Urban Design Assessment Report
615 Warrigal Road, Ashwood

by Message Consultants
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Message Consultants has been engaged by Panorama Investment to prepare an urban design assessment in response to the proposed development at 615 Warrigal Road, Ashwood.
1. Executive Summary

This report sets down our urban design assessment of the proposal by Peddle Thorp Architects (dated July 2018) for the property at 615 Warrigal Road, Ashwood.

The site is a large, single landholding fronting Warrigal Road that sits within a valley context. It is located in a Mixed Use Zone and in proximity to the Holmesglen Railway Station, Holmesglen TAFE and activity centre. Contextually, it sits within the City of Monash, but is on the boundaries of Stonnington and Boroondara (Figure 1) and is currently developed with low rise commercial and warehousing buildings (Figure 2).

Despite the physical and locational attributes of the site, its principal challenge is the ability to navigate seemingly disparate local policy across three municipal boundaries, and direct abuttals to an arterial road and railway line, which serve locally to separate and divide, but also connect the site to the wider metropolitan area.

The strategic opportunity is to create a more unified and “higher order” centre that responds to the area’s rail transit context consistent with planning policy directions.

The challenge is to use this large scale site of 1.49ha as a catalyst to improving physical, walkable connections between 3 separate precincts that comprise the Homesglen Activity centre. A challenge that must also surmount the political context of sitting across three municipalities.

The regeneration of this centre is most readily achieved on land within Monash, of which the proposal represents an important potential catalyst.

The proposal seeks to respond to this challenge with a development that is an integrated mixed use proposal over a series of building forms which are broadly separated out into two components as follows (Figure 3):

- Commercial uses fronting Warrigal Road; and
- Residential apartments occupying the balance of the site.
Our report concludes that this proposal delivers a high quality urban design outcome that capitalises on the potential of the site by:

- Acting as a catalyst development to unify and revitalise an area that borders three municipalities to create a vibrant activity centre.
- Responding to the site’s rail transit and physical context through a well-considered architectural response that contributes positively to the surrounding urban environment.
- Redeveloping a large land holding that is in close proximity to a range of services and amenities - including Holmesglen Railway Station, for a mix of uses.
- Delivering a permeable site layout that integrates with its surrounds.

The development is located on a site that has all the merits of a strategic development site and delivers a considered design response that seeks to overcome the fragmented nature of its surrounds.

Figure 3: Proposed Layout
Part A:
Site and Planning Policy Context
2. Site Context

2.1 Strategic Context

The principle of harnessing development opportunities within activity centres and in close proximity to the Principal Public Transport Network (PPTN) and community services and facilities is one that enjoys strong support in State and Metropolitan planning policy. 

Key directions at the State level (particularly in Clauses 11 and 16) encourage intensified development and housing growth in and around activity centres and close to public transport, to take advantage of existing services and infrastructure and contribute to the principles of urban consolidation.

This is underpinned in the Melbourne Strategy, Plan Melbourne 2017 – 2050 which promotes the creation of ‘20 minute neighbourhoods.’ This policy supports the strategic planning ambition for increases in dwelling density, in appropriate locations, so that greater numbers of people have access to urban services within 20 minutes of their place of residence.

As part of this approach the Strategy endorses the concept of transit oriented development, which is described as:

“...compact, walkable, mixed-use communities centred around high-quality train systems. Transit-oriented development assists in addressing the growing problems of climate change and global energy security by creating dense, walkable communities that greatly reduce the need for driving and energy consumption.”

Local policy at Clause 21.06 furthers these objectives and describes major activity centres as well connected to public transport, and providing:

...attractive environments and a focus for community activities and social life... jobs, investments and goods and services for residents and business.

At the strategic level, land in and around the Holmesglen Railway Station would clearly be suited to a major activity centre designation that had as a key remit to improve on the currently fragmented distribution of land use activities and make more use of the existing infrastructure assets, particularly the rail station and TAFE college. If Homesglen had been in one municipal district it may well have been seen as more than just a neighbourhood activity centre.

