Independent Urban Design Advice

Proposed Planning Scheme Amendment C221 West Melbourne

Prepared by
Koos de Keijzer
MArch, AIA
1 Areas of Expertise

Architecture and Urban Design dealing with a range of project types including complex master planned communities, waterfront projects, mixed-use projects and housing.

2 Expertise to prepare this report

I hold the position of Principal at DKO Architecture. Prior to establishing DKO Architecture in 2000, I was a Director at HPA Architecture. DKO is a multi-award winning Architectural firm with offices in Auckland, Melbourne, Sydney and Ho Chi Minh. I am also a member of the Victorian Design Review Panel which provides independent advice to the state government about the design of significant development proposals. I hold a Masters Degree in Architecture and Urban Design from the Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands. I am a registered Architect in Australia and New Zealand, and am a member of the Architects Institute of Australia and New Zealand Institute of Architects, I have over 30 years’ experience in designing and managing complex architecture and urban design projects in New Zealand, Australia, Netherlands and Southeast Asia.

3 Background

In October 2016 I was asked by the City of Melbourne to comment on, and provide recommendations to the proposed planning scheme amendment C221 West Melbourne Waterfront. I have visited the site and considered schedule 12 pursuant to the development plan overlay.

a. I have studied the location plan and diagrams illustrating the proposal. I have studied the draft development plan prepared by the specialist team. This development plan facilitates a mixed use, residential, commercial and retail development.

b. I have studied the submissions received after the exhibition of the amendment.

4 I have studied the following documents to assist in commenting on the proposed planning scheme amendment C221

- Planning scheme amendment C221 West Melbourne waterfront.
- Submissions received after the exhibition of the amendment.
- Plan Melbourne
- West Melbourne Waterfront Draft Development Plan.
- West Melbourne Waterfront Site Planning Principles
- Maribyrnong River Valley design Guidelines.
- City of Melbourne Open space Strategy Technical Report
- VDRG report Amendment C221 West Melbourne Waterfront
- Guidelines for Higher Density Development
- Better Apartments Draft Design Standards (BADDs)
- Perri Projects website
- NSW Apartment Design Guide
- General knowledge of the Joseph Road Precinct

5 Site context

The site, which is a part of amendment, C221 is to be rezoned from a Commercial 2 Zone to a Mixed Used Zone.

The site is located at 156-232 Kensington Road, West Melbourne. The site comprised 5 Titles. The site is approximately 2.8 hectares and has some 230 metres of Maribyrnong River frontage.

The site currently is partly vacant and partly occupied by a series of commercial buildings, warehouses and car parking. The northeastern boundary of the site is the Maribyrnong River. The Southern boundary is a material storage depot. The Northern Boundary is Vic Track managed land. This is partially elevated. The eastern boundary is Kensington Road. The site is visually very prominent from the adjacent riverbank located in the Maribyrnong City Council area.

The site sits within close proximity to the following key public transport stops.

i. South Kensington Rail station, 150m

ii. Footscray Rail Station 300m
The site sits within close proximity of the following key public open space locations.

- JJ Holland Park
- Newell’s Paddock Wetlands Reserve
- Maribyrnong River Walking and Cycling Trails.

### 6 Summary of Findings

I have summarized my findings in 10 categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 River interface</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Rail interface</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Kensington Road interface</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Public realm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Built form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Residential amenity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Tower Podium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8 Private residential access to the river.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9 Solar Controls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.10 Building Separation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 6.1 River Interface

This portion of the Maribyrnong River is within the “Footscray” length as contained within the Maribyrnong River Valley Design Guidelines, the Building visibility outcomes to be achieved are “Buildings should create a strong urban edge to the river, with vegetation used to frame built form and provide shade in public areas.” The proposition does provide an urban edge albeit rather incoherent as a whole; it is not clear if the interface is a promenade, a street or a linear park. The built form does not follow the River edge resulting in a series of triangular spaces. Whilst not discounting this strategy it is not particular urban and results in a confused ground plan.

There is a 15 metre minimum and an average 25 metre setback to the built form from the river identified in the IFP contained in DPO12. The 25 metre average setback is supported and will provide diverse waterfront experiences.

Images of the river interface show an urban environment that although attractive could be seen as out of character with the intertidal nature of the Maribyrnong River and the intimate landscaping currently on the site. In the City of Melbourne’s Open space Strategy this length of the Maribyrnong River is identified as providing “a range of environment and recreational improvements.” The City Of Melbourne’s Open space strategy report says the following, “In future redevelopment of these sites, achieve additional width of open space to provide more space to increase the riparian zone and the diversity of recreational opportunities.

With a residential programme on the interface, stoops and immediate front door access to the river are essential. It is noted that DPO12 specifically states no access. It is also noted that DPO 12 requires a clear distinction between private and public realm throughout the site. This has not been achieved.

