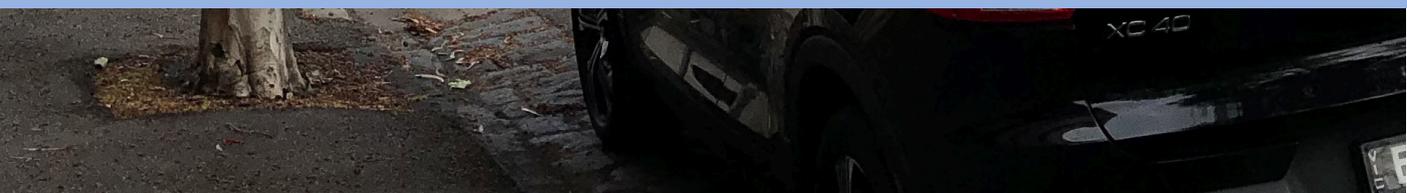




**32-68 Mollison Street, Abbotsford  
Urban Design Peer Review**

**Prepared for the Yarra City Council**  
October 2019



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**Hodgyl+Co**

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October 2019  
Version A

32-68 Mollison Street, Abbotsford | Hodyl + Co

# Contents

Introduction	4
Site and context	6
Part A: Indicative Development Review	8
Part B: Planning Scheme Amendment Recommendations	14

# Introduction

- 1) In September 2019 I was engaged by the Yarra City Council to provide an independent peer review of a proponent-led Planning Scheme Amendment request for 32-68 Mollison Street Abbotsford.
- 2) The site was previously subject to a proponent-led Planning Scheme Amendment (C170) in 2013 that rezoned the site from Industrial 1 Zone to Business 3 Zone and applied an Incorporated Plan Overlay Schedule and an Environmental Audit Overlay to the site.
- 3) The purpose of the Incorporated Plan Overlay (see Figure 1) was to facilitate the use and development of the land at 32-68 Mollison Street for office, commercial and other compatible uses.
- 4) The Incorporated Plan Overlay included the following key provisions -
  - » A mandatory maximum height of 23 metres (5 storeys), the management of the northern interface to provide for continued industrial purposes, a building setback above the parapet of 2m, and a preferred vehicle entry/exit identified on Mollison Street and Victoria Crescent.
  - » The current Planning Scheme Amendment requests an increase in the permitted maximum height from five to seven storeys.
  - » An existing planning permit applies to the site (PLN17/0679) that permits a five storey office building with two levels of basement parking.
  - » The planning permit applies to the area within the Incorporated Plan Overlay and a site to the north-east (10 Victoria Street).