Current constraints to the strategic intent existing of policy include:

• Conventional residential development in a Neighbourhood Residential Zone to the north of the station and south of the TAFE, and
• Fragmented economic development / activity centre planning across municipal boundaries.

The subject site is an ‘important piece in the puzzle’ of realising the opportunities presented by State and local policy directions while it’s location at the confluence of three municipal boundaries presents a political challenge in creating a unified centre, this dilemma is extended by the physical division created by Warrigal Road and the elevated rail line.

While the separation of the rail line from Warrigal Road can be seen on the one hand as a benefit, like Warrigal Road itself, it serves as a barrier to unification. The development site can potentially help to resolve this condition by improving the levels of residential population and in particular through activation.

The development proposal provides a considered and creative architectural response on a large parcel of 1.49ha with frontages to Warrigal Road and the rail corridor.

In the metropolitan context, strategic opportunities for development around public transport ‘nodes’ are increasingly being harnessed along rail corridors. There is a clear emergence of clusters of more intensive development around railway stations through inner, middle and outer suburban locations across greater Melbourne.

Planning policy encourages redevelopment in a manner consistent with the range of urban design principles created to facilitate better use of existing rail infrastructure.

Curiously, these opportunities are largely unrealised along the East Richmond-Glen Waverley rail section - in which the vast majority of centres are identified within the respective Planning Schemes as serving localised neighbourhoods - with the obvious exception being the Glen Waverley terminus. Analysis of rail patronage data (see Figure 4) along this segment indicates a general decline in network usage and this includes Homesglen. This is despite policy supporting higher order transit-oriented development around rail stations.

The exception in the analysis at Figure 4 is Tooronga which saw a considerable uptake in the 2013-14 period. Interestingly, the only discernible change within the physical context of this rail station was the redevelopment of the Stockland / Coles site on the south east corner of Toorak and Tooronga Roads with a series of small residential towers.

With a clear mandate for change, the subject site’s size and ability to directly access the railway station represents a unique opportunity within this part of Ashwood to make a major contribution to achieving an integrated transit-oriented development at higher densities that can bring beneficial physical change to the northern entry of the activity centre (Figure 5).

In summary, there is clear strategic support for more intensive development on the subject site, provided the built form and urban design response is appropriately resolved in relation to the site’s physical context and interfaces.
Figure 5: Strategic context
2.2 Planning Context

The site is located within the Mixed Use Zone (MUZ), which seeks:

- To provide for a range of residential, commercial, industrial and other uses which complement the mixed-use function of the locality.
- To provide for housing at higher densities.
- To encourage development that responds to the existing or preferred neighbourhood character of the area.
- To facilitate the use, development and redevelopment of land in accordance with the objectives specified in a schedule to this zone.

It is also affected by an Environmental Audit Overlay (EAO) which seeks to ensure that potentially contaminated land is suitable for a use which could be significantly adversely affected by any contamination.

A range of State and Local Planning Policies are of relevance, including:

- Clause 09 – Plan Melbourne
- Clause 11 – Settlement
- Clause 15 – Built Environment and Heritage
- Clause 16 – Housing
- Clause 21.04 – Residential Development
- Clause 21.05 – Economic Development
- Clause 21.06 – Activity Centres
- Clause 22.03 – Residential Development
- Clause 22.06 – Activity Centres

The following reference documents are further highlighted as relevant:

- Monash Housing Strategy 2014 (October 2014)
- Guidelines for Higher Density Residential Development (DSE, 2004)
- Activity Centre Design Guidelines (DSE, 2005)
- Safer Design Guidelines (DSE, 2005)

Holmesglen is identified as a ‘neighbourhood activity centre’ at Clause 21.06 of the Monash Planning Scheme and is similarly designated at Clause 21.03 of the Stonnington Planning Scheme, which applies to land to the west of Warrigal Road.

As previously noted if this centre was in one municipality and not on the boundary of three local government areas, it could be said to exhibit all the assets of a major activity centre.