No analysis has been provided in the material as to the visual impact of the built form as seen from the Buddhist temple and Newell’s paddock. Elevated the built form could appear rather amorphous and overbearing. (See attachment)

#### 6.2 Rail Interface

This interface is a difficult interface and the proposition as described by the IFP is to mitigate the detrimental acoustic effects. The interface does have good northern frontage providing the opportunities for good solar amenity the visual effects of the HV lines are also indirectly mitigated through the proposition.

The rail track for the majority of its length is elevated and could provide access opportunities to the site directly to the north. The proposition has created a very large podium typology blocking any potential linkage to the north. This proposition is any odds with the principles table in the West Melbourne Waterfront site planning principles.

An alternative approach would be to push the built form further away from the rail track and provide a positive urban street linking to the river and providing alternative staging opportunities. (See attachment)

A typical urban and suburban Melbourne urban typology is the “Station Street” or “Railway Parade”. The other scenario could with concurrence of Vic Track provide a “Banana Alley” type interface under the elevated railway track. These spaces could be used by “Creative Industries” and potentially other small tenancies. This would ensure there is a clear distinction between private and public realm throughout the site. The residual parcel adjacent Kensington Road could have a commercial use being more appropriate adjacent the Fish Markets. (See attachment)

#### 6.3 Kensington Road Interface
This interface currently characterized by mature canopy trees connects Dynon Road with Epsom Road. DPO 12 mandates that the built form adopt a street edge of 3 to 6 stories on Kensington Road. The proposition clearly provides a robust urban form that is aligned with Kensington Road.

A generous setback of 4 meters is provided which would ensure that Kensington Road maintains its character. Analyzing the graphic material available would indicate however that the contiguous 6 levels and stepping back to 14 in some instances could be overbearing on Kensington Road. (See attachments)

DPO 12 does state the architectural composition of the individual buildings should avoid the use of a tower and podium typology. The Kensington Road frontage would certainly benefit from a more conventional podium typology, which would allow for a more elegant and better proportioned street interface. (See attachment)

### 6.4 Public Realm

The proposition shows a hierarchy of spaces and places and is attempting some innovative typologies. This is to be applauded.

It is also noted that DPO 12 requires a clear distinction between private and public realm throughout the site. This has not been achieved. The biggest move in the public realm could be visually connecting the public realm with the Maribyrnong River, and linking Kensington Road to the Maribyrnong River. The public realm should be created with laneways, streets, parks and special places. This clear assemblage of components is missing. The proposition of the “development mountain” created by the prescriptive setbacks and then overlaid on a grid is an interesting one, but doesn’t necessarily create a high quality public realm.

A more pragmatic grid of a finer grain and scale could achieve similar development potential. (See attachments) The loop road provided in the proposition is a good insertion although it changing from a road to a share way doesn’t essentially provide the clear distinction require by DPO12. Greater street access on the river’s edge could be created by extending the loop road (see alternative scheme in the appendix)

There are a number of benchmarks of similar edge sites that should be analyzed as part of this proposition. Again DPO 12 does state the architectural composition of the individual buildings should avoid the use of a tower and podium typology. In my professional opinion DPO12 should examine its avoidance of the tower/podium criteria, which would then give the proponents greater scope to craft a quality public realm.

### 6.5 Built Form

The surrounding residential context of this site has grain and scale liked and familiar to Melbournians. This site has the opportunity to provide some larger built form. The heights suggested in DPO12 in my opinion are reasonable. Some of the assessment criteria for additional height in my opinion are difficult to manage through its complexity.

The visual bulk, podium height and tower setback in my opinion do not look particularly well resolved in the massing diagrams and the built form section. While acknowledging that the edges of the proposition are generally consistent with the built form guidelines in schedule 12, the proposition is an unusual typology and relatively untested. It feels as stated previously like a “development mountain”. A proposition like this needs to be tested visually form a number of strategic urban vantage points such as Newell’s Paddock, The Buddhist Temple of the Heavenly Queen and Riverside Park. A finer grained grid as previously stated will lead to a finer grained build form. (See attachments for alternative built form scenarios) The large building on the northern site through its sheer size will be not conducive to fine built form.

### 6.6 Residential Amenity

DPO 12 has a number of criteria re residential amenity that are to be encouraged.

DPO 12 states, “Ensure that the new development provides a high level of amenity for future occupants, including windows to all bedrooms which are visible from all points in the bedroom. Floor plates are to be designed to maximize opportunities for direct sunlight, natural cross ventilation and passive heating and cooling. All habitable rooms must have good natural light.”

The Victorian Government has recently issued draft Victorian Better Apartments Draft Design Standards (BADDS) that could form the basis of residential amenity on this site.

The current proposition contains some large footprints, which would not necessary meet the fundamental residential amenity criteria in BADDS. The proposition tabled in the IFP would need to be tested comprehensively to prove the residential amenity criteria. A finer grained approach could result in a more crafted residential and less problematic retail/commercial propositions, which could facilitate in creating great streets and attractive residential amenity.

