
TO: Nish Goonetilleke (Statutory Planning)
FROM: Amruta Pandhe (Urban Design)
DATE: 15 July 2020
SUBJECT: 25 Balmain Street & 128-134 Cubitt Street & Laneway, Cremorne
APPLICATION NO: PLN20/0037
DESCRIPTION: Construction of a six-storey building, use of the land as a food and drink premises (cafe) and as-of-right office, including associated reduction in the car parking requirements

COMMENTS SOUGHT

Urban Design comments have been sought on:

- Whether the height and setbacks/massing are acceptable with the policy and physical context
 - Whether the materials and finishes are acceptable with the policy and physical context
 - Any other matters that are relevant in your view
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These set of comments are provided on the plans prepared by JCB Architects dated 4 March 2020.

COMMENTS SUMMARY

The proposal is not supported in its current form. In summary, the following changes are recommended to make the proposal more acceptable from an urban design perspective. The rationale behind these changes is explained in more detail overleaf.

- The overall height is not acceptable in response to the local character of the area. It is recommended to remove Level 5 from the overall development.
- There are concerns regarding lack of articulation along Balmain Street frontage as it does not contribute positively to the fine grain character of the street.
- Provision of landscaping within the building is highly supported and contributes majorly in reducing the visual bulk, however, there are concerns regarding the usability and accessibility of the balconies.
- Reduce the dominance of large portion of blank wall along north and west elevations.
- The material palette does not respond to the context and needs to be reconsidered.
- The setting back of building on ground floor to provide pedestrian circulation is highly supported, however, it is important to provide a clear delineation between public and private land.
- Ground floor presentation to Cubitt Street is supported.
- Balmain Street ground floor frontage is dominated with services and garage doors and hence is not supported.
- There are concerns regarding spacing between the bicycle hoops along Balmain Street frontage.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The development proposes construction of a six storey development incorporating cafe on ground floor and offices in the levels above.

The proposal provides main pedestrian entries from Cubitt Street and vehicular and bicycle entries from Balmain Street.

URBAN DESIGN FEEDBACK

- **Height, Setbacks and Massing**

Clause 22.10 seeks development to positively respond to the context and respect the scale and form of the surrounding development where this is a valued feature of the neighbourhood character. It also seeks to ensure that new development makes a positive contribution to the streetscape, and limit the impact of new development on the amenity of surrounding land. The subject site sits within Cremorne Mixed Commercial precinct of the Swan Street Structure Plan where the preferred height is nominated as four storeys or 13-16m with a lower scale streetwall. It is acknowledged that structure plan is not an adopted document.

The subject site is located on corner of Balmain Street and Cubitt Street with some recent developments happening along both streets. Balmain Street predominantly presents a fine grain character with the north side of the street consisting a mix character ranging with predominantly 1-2 storey built form and few new developments comprising 3-4 storey form. The southern side of Balmain Street consists of predominantly 1-2 storey fine grain residential and three storey dwellings towards the western end of the street. Cubitt Street contains a medium grain character with 2-4 storey developments and a slightly stronger streetwall pattern. Hence overall it appears that the prevailing maximum height in the immediate context is of 4 storeys. Cremorne in general will be changing in character with the number of recent planning applications including the approved 7 storey development on the Rosella site (57 Balmain Street). However, the Rosella site presents different surrounding context which allows it to accommodate a higher form and most of the other sites do not have immediate proximity to lower scaled residential properties.

The subject site is within commercial zone (C2Z) and the properties on south of Balmain Street are within residential zone which have potential to develop to a maximum height of three storeys. On the other side of Cubitt Street the one and two storey buildings are within heritage overlay and do not present much development potential. Hence the intersection of Balmain Street and Cubitt Street will have predominantly lower scale built form. The subject site is located on corner making it more visible from the surrounding area. Hence it is important that any new development does not dominate the corner.

The above analysis clearly demonstrates that a six storey form on the subject site will overwhelm the street character and hence is not acceptable. It is recommended to reduce the overall height of the development by at least one level. This means Level 05 should be removed. Even though a five storey development will dominate the street character it will provide an appropriate balance between the existing context and the changing character of Cremorne. Also the large site area provides an opportunity to reduce the dominance of upper levels.

The proposal presents a streetwall of three storey along Balmain Street which is an acceptable outcome. The development presents a six storey streetwall along Cubitt Street with upper levels consisting 1.5m deep balconies. A five storey streetwall is unacceptable in Cubitt Street context but the provision of balconies and landscaping gives more depth to the built form making the streetwall height more acceptable. The provision of landscaping will provide some relief from the hard edge character and is highly supported. It will also contribute in reducing the dominance of the built form and makes it visually interesting.

