

## **Attachment C**

### Urban Design Review

# Private Plan Change 81: 320 The Terrace

## Urban design assessment

This report assesses the appropriateness of the proposed PPC81 District Plan provisions from an urban design perspective.

### 1. Permitted Building Standards (Appendix 4)

#### 1.1 Building height

The permitted building height is proposed to be 10m along The Terrace frontage to a depth of around 18m. The 10m standard is also proposed to apply to the north-west corner of the site, for the first 15m or so from the northern site boundary.

These permitted heights maintain the status quo for neighbouring dwellings north of the site and along The Terrace ie they are the same permitted heights as currently apply under the Inner Residential Area zoning. I consider them appropriate.

For the remainder of the site, three relative height zones are proposed:

- In the area around the Gordon Wilson Building, the ground levels sit at 41m amsl, rising to around 60m amsl in the south-east corner of that zone. The proposed relative permitted height of 56.5m asml translates into buildings 15.5m high on the lower grounds, gradually reducing in height (to zero) towards the south-east corner.
- West of the above zone and over the central section of the site's western boundary, the ground levels rise from around 42m to 60m amsl. The proposed relative permitted height of 72m asml translates into buildings 30m high on the lower grounds, gradually reducing in height to 12m along the western site boundary.
- In the south-west corner of the site, the ground levels rise from around 53m amsl in the north-east corner of that zone to 68m amsl in the south-west corner. The proposed relative permitted height of 80m asml translates into buildings 27m high on the lower grounds, gradually reducing in height to 12m on the higher grounds.

The Gordon Wilson Building is approximately 30m high or 72m amsl. The escarpment behind the Gordon Wilson Building is currently undeveloped and vegetated from around 42m to 80m amsl (next to the university's Wai-te-ata apartments). The highest permitted building on the site could be 30m above ground, but higher up on the slope than the Gordon Wilson Building. New buildings sitting higher up on the slopes have the potential to reduce the visibility of the escarpment from the city. This potential effect is proposed to be addressed in the Victoria University Design Guide, which I review below.

Higher buildings have the potential to give rise to shading, overlooking (or privacy) and dominance effects on adjoining properties. Shading effects are addressed through Building Recession Planes – see 1.3 below. I consider that the potential overlooking and dominance effects are adequately mitigated by:

- the proposed 10m height zones adjoining existing properties to the north-west and along The Terrace frontage;
- The 56.5m zone which hits the contours along the southern boundary, effectively excluding building from a part of the site;
- the 72m zone is set back from the boundaries with residential properties by at least 15m; and
- the 45 degree recession plane along the southern boundary will prevent taller buildings being located close to residential properties.

I consider the proposed building heights appropriate for the following reasons:

- they maintain the amenity (sunlight and privacy) of residential neighbours;
- they provide a suitable transition in building scale to residential neighbours; and
- they enable the creation of a building frontage of appropriate scale along The Terrace.

## **1.2 Site coverage**

The permitted site coverage is 50%, unchanged from the Inner Residential standard.

Limiting the site coverage is important to maintain part of the vegetated escarpment, a significant contributor to the character of this part of the city. To be effective in maintaining some visibility of the escarpment, the site coverage standard needs to be supported by design guidelines (in the Victoria University Design Guide). I assess the proposed design guidelines later on.

I consider the proposed site coverage standard appropriate for the site.

## **1.3 Recession planes and yard requirement**

### **1.3.1 Sunlight access**

The recession planes standards for the Inner Residential Area are proposed to apply to the northern and southern boundaries, except for one small indentation in the site boundary (sub-station). The building recession planes do not apply to site boundaries fronting the street (The Terrace) but do apply to east-facing boundaries set back from The Terrace.

The only change to the current recession plane is the exclusion of the small area along the northern boundary. This is will not affect the access to sunlight of properties located north of the site.

As the proposed recession planes are essentially unchanged from the Inner Residential Area Standard, I consider them appropriate for the purpose of controlling sunlight access.

### **1.3.2 Building envelope**

The maximum permitted building envelope on the site (notwithstanding the site coverage restriction) is a combination of the building heights, the recession planes and the yard requirements. These three parameters are considered together below.

A 5m deep yard is proposed along the boundaries adjoining the Inner Residential Area.