### 6.7 Tower Podium

DPO 12 does state the architectural composition of the individual buildings should avoid the use of a tower and podium typology. The tower and podium typology is certainly prevalent in the central city of Melbourne. The urban model of a tower above a low level 4 to 5 level podium does mitigate a number of environmental issues at pedestrian level. The tower and podium critique often stems from the woeful architectural treatment of the assemblage of parts. Podiums are usually car park driven whereas towers naturally should be residential amenity driven. Creating a tower rising from a podium with a high degree of permeability is a difficult architectural exercise. An additional concern re the tower and podium typology is that the podium top is visually disconnected from the street. There are a number of examples globally where the typology is skillfully executed; Steven Holl’s Raffles City in Chengdu is a relevant example.
Image 1: Example of podium design at Raffles City in Chengdu designed by Steven Holl Architects demonstrating a fine pedestrian grain which provides multiple levels of pedestrian connectivity as well as direct access to the street.

In many ways the proposition needs to be a hybrid combining the urban courtyard typology with the tower podium typology.

I concur with the VDRP’s report, which states, “The concern is rather with the large footprints of each of the 4 building envelopes. These will not allow the amenity and internal circulation of potential buildings within these envelopes to be optimized; they also miss an opportunity to create a fine grained network of circulation spaces within each block.”

A skillful architectural proposition could fragment the podium and create a more permeable condition that could provide a finer grain at the ground. This is a 3-hectare site and more emphasis should be placed on the nature of the public realm through the use of lanes, streets, parks and riverfront edges.

6.8 Private residential access to the river.

DPO 12 states, “Along the riverfront there is to be no access to private dwellings” and the DPO also states, “ensure a clear distinction between private and public realm throughout the site.”

I assume these conditions are attempting to prevent the privatization of the waterfront edge. With some clear setback controls and design guidelines, front door access could be achievable, indeed with a residential programme on the interface, stoops and immediate front door access to the river are essential.
6.9 Solar Controls

DPO 12 contains a number of solar controls: "A concept plan that shows orientation and overshadowing demonstrating that the development does not cast a shadow over public space between 9am and 3pm for a minimum of 3 hours at the solstice and a minimum of 5 hours at the equinox." And "Communal and private open space should have a minimum of 3 hours direct sunlight between 9am and 3pm on June 22 and at least 5 hours on September 22" and should the proposition be above 14 storeys "no additional overshadowing to the Maribyrnong River, the public open space, the internal street network or the footpath on Kensington Road". These controls are more onerous than the NSW "Apartment Design Guide" which mandates a minimum of 2 hours for the mid winter solstice for both communal and private open space. The proposition as tabled in the IFP would need to be tested comprehensively to prove the residential amenity criteria.
**6.10 Building Separation**

DPO 12 has controls on the internal street setbacks and states “Development at any frontage of any internal street must not exceed a height of 4 stories and should be setback 1 metre for every metre of height above 15 metres.”

The built form sections in the proposition show 5/6 levels and a building separation of 12 metres. (Section c) 5/7 levels and a building separation of 16 metres (section G) and 5/6 levels and a building separation of 16.5 (section H).

To facilitate good streets and a high level of residential amenity the building setback table in the Victorian Better apartments Draft Design Standards could be used. This table states up to 13.5 metres 12-metre separation, up to 25 metres 18-metre separation and over 25 metres 24 metres of separation.

**7 Conclusions**

7.1 The redevelopment of the land at 156-232 Kensington Road is supported and there is general agreement with the documentation in Amendment C221 along with the Indicative Framework Plan submitted.

7.2 The use of innovative and the range of differing typologies and mixed uses is supported but needs further testing to resolve the residential and public realm issues.

7.3 I do have issues with the overall built form massing as suggested in the IFP and feel that it does not contain the fine grain and permeability that an important riverfront like this demands.

7.4 The lack of fine grain and permeability also presents public and private realm concerns. Building separation needs to be carefully considered. General residential amenity is a concern and I support the amenity controls in section 12 of C221. Compliance with the BADDS if possible would provide additional certainty.

7.6 The northern rail interface is not supported both in its size, edges and built form. Further alternatives against this difficult edge should be explored.

7.7 The amalgamated solar controls in Amendment C221 section 12 are onerous and further testing should be undertaken to test their impact on the Indicative Framework Plan.

7.8 I agree with the VDRP’s suggestion that portions of DPO12 be reworded as, “firmer, more objective and performance based” to clearly articulate non-negotiable issues. Height should be in metres, setbacks to the river clearly stated and building separation clearly defined. I also agree with the VDRP’s suggestion that “DPO12 should investigate the potential for a simpler massing response”.

7.8 Attached to my evidence is an alternate scenario to master plan the site. While not suggesting this is the only approach, it is important to consider the mandatory requirements of DPO12 when looking at alternative scenarios.

8 I have made all the inquiries that I believe are desirable and appropriate and no matters of significance which I regard as relevant have to my knowledge been withheld from the Panel.’