly accessible communal courtyard is proposed at the centre of the Site. A publicly accessible pedestrian link dissects the Site and the courtyard, in a generally north-south alignment, allowing connectivity through the Site. A small pedestrian link with stairs is also proposed at the north east corner of the Site to provide connectivity with Precinct 3B to the east.

The proposed site layout, including pedestrian link and central courtyard, will provide good public amenity and usability through seating, platforms and landscaping, including in raised planters. The level changes within the link and central courtyard have also been appropriately dealt with using ramps and steps.

The proposed pedestrian link is generally consistent with the alignment sought in the Development Plan and will allow for permeability through the Site.

The link is open to the sky at the northern end between Building A and Building D, and is covered at the southern end in the form of an opening through Building B. I consider that the one and a half level high entrance to the pedestrian link at the Mills Boulevard frontage will appropriately promote urban legibility and allow for a view line to the central courtyard.

Looking south from the courtyard, the pedestrian link will provide an appropriate view line to the Paper Trail link. To the north there will be an appropriate view line to the link through Precinct 2A.

In summary, I consider the site layout to be generally in line with the Development Plan and appropriate to the context.

### **Overall height**

DPO11 and the Development Plan outline a 5 storey preferred maximum height for the Site. The south west corner of the Site is also nominated as a gateway, where a more prominent built form response is sought. Further, a transition in the scale and intensity of buildings is sought, especially along Chandler Highway from north to south.

This is consistent with Clause 21.05, which outlines that development on strategic redevelopment sites should generally be no more than 5-6 storeys unless it can be demonstrated that the proposal can achieve specific benefits, which of relevance include significant upper level setbacks and/or architectural design excellence.



Additionally, building heights are required to consider overshadowing effects within the Site and on adjoining land, including allowing solar access to key open spaces.

The land to the north of the Site is Precinct 2A which has a preferred maximum height of 14 storeys, with a landmark built form sought at the corner of Heidelberg Road and Chandler Highway. A development is approved on this land ranging in height from 13 to 17 storeys, with the tallest form marking the aforementioned intersection.

East of the Site is Precinct 3B which has a preferred maximum height of 3 to 4 storeys. A development is approved on this land with a height of 4 storeys.

South of the Site is Precinct 6 which has a preferred maximum height of 5 storeys. The northern interface of this land is nominated as a gateway, where a more prominent built form response is sought. A permit application has been lodged for this land. However, it has not yet been determined.

The proposed development exceeds the preferred maximum height of 5 storeys in each of the four buildings:

- Building A, at the north west corner of the Site along Chandler Highway, is 12 storeys;
- Building B, at the south west corner of the Site along Chandler Highway, is 9 storeys;
- Building C, at the south east corner of the Site along Mills Boulevard, is 6 storeys; and
- Building D, at the north east corner of the Site, is 9 storeys.

The Development Plan and DPO11 height provisions are discretionary. This indicates that there may be circumstances in which greater height is appropriate.

I consider that the most relevant planning provisions against which to assess an application for greater height are the DPO11 and Development Plan aspirations for a transition across the Site, a gateway at the south west corner, and solar access to key open spaces.

Further, the strategy in Clause 21.05 that seeks benefits to justify exceeding heights of 5-6 storeys is also relevant. One suggested benefit is quality of architectural design, which will be reviewed in the façade design detail section of this referral.

The emerging built form character should also be considered when assessing an application for greater height.

I consider that when contemplating the proposed overall heights along Chandler Highway, Building A and Building B would not contribute to an appropriately graduated built form



transition from north to south based on the approved heights to the north and the preferred maximum 5 storey height to the south.

In this context, a height of 10 storeys for Building A and 7 storeys for Building B would be a more appropriate response that reflects the intent for a transition, whilst also marking the gateway opportunity at the south west corner of the Site, as is illustrated below.



Figure 1 – Built form transition from north to south along Chandler Highway with a reduction in height of two levels to both Building A and Building B, and Level 8 deleted on Building D (Source: Elenberg Fraser with annotations)

