

Memo

To_ Peter Coop
Of_ Urban Perspectives
Subject_ 320 The Terrace

From_ A Burns
Date_30 June 2015

Ref: 320 TT_30062015AB

1. Introduction

This Memo responds to a request from Wellington City Council (WCC) to Peter Coop of Urban Perspectives following a meeting on the scope and content of the proposed VUW Plan Change for 320 The Terrace (the Plan Change).

The request was for an urban design assessment of the Plan Change. Mr Coop in turn requested us to “*assess the appropriateness of the key building standards [as per Appendix 4] and the appropriateness of the control of building design, appearance and landscaping and the amended VUWDG*”. The following Memo provides a high level assessment focussing in turn on those components of the Plan Change.

McIndoe Urban has assisted with the preparation of the Plan Change and identified ten ‘Key Principles for Site Development’ to which any future development on the site should respond (provided in full at Appendix A). These cover the full range of relevant urban design matters for the site and, being informed by robust analysis, are used (where applicable) to inform the assessment below. The ten principles include (abridged):

- 1) *New gateway – establish a high quality front door for VUW*
- 2) *Character – transitional relating to both residential and VUW contexts*
- 3) *Topography and alignment – work with contours, reflect natural slope*
- 4) *Connections and access – links The Tce to Wai-te-ata to Main Campus*
- 5) *Built form, height and massing – site-specific standards*
- 6) *Open space – primary forecourt, sequence of active spaces, planting*
- 7) *Views structure – identified short, medium, long range views*
- 8) *Entrances and entrance spaces – clearly visible, oriented onto routes*
- 9) *Elevated secondary spaces – connections into buildings, views out*
- 10) *Active building edges – façade transparency, include entrances*

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2. Assessment of Proposed Permitted Building Standards

The Plan Change proposes some site specific permitted activity building standards as specified in “Appendix 4: Permitted Building Standards for 320 The Terrace”.

Assessment of these standards using the relevant principles is as follows.

Relevant Principles: 1 (Gateway); 2 (Character); 5 (Standards); 7 (Views Structure)

Overall the proposed standards will result in protection of residential amenity along the side boundaries through application of the Operative District Plan’s Inner Residential building recession plane controls (5.6.2.8) on the site.

In addition to these, further control is proposed on the quality of visual amenity / outlook for adjoining dwellings through a maximum 30m continuous building length standard. This requires any building longer than 30m and within 10m of the side boundary and to be articulated by a 10m setback from that boundary for a minimum length of 10m. The effect of this proposed control, when combined with the building recession plane standard and proposed 5m yard standard, will be to ensure no overly large, out of scale, unrelieved facades will be created that may present an onerous or unpleasant setting for local residents.

Further, these standards will ensure that local views from The Terrace at the MacDonald Crescent intersection are sensitively designed to respond to:

- (a) the visual connections to steeply rising ground visible along the site’s northern boundary (through limiting long horizontal slab forms); and
- (b) the finer grain residential context, avoiding negative perceptions of severe juxtaposition in scale.

Building heights have been defined according to the Inner Residential 10m limit with variation to sensibly reflect the steep topography and requirement for VUW development needs (i.e. taller buildings than the 10m limit permits). In this regard a series of three additional height envelopes are proposed (using AMSL height datums) of 56.5 AMSL; 72 AMSL; and 80 AMSL. An average datum at street level of 35.7 AMSL is also defined as a reference.

The combined effect of these datums including the 10m height limit will result in:

- Building forms that maintain a compatible 10m residential scale height at The Terrace street edge, avoiding visual dominance that would be out of character with the local street setting;

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- Building forms that step up the site, locating greater height up and away from the more sensitive residential side boundaries where buildings are proposed to be restricted to either 10m above ground level or 56.5 AMSL (some 4 storeys above ground) largely utilising the platform of the former Gordon Wilson flats building; and
- Taller VUW-scale buildings closer to the upper VUW Main Campus at a combination of 72 and 80 AMSL. The specific location of these height areas have been set to ensure no additional overshadowing occurs to neighbouring properties or their usable private outdoor spaces compared to the existing Inner Residential building standards.

The proposed permitted 50% site coverage reflects the Inner Residential Zone context and will fundamentally ensure any perceptions of over development are avoided. This proposed standard will have the important effect of maintaining a built-to-open space ratio that allows the visual character of the hill side to continue where buildings are 'read' within a green open space backdrop.

The provision of a quality forecourt space at The Terrace edge, whilst not specifically required by the 50% site coverage control, will be facilitated when coupled with the existing constraint to maintain vehicular access to the adjacent HNZ site using the existing on site driveway/right of way. This will have positive urban design impacts of reinforcing Principle 1 (Gateway) at this location and distinguishing the site as an Institutional use from housing elsewhere.