A review of the relevant provisions clearly indicates support for increased densities around areas that are well serviced by amenities and the PPTN.
2.3 Physical Context

The physical context of the site is affected by three primary influences:

- The **topography of the district** - within the context of Gardiners Creek, the site sits at the bottom of the Creek valley, which, seen along Warrigal Road, makes buildings appear subservient to the residential hinterland on generally higher ground (Figure 8);
- The **place of transport infrastructure** - the presence of Warrigal Road and the elevated rail line serve as physical barriers that divide and separate, but also connect the site to a wider context; and
- **Land uses abutting and adjacent to the site** - adjacent land use zonings that includes the Gardiners Creek Reserve serve to limit opportunities for increases in density except for the development site and its neighbour to the north already developed to 7 storeys of residential apartments.

In broad terms, the site is located on the northern edge of the activity centre which extends to the south of the railway corridor along both sides of Warrigal Road. (Figure 8).

The site currently accommodates three large warehouse buildings with at grade parking for a variety of tenancies which serve a range of wholesaling, administration and distribution needs. The site’s interfaces are:

- **North**: A seven storey residential development (with a basement car park), separated into 3x residential buildings that span the width of the development site. Land further to the north forms part of the Gardiners Creek reserve.
- **South**: The Glen Waverley railway line - which is an elevated corridor that forms an edge to some of the lower density residential uses to the south. The corridor also includes a pedestrian connection through to the train station that is directly accessible from Elliott Street.
- **East**: Elliott Street, a small local street that terminates at the railway line. Land on the opposite side of Elliott Street contains a five storey residential building with a ground floor cafe. A pedestrian connection to Collins Street (south of the rail line) is provided via Elliott Street.
- **West**: Warrigal Road, a six-lane arterial road with a centre median. Land further to the west forms part of the Malvern Valley Public Golf Course. A signalised T-intersection is also located south west of the site, intersecting with The Boulevard.
2.4 Influences, Opportunities and Constraints

The interfaces to the site serve to buffer it from its surrounding context, and in particular the lower density residential areas to the south (Figure 9). The rail line is elevated above the housing to the south and the site itself. The land to the north has a 7 storey apartment development and beyond this is the extensive Gardiners Creek Reserve. To the west is Warrigal Road, the Homesglen TAFE and the rail station.

The principal opportunities of the site are:

- The consolidated nature of the parcel with limited sensitive abuttals, and existing 7 storey development to the north.
- The direct proximity to the Homesglen TAFE, rail station and the opportunities afforded by a station not impacted by a level crossing.
- The site’s location within a valley context in which taller built form can be absorbed into the landscape.
- The potential for long range views toward the CBD and Dandenong Ranges.
- The potential for new connections through the site that can integrate development into the surrounding area and improve permeability.
- The potential for a mix of uses that generate activity and increased population to support the vitality of the activity centre.

Constraints to the site include:

- The fragmented nature of strategic planning and policy frameworks for Homesglen and its surrounds, which are a consequence of its location on the boundary of three municipalities.
- The elevated rail line which creates an abuttal that requires a considered design response.
- The potential effect of shadow on residential neighbours to the south.

Figure 9: Opportunities and constraints
2.5 Distillation of the Influences of the Planning and Physical Context

In broad terms, the analysis reveals that the site sits within two fragmented and divided local activity centres at the confluence of three municipal boundaries.

The location of Holmesglen 'on the edge' has traditionally meant that municipal attention has been focussed elsewhere and there is no unified vision for the centre.

This condition, together with the physical context, have clearly influenced the planning approach to Holmesglen to date.

As highlighted in Figure 10, land within the City of Boroondara to the north and north-east of the subject site is clearly separated by the Gardiners Creek open space linear corridor. While the open space is clearly a community asset, it also serves to separate the residential area from abutting to the north Homesglen, encouraging gravitation toward Alamein Station and the existing Ashwood and Ashburton Neighbourhood Centres at the intersection of Warrigal Road and High Street Road and on High Street respectively.

To the south, the Monash Freeway forms a hard edge to the range of non-residential uses clustered along Warrigal Road.

This condition clearly starts to form a 'contained precinct' focusing on Homesglen Station and the fragmented activity centre along Warrigal Parade. There is an opportunity here to redevelop the site in a manner that responds to its rail-transit context, in a way that serves to better unite the functioning of the area as a community around a regenerated activity centre.