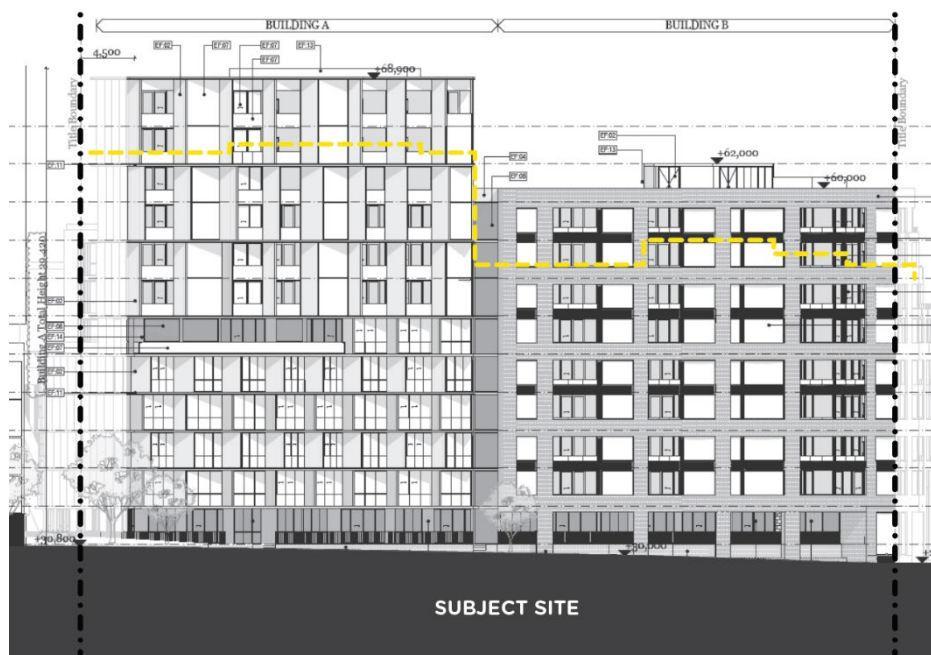


Figure 2 – West elevation showing two levels removed from both Building A and Building B (Source: DKO Architecture with annotations)



Similarly, in order to provide an appropriate transition from north to south on the east side of the Site, it is recommended that the two southern most apartments of Level 7 of Building D should be deleted, as well as Level 8, as illustrated below.

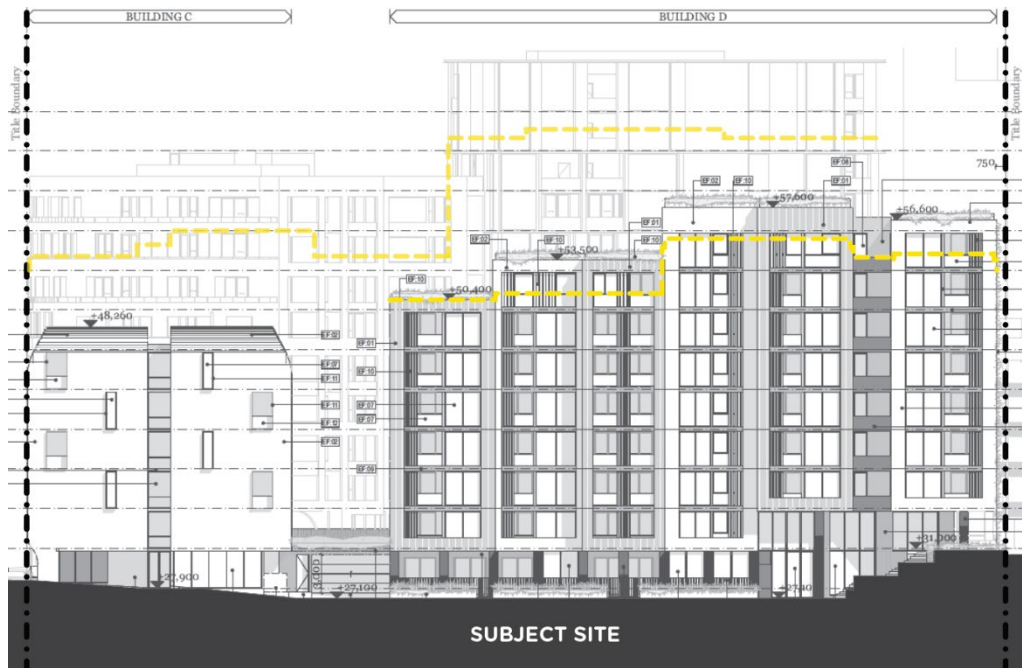


Figure 3 - East elevation showing the two southern most apartments of Level 7 and Level 8 deleted on Building D, with Building A and Building B in the background (Source: DKO Architecture with annotations)

The recommended changes to Building D will ensure the proposal steps down more appropriately to the 6 storey form of Building C. I consider the height of Building C to be appropriate as, given the levels of the Site, it will be predominantly perceived as a 5 storey form from all views except the east.

The recommended reduction in height of Building A, Building B and Building D will also result in a more appropriately graduated transition from west to east across the Site and to the 4 storey approved forms in Precinct 3B, as illustrated below.