3. Assessment of the proposed control of building design, appearance and landscaping and the amended VUWDG

The DPC proposes that the "*design, external appearance, siting and site landscaping*" of new buildings on 320 The Terrace is to be assessed using the resource consent process. This is consistent with other Areas where design control is exercised by the Council through District Plan provisions (i.e. Central Area, Business Areas, Centres etc).

A stand-alone, site-specific design guide for 320 The Terrace was initially prepared. However, WCC District Plan officers indicated that they preferred the existing VUWDG be modified. This approach has therefore been adopted.

The modified parts of the VUWDG that relate to design, external appearance, siting and landscaping are assessed below.

Relevant Principles: All

The site analysis for Area 1 Kelburn Parade East is proposed to be modified to insert reference to 320 The Terrace. Key features of the site are referred to.

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Important aspects of the site, including its visibility in medium and long range views, the vegetated escarpment, the mixed character (VUW and residential) context, and the opportunity for connection and gateway, are identified.

Only minor other modifications are proposed i.e. Massing G1 and G10. There are a number of existing objectives and guidelines that apply well to the site.

Massing

Building forms on the site should reflect the two principal types of relationship to topography (G1) – building *along* contours or alternatively *across* contours.

Whilst the upper Main Campus tends to follow the former, the DPC site can appropriately accommodate buildings that run perpendicular to contours, picking up the local grid responding to The Terrace edge. Such forms will also allow buildings to provide efficient vertical circulation up and down slope.

Visual impact and dominance objectives (O1 and O2) are addressed by the proposed building standards as discussed at section 2 above. A combination of site coverage (50%), height planes, yards and recession planes will ensure visual connections to the green escarpment are enhanced (from the current condition with the Gordon Wilson building) in medium and long range views while short range views are also proposed to be controlled by the maximum 30m façade length requirement that will mitigate visual dominance over residential neighbours and enhance views from The Terrace towards the site (up slope towards the Main Campus).

G10 is a proposed additional guideline that seeks to create integrated, positive spaces. This could be achieved on the site with a primary forecourt / gateway space at street edge and a sequence of secondary spaces linking up the slope providing access to buildings.

Overall I conclude that future development of the site will perform well in relation to the massing objectives and guidelines.

Scale

The character of the street edge along The Terrace will be maintained through the 10m height control while severe juxtaposition or abrupt transitions to neighbouring residential properties will be avoided through a combination of the proposed height planes and maximum 30m façade length and setback controls.

The 'scale of articulation' guidelines (G1, G3) are given effect to by the proposed 30m façade length control and the 'interval of 7.5-10m' can readily be accommodated in any building façade design.

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Overall I conclude that future development of the site will perform well in relation to scale objectives and guidelines.

Skyline

The principal focus of objective (O1) is the visibility and quality of the ridge-top skyline of the Main Campus that would be largely unaffected by development on the site.

Removal of the existing Gordon Wilson flats will however result in enhanced visibility of the skyline from short range views along The Terrace and could improve the foreground view of the ridge skyline in medium range views from Ghuznee Street.

Existing G1 refers to the skyline at the interface with residential areas and in this regard the proposed height plane controls for the site, 30m maximum façade length control and recession plane standards will have the effect of reducing the visual mass of any development's skyline in relation to finer grain neighbours. The detail design of building proposals will still affect the quality of the interface between an institutional activity and residential.

Overall I conclude that building development on the site is likely perform well in relation to the skyline objectives and guidelines.

Views

VUWDG objectives focus on maintaining the quality of views out towards the harbour / city from residential areas and public places. Public and private views have been assessed during the Plan Change development process and the extent to which existing views are currently blocked by Gordon Wilson Flats but will be opened up when it is removed.

Future development within the proposed permitted standards described in section 2 of this memo will ensure the quality of views for neighbours towards the city / harbour will be maintained, albeit with an alteration to the existing view because of the demolition of Gordon Wilson Flats.

Overall, I conclude that future buildings meeting the proposed building standards will perform well in relation to the VUWDG objectives and guidelines concerning views.

Existing G3 is concerned with the visibility of any large areas of car parking. However given the tight constraints of the site, topography, limited building platforms, and restricted views from the street into the site, I conclude that it is unlikely the site will be attractive for large parking areas. It is more likely that parking will be within a building basement or under-croft.

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Elevation modelling

Existing O1 refers to the need for development to both relate to the visual character of the campus as well as that of the finer residential grain nearby. Existing G1 and G2 refer to techniques of designing for visual interest with respect to viewing distance and avoidance of blank walls.

