

# GOVERNMENT ARCHITECT NEW SOUTH WALES

23<sup>rd</sup> August 2021

**Kara Krason**  
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Head of Campus Planning  
and Design

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**PROJECT:** Pyrmont Key Site Masterplan – UTS, Indigenous Residential College (IRC)  
**RE:** State Design Review Panel – Review No.3, 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2021

Dear Kara,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the above project. Please find below a summary of advice and recommendations arising from design review session no. 3, held on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

## **Overview**

UTS and the project team are commended for a thorough and informative presentation, and the efforts to convey the core cultural values of the project. Given that the next steps will involve zoning changes and preparations for a design competition, two key matters have been considered in this advice letter: the proposed building envelope and the design competition process. Recommendations are intended to enable a successful competition and the best possible design outcomes with the cultural values of the project at the core.

## **Design review**

The following elements of the design strategy are commended:

- The further investigative work undertaken and efforts to address the advice from the previous SDRP sessions.
- Options demonstrating flexibility in the planning envelope, including alternative configurations for the communal gardens.
- The sustainability approach, ambitious ESD targets and their place at the core of project values, showing great potential for industry leading sustainability outcomes.
- The landscaped gardens proposed on the rooftop of the existing heritage building, in particular the amenity these provide, their northern aspect and relationship to Harris Street.
- The proposed reduction in the height of the tower.

The following commentary provides advice and recommendations for the next stages of the project:

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## **Building envelope**

A larger planning envelope will allow more flexibility and give the competition participants greater scope to develop genuine alternative options and innovative design strategies during the competition process.

Some areas of concern remain with the proposed envelope (including impact to the amenity of the neighbouring building at the south and the Harris Street tree) and further adjustments are recommended. Flexibility in the envelope will better place the project teams to achieve good design outcomes while resolving these issues during design development. The following adjustments to the planning envelope are therefore recommended for consideration. These should be considered holistically and in relationship to each other to achieve an envelope with the least impact and greatest flexibility to support a culturally rich and responsive final building form:

- An additional floor to the heritage building.
- An additional floor to the current proposed tower (indicated as RL 64.7).
- Increase to the envelope setback from Harris Street to reduce or eliminate the need for the envelope cut-out for the existing street tree, and further reduce or eliminate the impacts of the envelope on the building to the south. The cut out in the envelope currently shown does not appear to provide enough buffer and may negatively impact the health of the tree.

The above adjustments may lead to an increase in the competition envelope however the intention is to provide flexibility only and not increase the overall briefed GFA or built form.

## **Competition process**

The project's core cultural values and intention to respond to Country are commended. It is imperative these are clearly communicated and explicit in the competition brief. As a minimum, the competition brief should address the following:

- The brief should lead with the indigenous values of community, kinship and Country as a priority throughout the project.
- The project as a marker of an Indigenous place in the city - for education, for UTS, for Closing the Gap, should set a precedent for this unique urban typology. Its identity and core values should be integral to the arrival experience and immediately

apparent to residents and visitors. Clearly convey this design intent to form a key component of the competition brief.

- As the designs should reflect a deep understanding of the physical and cultural context of the site and its Country, the competition brief should include the following:
  - Pre-European movement and settlement patterns, and how the elements including hydrology, microclimate and topography have influenced how Country was understood and inhabited.
  - Understanding of the broader cultural narrative of the site and how it sits within a wider network of indigenous stories and places across the Pyrmont Peninsula and throughout the city.
- While sustainability goals are commended, the current industry rating tools will not embody the project's core ESD values, such as access to daylight, views, breezes, and connection with landscape. The following strategies are recommended:
  - Clearly express the sustainability and ESD goals as an integral part of the core values of the project in the competition brief.
  - Formulate a bespoke set of ESD criteria specifically designed to address the core values and ambitions of the project.
  - Prescribe the sustainability benchmarks, be clear on the minimum requirements and what is not negotiable. Clarify that industry ratings tools are to be used in addition to and not replace the competition brief benchmarks.
  - Specify the target for every room to receive natural lighting and ventilation and the desired levels. Investigate and advise technical strategies that need to be implemented to achieve the targets. An example includes hold-open fire doors to improve natural and cross ventilation.
  - Outline the solar access requirements for the precinct heart in the competition brief, to ensure they are met and to enable the project team to explore envelope options that still meet the project's objectives.
- The communal gathering and garden spaces range in hierarchy and scale, and how they are configured is important to ensure that the cultural objectives of the project can be realised. Consider providing more clarity in the competition brief around:
  - how the communal spaces support the idea of community. Indicate the rationale for the network of neighbourhoods, including their size, where they sit within the college, and how the communal spaces and students reside within them.

- the hierarchy of communal spaces, from the larger common gardens, the corridor gathering spaces and the more private apartment areas, and their intended relationships with each other.
- the nature of the interface between communal areas eg. defensible or fluid boundaries.
- the intended size of group gatherings to be accommodated in the communal areas and the activities envisaged to enable the future team to facilitate and design to an appropriate scale. Consider illustrating how they will be used, showing people and furnishings.
- Consider designating a portion of the tower rooftop to be communal open space. It is noted being elevated several stories this space has substantially different conditions to the communal gardens throughout the lower levels, therefore would complement rather than replace them.

While this was not discussed in the session, the following is included for consideration:

- Street trees are a valuable component of a sustainable street environment. Consider a long-term strategy to progressively replace the plane trees with native species, even if only for the frontage between Mary Ann Street and Ultimo Road.

We trust that this advice is helpful and should you have any queries, please contact myself or Melissa Riley.

Sincerely,



Olivia Hyde  
Director of Design Excellence  
Professor of Practice, University of Sydney Architecture  
Chair, Pyrmont Key Site Masterplan – UTS SDRP

CC NSW SDRP Panel members	Rod Simpson, Digby Hall, Sophie Dyring, Penny Collins, Danièle Hromek, Graham Jahn (CoS nominee) Olivia Hyde (Chair, SDRP)
GANSW Design Advisor	Darlene van der Breggen, Melissa Riley, Dillon Kombumerri (Observer)
DPIE	Thomas Watt, Sarah Waterworth, Thomas Soccio, Amy van den Nieuwenhof
City of Sydney Hassell Studio	Reinah Urqueza Thomas Hale
UTS	Kara Krason, Nigel Oliver
BVN	Kevin O'Brien, Ivan Tejada
Aspect Studios	Sacha Coles
Ethos Urban	Alexis Cella
SJB Planning	Stuart Gordon
Procure Group	Vic Baueris
Design 5 – Architects	Alan Croker
Ultimo Village Voice	William (Bill) d'Anthes (Community Representative)

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