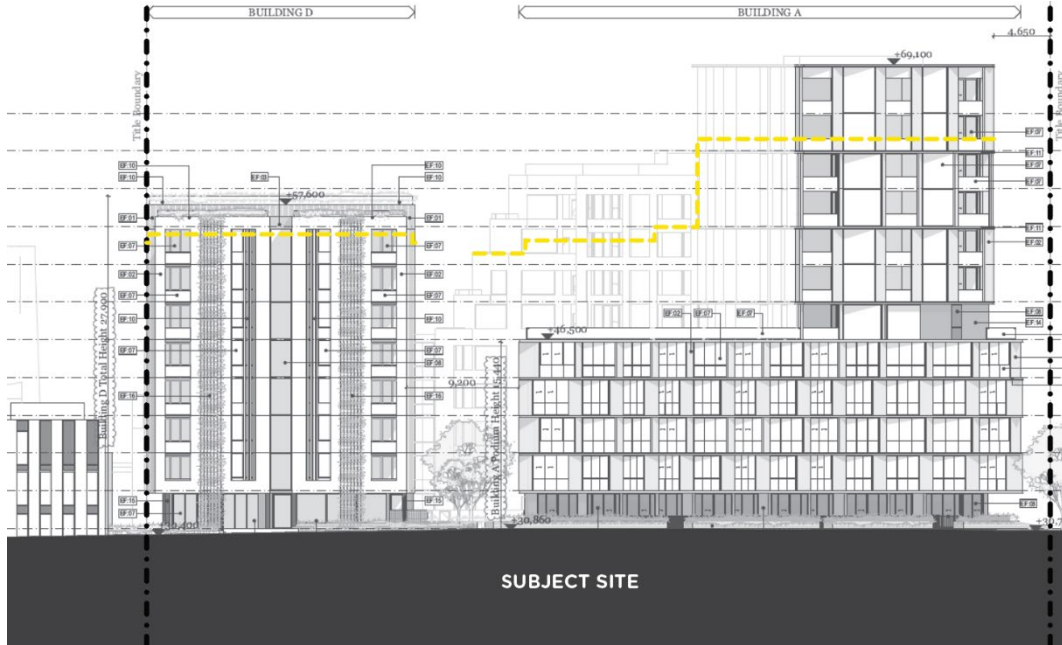


Figure 4 - North elevation showing a reduction in height of two levels to Building A and deletion of Level 8 on Building D, with Building B in the background (Source: DKO Architecture with annotations)

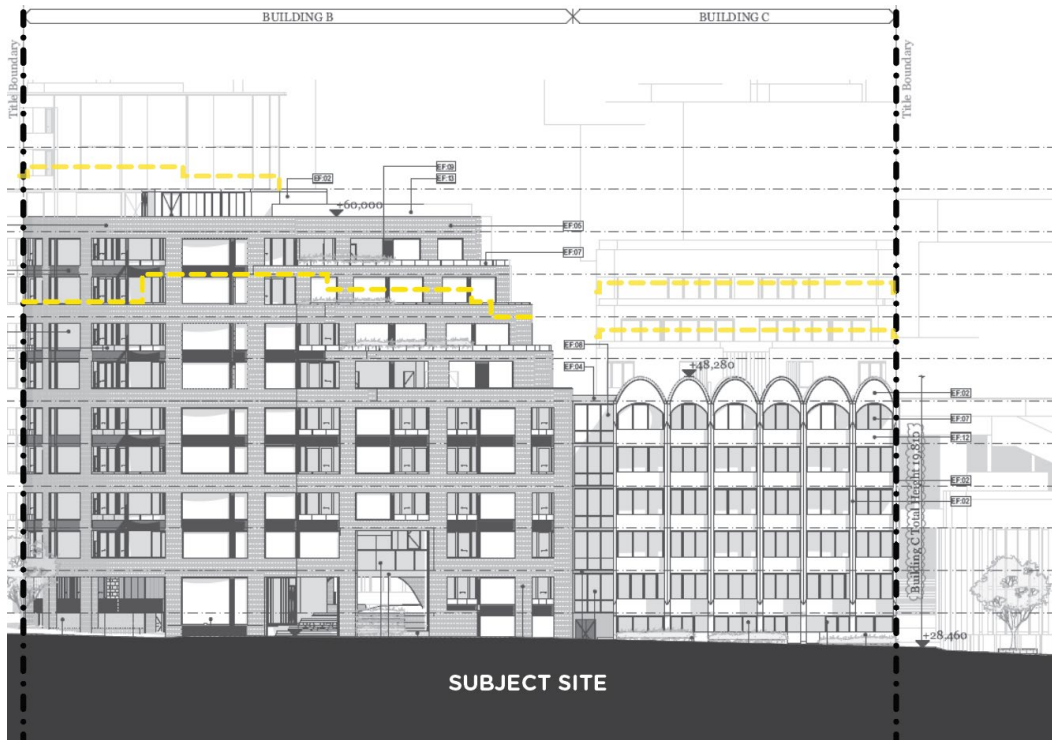


Figure 5 - South elevation showing a reduction in height of two levels to Building B and deletion of the two southern most apartments of Level 7 and deletion of Level 8 on Building D, with Building A in the background (Source: DKO Architecture with annotations)



The proposal meets the Development Plan objective to generally provide for solar access to the southern footpath adjacent to Precinct 5 between 11am and 2pm at the September equinox. However, importantly, a reduction in the building heights as recommended above will reduce the extent of overshadowing caused by the development on communal open spaces on the Site and adjoining it to the east.