O1 is challenging in so far as it anticipates two different character types forming the design precedent for new VUW buildings. The identity of VUW is paramount and any new development on the site should read consistently with the wider University. Addressing the adjoining finer grain context can occur through the design of facades, scale of fenestration, variation in skyline / roof form, human scale of entrances, canopies, windows and the like. The modulation of mass required by the proposed 30m max building length control together with the other proposed building standards will greatly assist with how elevations are modelled and related to their adjoining contexts.

Viewing distance analysis indicates there are more limited short range views from nearby streets but more prevalent medium and long range views. Therefore the overall form of buildings, rooflines, broad façade patterns etc. that read from those medium/longer range views are important and proposals should not appear as large, lumpy blocks of buildings. At the shorter range, oblique views into the site prevail as well as close up pedestrian viewing distances and experiencing of 'true' elevations is generally not possible.

I conclude that future buildings on the site can perform well in relation to the Elevation Modelling objective and guidelines.

4. Conclusions

Based on the assessments above and analysis as part of the DPC preparation process, the following can be concluded:

- The proposed permitted building standards will support positive built form and open space outcomes in relation to VUWDG objectives and guidelines relating to massing, scale, skyline, views and elevation modelling.
- The proposed permitted building standards can be relied upon to control the overall townscape of any future development to meet local residential amenity needs and foster a strong sense of design in relation to the existing escarpment and TheTerrace street edge.
- Future buildings on the site can be designed to respond well to VUWDG matters of massing, scale, skyline, views and elevation modelling.

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- Good design outcomes, particularly in relation to skyline, views and elevation modelling, will be dependent upon the preparation of an appropriate design brief for future new buildings on the site.
- Good design outcomes will be ensured by the proposed control of design, external appearance, siting and landscaping by the Council using the resource consent process and with the ability (because of the proposed Discretionary Activity Restricted status) to decline applications that are inconsistent with the modified VUWDG.

Overall the proposed permitted building standards, proposed building design control, and modified VUWDG are supported from an urban design perspective.

Andrew Burns

Director, McIndoe Urban

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Appendix A – Ten Key Development Principles for 320 The Tce

1. New gateway: Development to establish a high quality 'front door' for VUW along The Terrace and a gateway to the city.

2. Character: Site character to be 'transitional' relating to both the adjacent (permitted) residential context but recognising the larger scale institutional role and function of the Site.

3. Topography and alignment: Celebrate the level change and slope condition. Maintain a sense of the natural ground and avoid creating large artificial datums. Align building forms with the contours where appropriate whilst allowing some built forms to traverse contours to facilitate access up the slope.

4. Connections and access: Establish new physical links from The Terrace to Wai-te-Ata Road and to connect further up to the main campus. Links to work with the contours to create a unique experience of the hill side and creating new views to the city. Links to interconnect with the ground and with future buildings. Potential for multi-modal connections exist but require further investigation. Access to utilise the existing entry point onto the Site but could consider a basement vehicular access towards the southern end of the street front.

Access to facilitate and allow for vehicular access to the adjacent HNZ McLean flats site to the south.

5. Built form height and massing: Building height to establish a maximum 4 storey frontage towards The Terrace and set back in relation to a forecourt at the front of the Site (see Open space below). Building heights to step up the Site to the west in accordance with the Appendix 4 Building Standards Plan.

Massing: Development to allow for variation along any continuous facade with notable visual change at maximum 30m intervals. This may comprise of a set-back, step, projection coupled with change in height. No single and overly large facades are to be created.

Northern boundary setback: Achieve a minimum 5m setback to the lower parts of the Site along the boundary, potentially increasing at the upper north western part of the boundary adjoining existing residential development.

6. Open space: The value of existing mature street edge tree planting should be reviewed in relation to the degree to which it constraints visual connections with the street and the potential for an entrance space. Provide a forecourt space to the front of the Site against The Terrace of at least 20m depth. Establish new planting to all outdoor areas particularly to slopes.

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A human scale street edge with attractive, inviting, active spaces should be created.

7. Views structure: Development to allow for some visual links to rising ground beyond, between and over buildings. Visual links to be provided to the ridge and Kelburn campus buildings above. Short range views occur at the intersection of MacDonald Crescent with The Terrace, medium range views occur principally along Ghuznee Street, and long range views exist across Te Aro from Mount Victoria.

8. Entrances and entrance spaces: Development to provide clearly visible building entrances onto a forecourt. Upper level entrances to be oriented towards and opening onto access routes connecting up and across the Site.

9. Elevated secondary spaces: Development to create a sequence of minor spaces located along new routes that provide connection into buildings and afford views out across the city.

10. Active building edges: Where development adjoins, fronts and overlooks a forecourt space or other routes / connections, building edges to include high levels of facade transparency promoting visual connections between inside and out. Locate entrances along these edges.