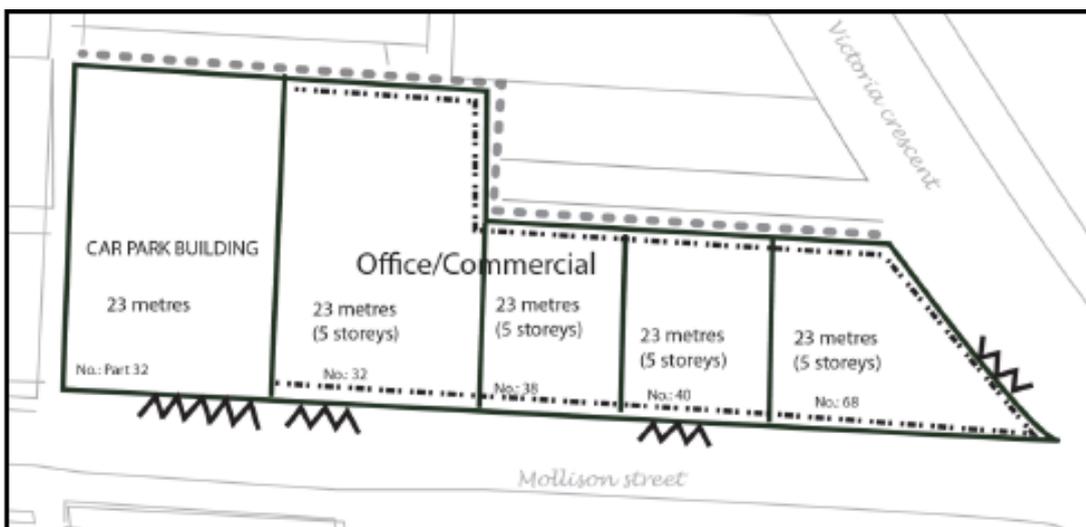
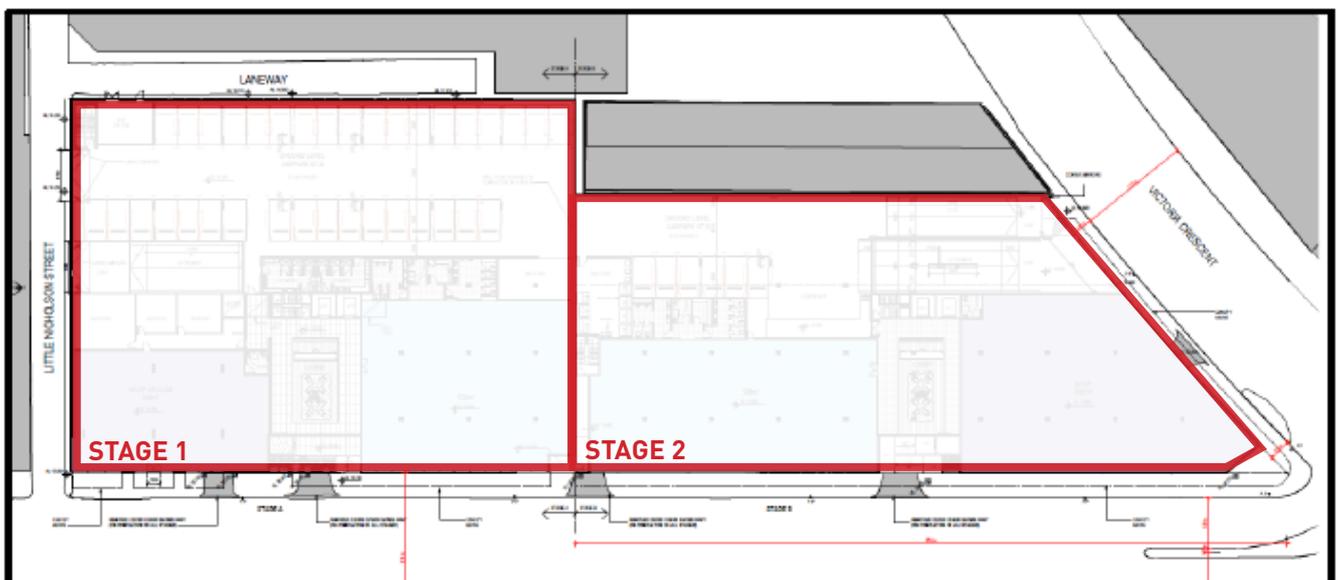


Figure 1 Incorporated Plan Overlay (C170).

- 5) The existing permit allows the site to be developed in two stages (see Figure 2). The developer has indicated their intention is that Stage 1 of the development progresses while the current Planning Scheme Amendment is assessed. Details of how they propose to manage the development are included in the Planning Scheme Amendment Request.
- 6) Our urban design review is focused on assessing the merit of the indicative development, identifying what revisions to the design are required and therefore recommending revisions to the Planning Scheme Amendment that would be necessary to deliver acceptable urban design outcomes.
- 7) The review is divided into Part A: Indicative Development Review and Part B: Planning Scheme Amendment Recommendations.
- 8) Part A: Indicative Development Review is an urban design assessment of the indicative development provided in Attachment 3 of the Planning Scheme Amendment Request (p.77 - p.94).
- 9) Part B: Planning Scheme Amendment Recommendations is an assessment of the proposed Planning Scheme Amendment provided in Attachment 2 of the Planning Scheme Amendment Request (p.69 - p.76).
- 10) Part B includes a summary of recommendations to inform the Planning Scheme Amendment and facilitate best-practice urban design outcomes on the subject site.