With the recommended changes above, the proposed overall building heights will be generally consistent with DPO11 and the Development Plan.

### **Streetwall**

DPO11 and the Development Plan outline a 3 storey preferred maximum streetwall for the Site. The Development Plan further outlines that the streetwall is to have a 0m setback, with upper levels to be setback at least 2.2m.

The proposal does not adopt a typical streetwall and recessed upper form typology. Building B is proposed to be constructed on both street boundaries, with Level 6 to Level 9 peeling away floor by floor from the east. The resulting streetwall exceeds that preferred by the DPO and Development Plan. However, I consider that with the deletion of Level 8 and Level 9, the proposal will be an appropriate response to the aspiration for a gateway at the corner, while stepping down and transitioning effectively to the east.

Building A is also proposed to be constructed on the street boundary, with the northern portion of the building angling away from the boundary from Level 6 to Level 12. This chamfer will appropriately differentiate the upper form from the lower and, combined with the recommended deletion of Level 11 and Level 12, will ensure that the upper form is experienced as distinct from the lower levels. This will result in an appropriate visual outcome to the Chandler Highway interface. I consider the height of the streetwall to be an acceptable response given the non-sensitive nature of Chandler Highway, and the context of the tall street wall heights approved to the north in Precinct 2A.

Building C is proposed to be constructed on the street boundary for five and a half levels. I consider this to be an appropriate response to the context as it will contribute to the transition in streetwall heights from east to west.

In summary, I consider that the lack of typical streetwalls within the development has been overcome through appropriate design methods such as chamfering and the stepping down of upper form. In this regard, I consider the proposed forms to be generally in line with DPO11 and the Development Plan.



## **Public realm interfaces**

DPO11 and the Development Plan seek to ensure that street level interface treatments contribute to high levels of pedestrian amenity and safety, with habitable uses facing the public realm.

The proposal incorporates apartments fronting all public realm interfaces, including the street network, pedestrian links, and the central courtyard, enhancing their safety through passive surveillance. The privacy of the ground level apartments is assured through floor levels raised above external levels. There is also proposed to be clear delineation between the private and the public realm through the use of low fences and gates.

However, I have concerns about the subterranean nature of the Ground Floor dwellings of Building C. I recommend swapping the Ground Floor and Level 1 of Apartments CG.01-CG.03 in order to improve the potential for street activation.

In summary, apart from the recommendation above, the proposed public realm interfaces are appropriate and are generally consistent with the vision of DPO11 and the Development Plan.

## **Facade design detail**

DPO11 and the Development Plan seek well articulated facades and natural or recessive materials, in order to manage and avoid long, continuous and visually dominant buildings.

The proposal for four distinct buildings with different designs and façade treatments is an effective way of breaking up the massing on the Site, and creating an individual identity for each building.

Building A incorporates strong horizontal articulation through the emphasis of the slab edges, with verticality expressed through angled light grey concrete partitions. The pairing of the upper levels which have been chamfered also effectively distinguishes the upper levels from the lower form.

The curvilinear form of Building B will effectively mark the entrance to Mills Boulevard and the predominant use of light grey brick distinguishes this form from the rest of the proposal. The use of charcoal coloured metal banding appropriately provides for additional horizontal articulation.

Building C is proposed to be predominantly finished in light grey concrete and to incorporate strong vertical articulation through the use of columns within the front façade. The design is rounded out through the use of arched elements at the top of the façade, which will effectively differentiate the building from the others on the Site.





Building A, Building B and Building C are joined by recessed elements, which are comprised of grey glazing and dark concrete. The darker tone of these recessed elements will help to visually separate the buildings to either side.

Building D incorporates strong vertical articulation through the recessing of sections of the façade and the effective use of different finishes in different sections, including light grey concrete, natural concrete and textured concrete

In summary, I consider the facade design detail of all of the buildings to be of a high quality and to represent architectural design excellence.

### **3.0 SUMMARY**

In summary, the overall site layout, design of streetwalls, public realm interfaces, and facade design detail is generally supported. However, the following changes are recommended, especially regarding the overall height of three of the buildings, for the proposal to be acceptable from an urban design perspective:

- **Delete Level 11 and Level 12 of Building A.**
- **Delete Level 8 and Level 9 of Building B.**
- **Delete the two southern most apartments of Level 7 and Level 8 of Building D.**
- **Swap Ground Floor and Level 1 of Apartments CG.01-CG.03 in Building C.**

**Mark Sheppard, Principal**