The absence of extensive strategic local policy to achieve this does not mean the opportunity should be ignored. It is a policy well founded in State policy.

Our analysis of the design response, set out in Part B of this document, concludes that the proposal responds to the site’s rail transit and physical context in a well-considered architectural and urban design outcome that serves to enhance and unify the Activity Centre.
Part B:
Urban Design Assessment
3. Design Response

3.1 Site Planning and Design

The site planning approach is to create two distinct zones:

1. **Commercial** to Warrigal Road which has a strongly activated edge to respond to this robust interface before transitioning into the site to a residential precinct.
2. **Residential** over the rest of the site which provides a residential interface to the residential neighbours to the north east and across the rail line to the south.

Response:

- A road connection between Warrigal Road and Elliot Street provides connectivity and links the site and its surrounds.
- The inclusion of a retail tenancy to the site frontage will improve the pedestrian experience and contribute to the activation of Warrigal Road as well as the pedestrian thoroughfare that leads into the residential development from the street.
- A clearly separated vehicle access point and pedestrian entry which reduces potential pedestrian and vehicular conflict zones.
- Undercroft and basement parking which takes advantage of the natural slope of the site - creating a central open space podium that becomes a focal point for residents.
- Elevation above the parking ensures that apartments sit above the level of the railway line.
- The spacing and orientation of residential blocks ensures a good level of internal amenity and outlook.

Conclusion:

The development adopts a successful site planning approach that responds to the natural site features and adjoining interfaces t creates a pleasant internal network of streets and spaces, activates Warrigal Road and has minimal impact upon lower scaled residential neighbours.
3.2 Scale

The building scale responds to the physical context of the site by delivering a series of buildings that can be readily absorbed into the built form context and landscape. The proposal adopts a stepped form that transitions from the scale of adjacent buildings to the north up to 13 storeys for the commercial building on the Warrigal Road frontage (Figure 13).

The residential apartments have a stepped and layered form reaching a maximum height of 10 storeys. Their graduated form creates a tiering effect and provides large landscaped terraces that provide longer range views to the CBD (north west) and Dandenong Ranges (east).

Response:

- The building height has been crafted so that the tallest element sits centrally within the site. The building scale is managed so that:
  - The predominant building mass sits within the scale context of apartment buildings to the north.
  - There is no unreasonable overshadowing of residents to the south.
  - The taller commercial forms transition down to their adjoining interfaces so that the highest element sit comfortably within a context of surrounding buildings at the foot of the valley (Figure 14). While these buildings are a ‘marker’ in the activity centre they are moderated in their mass and scale relationship with neighbouring buildings.
  - The footprint of the tallest building diminishes at the upper levels to create a vertical element that punctuates the prevailing scale.
  - The central open space podium is framed by buildings that define its edge and allow sunlight penetration.

- The architectural language of the tower assists in articulating a gateway into the activity centre which works in conjunction with the 7 storey built form of the TAFE building (south west) of the site.

Conclusion:

The development is of measured and considered scale within the context of emerging taller built form and its location within a valley. This is reinforced by the limited offsite amenity impacts of the mooted on existing residential neighbours.
3.3 Massing and Composition

The proposal is made up of two principal building forms that present to Warrigal Road. The forms are grounded by a well defined podium that activates the public realm. A different composition is adopted for the residential component, which employs a series of curved and tiered buildings around a central landscaped deck.

Response:

• Commercial
  - The podium at the Warrigal Road interface pays clear regard to the human scale, ranging between 2-5 storeys across the frontage. The taller podium form serves to balance the scale of the commercial tower, with the ground floor plane recessed from the street edge to provide a visual connection and to lead pedestrians into the site (Figure 15).
  - Terraced forms to the north and south provide opportunities for landscaped outdoor spaces which not only enhance onsite amenity, but also soften long range views from the south.
  - The crafting of the commercial volumes to the street alignment creates a transformative dynamic composition to the Warrigal Road streetscape.