**Figure 2** Approved permit at 32-68 Mollison Street and 10 Victoria Crescent.

## Site and context

- 11) The site is located at 32-68 Mollison Street, Abbotsford. It is bounded by Victoria Crescent to the east, Mollison St to the south, Little Nicholson St to the west and by two private sites to the north.
- 12) It has a street frontage of approximately 147 metres to Mollison St (southern interface), 46 metres to Victoria Crescent (eastern interface) and 47 metres to Little Nicholson St (Western interface). It is an irregular shape with a total area of 4,360m<sup>2</sup>.
- 13) It is located to the south-east of an ageing industrial precinct to the west of the Yarra River. The industrial precinct is predominantly warehouses of varying scales with some more recent commercial developments.
- 14) There is a mixture of buildings to the south of the subject site. These include:
  - » The individually significant Former Denton Hat Mills, a three storey brick warehouse that has been adapted into a mixed-use development.
  - » A recently completed four storey apartment development with a one storey brick street wall (see Figure 4).
  - » A mixture of 1-2 storey commercial buildings and warehouses (see Figure 5).
- 15) The precinct to the south is predominantly covered by heritage overlays.
- 16) To the east of the subject site is a two storey commercial development and a one storey warehouse.
- 17) There are two approved developments neighbouring the subject site.
  - » To the west of the site (20-30 Mollison Street) is an eight storey office building with a rooftop garden and an overall height of 33.5m. The office has a high-level of activation at the ground floor, provides a new pedestrian connection to the north of the site and has a defined three storey podium with varying setbacks at upper levels.
  - » To the north of the site (12-20 Victoria Crescent) is an office building which varies in height from five storeys (at the eastern interface) to seven storeys (at the western interface) with the roof/plant creating an additional storey. The approved development has an overall height of approximately 33 metres.
- 18) The approved development at 12-20 Victoria Crescent includes the retention of a portion of a heritage building, a high-level of activation to Victoria Crescent and a break in the massing at the second level to create two distinct upper level forms of varying heights (see Figure 3).

Break in the massing at the second level to create two distinct upper level forms of varying heights

Retention of existing heritage building

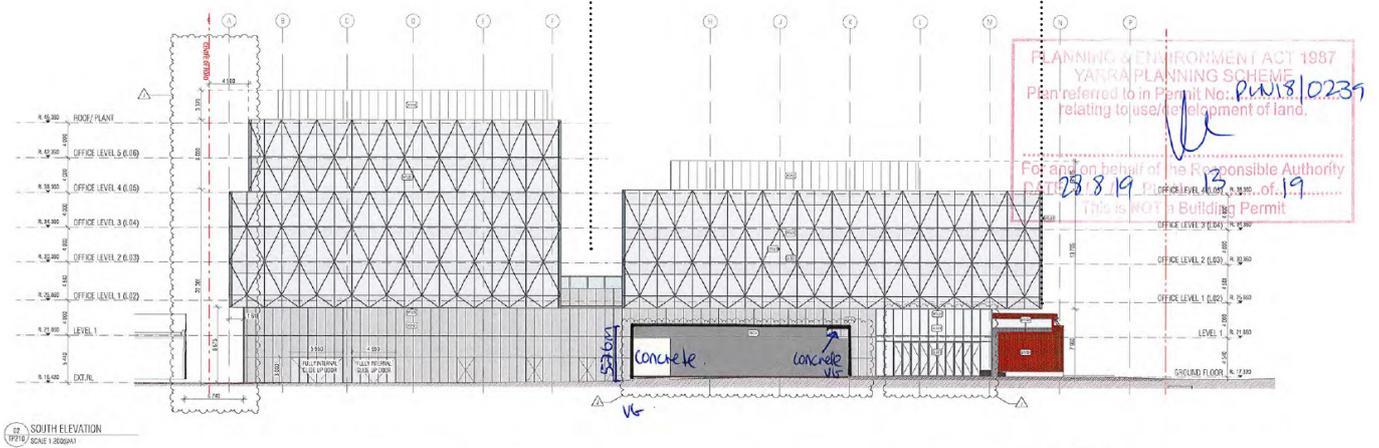


Figure 3 Approved permit at 12-20 Victoria Crescent (with key factors noted).

Recently developed four storey apartment

Subject site

Adjacent 1-2 storey commercial buildings and warehouses

Subject site



Figure 4 Looking north-west along William Street towards the subject site.