The recession planes, measured 2.5m above the property boundaries, are:

- 71 degrees from horizontal along the northern boundary (3 vertical to 1 horizontal);
- 45 degrees from horizontal along the southern boundary (1 vertical to 1 horizontal);  
and
- 56 degrees (1.5 vertical to 1 horizontal) along east-facing boundaries.

The northern boundary recession plane meets the line of the 5m yard 17.5m above the ground level at the site boundary. Given the permitted building height of 10m along The Terrace and in the northern corner of the site; and the 56.5m amsl (roughly 15.5m above ground level) permitted height in the centre of the site, this recession plane does not restrict the maximum building envelope for the site ie building up to 15.5m high could be built along the 5m yard and still be well within the recession plane.

The southern boundary recession plane requires a building built along the line of the 5m yard to be no more than 7.5m high. This has the effect of restricting the development envelope ie a 10m high building would have to be setback 7.5m from the boundary or stepped down towards it; a 15m high building would have to be set back by 12.5m or stepped down.

The east-facing boundaries (excluding along The Terrace) recession planes allows a 10m high building to be built along the 5m yard; 15m building would need to be set back by just over 8m.

The recession planes only limit the maximum permitted building envelope along the southern and part of the eastern boundaries. Along the northern boundary, the building envelope is restricted by 10m height zones next to existing residential properties but unaffected by the recession planes.

I consider the maximum building envelope appropriate for the following reasons:

- The larger building mass is pushed away from the residential neighbours by virtue of the 5m yard requirement, 10m height zones and recession planes (to the south and east boundaries).
- The building mass is stepped down the hillside, responding to the local topography;  
and
- The building envelope is moderate by the 50% maximum site coverage.

#### **1.4 Building articulation**

Building Standard 5 proposes that buildings within 10m of the Inner Residential Area boundary be articulated at least every 30m with a recess at least 10m long.

The longest straight boundaries to the north and south are approximately 55-60m long. In the absence of this standard, facades up to 50- 55m long (the yard standard applies to the east-facing boundaries) could be built along these boundaries.

I note that the standard would not prevent such a long building being located just over 10m from the Inner Residential Area boundaries. Theoretically, a building located at the mid-point of The Terrace frontage could stretch from the eastern to the western boundary of the site in

a straight line. Such a building would be out of scale with its finer grained residential neighbours.

I consider that controls on building articulation need to be in place for the whole of the site. For this reason, I recommend that Building Standard 5 be amended so it applies to any building on the site. The amended version could read:

*5. No façade along a single building plane shall exceed 30m in length.*

## 2. Victoria University Design Guide

### 2.1 Analysis: Main Campus

An analysis of the site has been added under this section. The key elements are:

- The opportunity to develop better connections between the campus and Te Aro, with a new entrance on The Terrace;
- The importance of “the landscaped escarpment which is prominent in views from Te Aro [and] should be made more visible and enhanced”; and
- A safe pedestrian connection between The Terrace and the main campus is desirable.

The explanatory text states:

*“A local landscape feature is the vegetated escarpment at the rear of and above the site. This is part of a wider swathe of vegetation extending north and south which also includes a significant number of large detached dwellings. This pattern of buildings within heavily planted steeply sloping sites characterises most steeply sloping parts of the inner city suburbs.”*

I agree with this analysis.

### 2.2 Objectives: Main Campus

This section contains “broad urban design intentions drawing directly from the preceding site-specific analysis”.

Given the site analysis, the most relevant objectives for 320 The Terrace are:

#### Massing

- O1 To minimise the visual impact of any development as viewed from the city, and mitigate adverse visual effects on surrounding residential areas.
- O2 To avoid visually dominating nearby residential areas.
- O3 To allow adjoining residential properties to receive reasonable sun and light.

#### Scale

- O1 To achieve a transition in scale between large institutional and smaller residential buildings at the interface with neighbouring residential areas.

## **Views**

O3 To avoid the total enclosure and restriction of views from nearby houses.

## **Circulation**

O1 To improve public access to and within the university.

O2 To connect to the existing circulation structure of the city.

O3 To make the circulation routes for pedestrians (the main group of users of campus facilities) as safe, convenient and pleasant as possible.

## **Elevational modelling**

O1 To achieve development which is consistent with the visual character of the existing campus, and which relates to the level of intricacy of nearby residential buildings when it directly borders a residential area.

Following receipt of the Plan Change documents, additional objectives have been proposed by the Applicant. These are:

## **Massing**

O6 To promote a balanced relationship between buildings and open space on the escarpment on 320 The Terrace that avoid the domination of built form over open space.