Provision of balconies on the upper level will provide passive surveillance along Cubitt Street. However, the usability and accessibility of these balconies are doubtful. The balconies are only 1.5m deep and the provision of landscaping does not leave enough usable space. The design will benefit by ensuring at least 1.5m usable space is provided within the balcony (excluding the landscaping area). Please take advice from Open Space Planning and Design team regarding the proposed landscaping.

The overall architecture of the form does not respond to the streetscape character, particularly the fine grain character of Balmain Street. There is lack of articulation along Balmain Street to break the length of the façade which is unacceptable. Further, the large expanses of blank wall along north and west facades will make the form appear more bulky from street views. It is understood that these are provided to ensure equitable development opportunities of adjacent sites but till those sites are developed these walls will be very visible from the surrounding areas. The ribbed texture concrete might make some contribution, however, it is recommended to provide some level of articulation or design or texture on these blank walls so the development does not detract from the fine grain character of the streetscape when viewed from oblique views.

- **Material and Colour**

Clause 22.10 seeks that developments use massing or articulation or changes of surface treatment or a combination of these, to relate taller buildings to the scale of their surrounds, and to diminish visual bulk. It seeks new development to use sympathetic materials and finishes to ensure new development positively responds to the context.

The overall architecture of the building presents a bulky form and does not reflect the complex character of Cremorne. The proposal currently uses metal cladding along Balmain Street which further contributes in making the form appear bulky. Cubitt Street façade is dominated with glazing and fibre cement cladding which do not respond appropriately to the context either. Hence it is recommended to reconsider the material palette as it does not contribute positively to the character of the street.

- **Ground Level Interface**

Clause 21.05 seeks new development to make a positive contribution to the enhancement of the public domain. Existing footpath in front of the subject site is only 1-1.5m wide. Hence, the provision of 1.5m setback along both street frontages is highly supported. The provision of café frontage and lobby entrance area along Cubitt Street is highly supported.

More than half of the Balmain Street frontage still presents a blank wall and is dominated by service areas and garage doors. Balmain Street is an important pedestrian thoroughfare in Cremorne and hence it is important to provide an engaging and active frontage along this street. Hence, the ground floor frontage along Balmain Street is still not acceptable. It is recommended to provide a more active frontage. This can be achieved by providing an underground car park and lowering the substation to the basement level.

There are two bike hoops proposed along Balmain Street frontage. Considering that bike hoops need a 1metre by 1.8metre clearance box around them (to allow enough space for parked bikes, the provision of two hoops so close to each other will create pinch points both along the building and for bikes. It is recommended to explore providing one more bicycle hoop along Cubitt Street frontage.

- **Pavement**

The proposed pavers within the Council land along both footpaths are not supported. All pavements along Balmain Street and Cubitt Street are to be reinstated as asphalt footpaths with concrete kerbs and channels for the full length of the site as per *City of Yarra's Infrastructure – Road Materials Policy*. All redundant vehicle crossovers are to be demolished. Proposed kerbs and channels and vehicle crossovers to be shown on drawings and reinstated as per *Yarra Standard Drawings*.

All proposed paving in the pedestrian walkways must be compliant with Australian Standards for slip resistance and DDA.

The drawings need to provide more information and/or clarification about:

- Confirm delineation between public and private land. There needs to be a clear distinction between public and private realm along both street.
- Show location of all existing infrastructure on footpath like electricity pole, parking signs, street name sign. If any of this infrastructure is proposed to be relocated show the proposed new locations.

- Provide additional spot levels on the plan to clarify the height differences between the footpath and paving. We would expect a seamless transition between the footpath and paving, with any height differences resolved through grading of the paving to ensure no steps will be required.

- **Street Tree Planting**

Balmain Street and Cubitt Street have been identified to be planted as part of Council's street tree planting program. Hence, it is recommended to plant a roadside tree on Balmain Street in the no standing area near the intersection of Balmain Street and Cubitt Street. Currently there are no street planting opportunities along Cubitt Street in front of the subject site.

The applicant is requested to contribute to the cost of planting one (1) new street tree, which would cover tree sourcing, planting and 2 years of maintenance. The total cost for the trees would be \$1,037.

Council's tree planting contractor will source and plant the street tree. However, please keep Council updated as the project progresses so when the plans are approved Council can ensure trees are placed on order in time for completion.