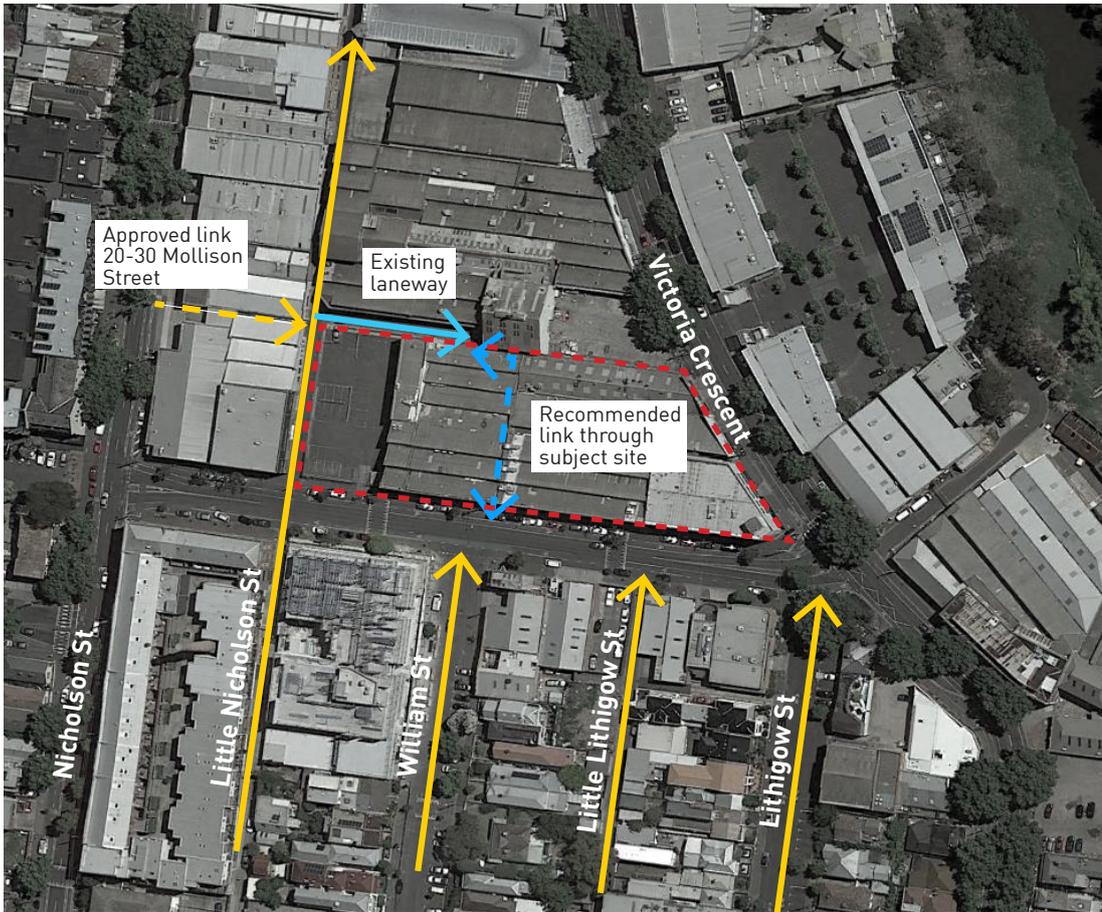
Figure 5 Looking west along Mollison Street from the intersection of Victoria Crescent and Mollison Street.

## Part A: Indicative Development Review

- 19) An urban design review of the indicative development was undertaken.
  - 20) The proposed increase in the overall height limit will have a significant impact on the surrounding area and this proposition has therefore triggered a broader review of the overall site layout and massing as well as the overall height.
  - 21) Upon review of the indicative development, a series of urban design recommendations have been made. The discussion supporting these recommendations has been grouped under the following directions:
    - » Managing the ground plane
    - » Establishing an appropriate podium
    - » Creating a responsive massing strategy
- ### Managing the ground plane
- 22) The industrial history of this precinct has resulted in limited granularity of the street network when compared with the surrounding residential areas.
  - 23) This results in challenges in managing the street network and traffic requirements within large sites.
  - 24) Although there is a natural logic to placing vehicular entrances of rear laneways, this is increasingly challenging as these laneways often lack the capacity to manage the large volumes of traffic generated by new developments.
  - 25) Widening Little Nicholson St at the Mollison St intersection will assist in managing traffic flow but will still channel high volumes of traffic onto a narrow street with limited capacity.
  - 26) The subject site represents the termination of three residential streets to the south of the subject site. These are William Street, Little Lithgow Street and Lithgow Street, with Little Lithgow Street predominantly functioning as a rear laneway.
  - 27) There is an opportunity to extend William Street to the north which would offer the following benefits within the subject site:
    - » Reducing visual bulk at the Mollison Street frontage by breaking up the overall massing, particularly as its viewed from the low-scale residential dwellings on William Street.
    - » Providing an opportunity to reduce traffic impacts on Little Nicholson Street by locating the carpark entrance off a new service laneway.
    - » Improving amenity at the lower levels of the building by increasing outlook.
    - » Connecting to the existing laneway to the north of the site and effectively expanding the pedestrian network in line with the proposal at 20-30 Mollison Street in which an east-west pedestrian link has been provided at the northern interface.