## **Open space and Landscape**

O1 To develop a high quality landscape on 320 The Terrace, recognising the prominence of VUW's elevated position in the city-scape, including the visibility of the vegetated escarpment.

Together, these two objectives seek to maintain the visibility of the escarpment from Te Aro and further afield. These objectives are supported by additional design guidelines, assessed below.

I consider the above objectives appropriate for the site.

## **2.3 Guidelines: Main Campus**

This section presents detailed guidelines to achieve the objectives of the Guide.

One site-specific guideline was added to the Guide:

## **Massing**

G10 Design buildings and the spaces around them as an integrated whole to create positive open spaces that contribute to the quality and amenity of the campus.

Following receipt of the Plan Change documents, additional site-specific guidelines have been proposed by the Applicant. These are:

## Massing

G11 Any building mass on 320 The Terrace that faces The Terrace and runs longitudinally with the Terrace alignment (NNE-SSW) should achieve the following outcomes:

- Avoid the appearance of overly long and dominant forms and facades by restricting the maximum continuous length of the form/façade along any single building line to 30m.
- Longer building forms/facades if proposed should include a visually significant step in the building line, emphasised by a similar articulation of the roof and eave lines.

Given my recommendation to amend Building Standard 5 so it applies to **any** façade, I recommend that the above guideline is simplified as follows:

*G11 Articulate long building forms and facades on 320 The Terrace to integrate with the residential environment.*

G12 Break down the mass of any buildings on 320 The Terrace by stepping forms down and across the site.

## Circulation and Connections

G3 Promote connections between the Kelburn Campus and The Terrace by facilitating a new university 'front door' and link to the city through 320 The Terrace.

## Open Space and Landscape on 320 The Terrace

G1 Provide for the visibility of the vegetated escarpment between The Terrace and the campus ridgeline from the city by encouraging glimpsed views and view shafts between and over buildings onto areas of open green space.

G2 Provide for views of the escarpment from Ghuznee Street, MacDonald Crescent and The Terrace by providing for visual connections onto upper level vegetated areas.

G3 Progressively improve the landscape quality of the vegetated escarpment by removal of weeds and weed species trees and re-vegetate with appropriate native species.

In recognition of the important view corridor between Ghuznee Street and the vegetated embankment, I recommend that the following guideline be added:

*G4 Minimise encroachment by buildings into the area of vegetated escarpment visible from Ghuznee Street.*

Subject to my proposed amendments (Massing G11 and Open Space G4), I consider the design guidelines appropriate for the site.

## 3. Activity status

PCC81 proposes that "the construction, alteration of, and addition to any buildings and structures on 320 The Terrace is a Discretionary Activity (Restricted) in respect of:

- Design, external appearance and siting

- Landscaping
- Site access for vehicles, parking and loading”

Elsewhere within the Institutional Precinct, the construction of new buildings is a Controlled Activity.

I support the DR Activity status for new buildings at 320 The Terrace, given the sensitivity of the residential context. I also support the extent of discretion. I consider that the proposed activity status and discretion will give Council sufficient control over the townscape, streetscape and amenity outcomes on the site and from adjoining properties.

I note that the construction, alteration of, and addition to any buildings and structures on 320 The Terrace should be added to the list of exclusions under 9.2.1 (Controlled Activities).

#### 4. Conclusion

I consider the proposed PPC81 District Plan provisions (including further amendments proposed by the Applicant post-submission) acceptable from an urban design perspective subject to the following amendments:

- Amend Building Standard 5 to: *No façade along a single building plane shall exceed 30m in length.*
- Amend Massing guideline G11 from the Victoria University Design Guide to: *Articulate long building forms and facades on 320 The Terrace to integrate with the residential environment.*
- Add a new guideline under Open Space and Landscape on 320 The Terrace to read: *Minimise encroachment by buildings into the area of vegetated escarpment visible from Ghuznee Street.*

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## Appendix 1: Photos



Photo 1: View of the vegetated escarpment from the junction of Ghuznee and Taranaki streets (Focal length 50mm)



Photo 2: View of the vegetated escarpment from the junction of Ghuznee and Victoria streets (Focal length 50mm)



Photo 3: View of the vegetated escarpment from the junction of Ghuznee and Willis streets (Focal length 50mm)



Photo 4: Aerial view of 320 The Terrace, VUW Campus and vegetated escarpment