• Residential
  - Residential buildings are supported by a well defined 2 storey terrace typology which acts as the building base and conceals onsite car parking to support the creation of a pedestrian-friendly public realm to the existing and proposed road network (Figure 16).
  - North facing terraces are maximised through the creation of a curved floor plate, with terraces and rounded corners eroding a defined building edge and softening the overall massing.
  - Buildings within the north east and north west are punctuated by a central atrium which allow for an internal corridor that is supported by natural light and landscaping that lead to individual apartments.
  - The southern buildings have been shaped away from the railway edge to mitigate noise and provide ample opportunities for meaningful landscaping at this interface.

Conclusion:

The proposal applies a massing strategy that is responsive to the strategic context, the site facilitates an architectural expression that allows the extensive introduction of landscape at the ground plane and across all levels of the building.
3.4 Architectural Expression and Materiality

In broad terms, the proposal incorporates the extensive use of glass as a unifying design element. Varied architectural treatments are then employed to reinforce the different built form functions.

Response:

- Stronger linear forms define the Warrigal Road interface in which the office, child care and hotel uses are proposed. The orthogonal shape of the tallest element is an effective response to the main road environment of Warrigal Road, broken by angular elements that provide interest and variety in this northern part of the activity centre.
- The introduction of activated pedestrian space creates a place that is comfortable to walk along, or to pause for “coffee” and conversation. A marked improvement over the existing condition and a significant contributor to uniting the quite disparate elements that currently characterise this centre.
- Softer forms are incorporated into the residential buildings and provide a strong visual cue of the transition from one space to the next.
- Internally, the residential building form presents a more organic footprint, with curved terraces designed to work with a considered landscape podium to provide a series of connected pedestrian spaces at Level 3.

Conclusion:

The proposal achieves an overall architectural strategy that is a coherent design approach with variation in “language” that serves to reinforce the different land use functions across the site. Most particularly it works to unite this northern part of the activity centre.
3.5 Off-site amenity

The site planning approach has ensured that there will be no unreasonable effects on neighbouring properties.

Response:

- Site planning has sought to separate buildings away from sensitive interfaces. The internal roadway along the north serves as a primary buffer to existing dwellings in Power Avenue.
- Separation is also provided to the east, noting that Elliot Street is an approximately 20m wide road reserve.
- The elevated railway line and the separation from dwellings to the south ensures that visual and shadow effects on these properties are minimised.

Conclusion:

Building forms have been sited in a manner that gives due consideration to the adjoining interfaces. The alignment of the new road provides for meaningful separation from existing residences.
3.6 Internal Function and Amenity

Response:

- Car parking is contained within an undercroft and/or basement and is not visually exposed at the street.
- The hotel entry area functions as a port-cochere – with a dedicated pick up/drop off area to cater for occupant demands.
- Provision of outdoor dining area to Warrigal Road and retail within the internal street wall provide passive surveillance of the public realm.
- Inclusion of a childcare centre, gym and extensive outdoor terraces for residents and workers demonstrates a considered approach that increases internal amenity and quality of place for future occupants.
- Site planning and the placement of buildings assures a good outlook for residents and minimises overlooking to apartments and private open spaces.
- The orientation of apartments to the internal road and common spaces provides for beneficial passive surveillance.
- By providing a central atrium, dwellings achieve excellent daylight access to habitable rooms, with a high proportion of cross ventilated apartments and shallow apartment depths. This space also offers potential for informal recreation and gathering.

Conclusion:

The development has been effectively configured with respect to circulation and internal amenity. Incorporation of a central atrium significantly enhances the design.
4. Conclusion

In terms of the urban design merits of this proposal, our conclusion is that it provides a positive response to the existing and emerging context. The principal reasons for this conclusion are:

• There are sound strategic reasons to pursue regeneration on this site
• The site offers an ability to make a beneficial contribution to the unification of this fragmented centre around an established railway station next to the Homesglen TAFE
• The building massing and composition minimises its negative impacts on neighbours particularly in relation to shadow and visual bulk
• It includes a well-considered ground floor design that includes an arrangement of clearly separated and secure entry / exit points along with an activated ground plane.
• A functional circulation layout and attractive internal amenity for future residents.

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