### Recommendations

- Provide a pedestrian link that connects William Street to the existing laneway to the north of the site (nominally 6m in width).
- Vehicle access to the subject site should occur off a new service laneway within the site.



- - - Subject site
- ↔ Recommended link through subject site
- Existing streets to the south of the subject site
- Existing laneway abutting subject site
- - - → Approved link at 20-30 Mollison Street

**Figure 6** Looking north-west along William Street towards the subject site.

## **Establishing an appropriate podium**

- 28) A site of this scale requires a sophisticated massing strategy that responds to the surrounding context and minimises the bulk of the development.
- 29) The Mollison Street frontage is approximately 147 metres wide and visual bulk needs to be carefully managed at this interface.
- 30) The existing building on the site has an overall height of three storeys, stepping down to two storeys to the west of the site (see Figure 7).
- 31) There are recent positive development examples in the surrounding context in which the existing warehouse has been adopted as the podium with the upper level forms setback (see Figure 8).
- 32) Although the existing building is not to be retained at 32-68 Mollison Street, the overall height of the existing building provides a starting point for establishing an appropriate street wall height that is in keeping with the existing character and context.
- 33) The recently approved development at 20-30 Mollison Street also provides an indication of emerging street wall heights. This building design establishes a three storey podium in predominantly recycled brick. The podium is reinforced by variable upper level setbacks, a recessed terrace at the fourth storey and a distinct change in materiality above the podium (see Figure 11).
- 34) This is most effective at the Nicholson Street interface where a 4.5 metre setback and a change in materiality creates a clear distinction between the podium and upper levels.
- 35) A successful podium strategy requires this differentiation through massing and materiality. Material differentiation that isn't supported by a change in the massing effectively creates a 'facade' podium that cannot be read in three dimensions.
- 36) Figure 8, Figure 10 and Figure 11 all establish context specific podiums in which there is a clear distinction between the podium and upper levels achieved through massing and materiality. These range in height from one storey to three storeys.
- 37) The success of these massing strategies is that there is a clear visual distinction between the podium and the upper levels that does not just rely on a change in materials.
- 38) This requires a setback above street wall that assists in making the upper levels appear visually recessive. The existing setback above the street wall specified in the Incorporated Plan Overlay is 2m.
- 39) An increase in the setback to 3 metres to Mollison Street and Victoria Crescent is considered more appropriate in the context of increasing the overall height to seven storeys.
- 40) A 3 metre setback is also considered more appropriate to the northern boundary, in order to create adequate building separation at the upper levels.



**Figure 7** Existing building looking west along Mollison Street.



**Figure 8** Building at corner of Gipps St and Nicholson St.



**Figure 9** Building at corner of Gipps St and Nicholson St.



**Figure 10** Building at corner of William St and Nicholson St.



**Figure 11** Proposed development to the west of the subject site (20-30 Mollison St).

- 41) This would create a more distinctive break between the podium and upper levels and assist in managing visual bulk at upper levels.
- 42) This should be increased to 5 metres at the Little Nicholson Street interface to ensure that human-scale is retained along this narrow street (approximately 5 metres wide).
- 43) The site has a triangular shape at the south-eastern corner. This corner should be chamfered to mark the corner and create a generous widening of the footpath at the intersection.
- 44) This also creates a positive reference to the existing building which has used the same strategy to mark the corner and manage the irregular site shape at the intersection (see Figure 12).
- 45) The indicative development proposal chamfers the corner at the ground level and then cantilevers the building over the corner at the upper levels.
- 46) This is considered an unacceptable approach that undermines the podium strategy and creates undefined space at the ground level that make no positive contribution to the public realm.



**Figure 12** Chamfered corner of the existing building as viewed from the intersection of Mollison Street and Victoria Crescent.

### Recommendations

- Street wall height should range from three to four storeys: three storeys to Little Mollison Street and four storeys to the corner of Mollison Street and Victoria Crescent.
- Introduce a setback above the street wall of 3m from Mollison Street and Victoria Crescent
- Introduce a 5m setback above the street wall at Little Nicholson Street
- Introduce a 3m setback from the boundary or the laneway centreline to the north of the site.
- Require material definition between the podium and upper levels that is responsive to the local context and character. Podium materials should be detailed and robust with visually recessive materials used at upper levels.
- Corner should be chamfered at the Mollison St and Victoria Crescent intersection to mark the corner. No cantilevering should occur at upper levels.

### Creating a responsive height strategy

- 47) The subject site is located at a sensitive interface and marks the transition from industrial and commercial buildings to lower scale housing.
- 48) The existing development approvals to the north and west of the site will establish a new height datum for the precinct.
- 49) The site to the west has an approximate overall height of 33.5 metres. The site to the north varies across the site with the eastern upper form setback from Victoria Crescent (25 metres) and the western upper form (33 metres).
- 50) The subject site is more comparable in size (4,360m<sup>2</sup>) to the site to the north (approximately 4,100m<sup>2</sup>).
- 51) The site to the north provides a distinct break in the massing above a two storey podium. The separation between these upper level forms is approximately 7.5 metres (see Figure 3).
- 52) This is unsuccessful in the proposed development on the subject site which provides no distinctive break between the upper level forms for the first five storeys.
- 53) The existing approved development has an approval for five storeys with no break in-between the upper level forms. However, if the overall height is increased to seven storeys this effectively changes the typology and requires greater management of visual bulk at upper levels.
- 54) This is unacceptable outcome which would create unreasonable visual bulk when viewed from Mollison St and when approaching from the streets to the south which have a predominantly low-scale character.
- 55) A distinct break should be created in the form of a new pedestrian link (see recommendation on page 8) and upper level setbacks that effectively break the building into three upper level forms.
- 56) The height should then vary across the site to respond to the emerging heights of adjacent approvals.
- 57) An overall height of 32 metres to the west stepping down to 23 metres to the east of the site.
- 58) The proposed approach to massing and overall height would have the following benefits:
  - » Reducing visual bulk, as it is perceived from adjacent buildings, Mollison St and streets to the south of the subject site.
  - » Improving the efficiency and internal amenity of commercial floorplates.
  - » Creating a perception of multiple buildings of varying heights rather than one large monolithic building.

### Recommendations

- Building should read as three separate upper level forms set within a three/four storey podium.
- Upper level forms should have a minimum separation of 6 metres.
- Maximum overall height of 32 metres to the west of the site, stepping down to 23 metres to the east of the site.

## Part B: Planning Scheme Amendment Recommendations

- 59) My assessment of the proposed Planning Scheme Amendment is focused on its effectiveness in delivering positive urban design outcomes as identified in Part A. The current Planning Scheme Amendment drafting would fail to deliver adequate urban design outcomes.
- 60) The Schedule should be updated to incorporate the previously stipulated recommendations:
- » Provide a pedestrian link that connects William Street to the existing laneway to the north of the site (nominally 6m in width).
  - » Vehicle access to the subject site should occur off a new service laneway within the site.
  - » Maximum overall height of 32 metres to the west of the site, stepping down to 23 metres to the east of the site.
  - » Street wall height should range from three to four storeys: three storeys to Little Mollison Street and four storeys to the corner of Mollison Street and Victoria Crescent.
  - » Introduce a setback above the street wall of 3m from Mollison Street and Victoria Crescent
  - » Introduce a 5m setback above the street wall at Little Nicholson Street
  - » Require material definition between the podium and upper levels that is responsive to the local context and character. Podium materials should be detailed and robust with visually recessive materials used at upper levels.
- » Corner should be chamfered at the Mollison St and Victoria Crescent intersection to mark the corner. No cantilevering should occur at upper levels.
  - » Building should read as three separate upper level forms set within a three/four storey podium.
  - » Upper level forms should have a minimum separation of 6 metres.
  - » Maximum overall height of 32 metres to the west of the site, stepping down to 23 metres to the east of the site.
- 61) As per the recommendations, a specific street wall height, variable overall height, requirement for separation between upper level forms, minimum separation distance between upper levels forms and a setback above the street wall height should be introduced.
- 62) The statement 'separation of the built form **OR** design treatments to ensure it does not appear as one building mass' is not supported, design treatments must occur in combination with building separation to effectively manage visual bulk. The objective should therefore use the word **AND** not **OR**.
- 63) The modification of the 'active ground floor' requirements are not supported. The proposed development should provide above 80% active frontages to the Mollison Street and Victoria Crescent frontage (including individual entrances to tenancies). This will be facilitated by the provision of a service laneway.
- 64) The suggestion to incorporate an overshadowing requirement to protect the south side of Mollison Street is supported.



**Figure 13** Render of indicative development, looking east along Mollison Street.



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