

3.0 Significant views

3.1 Significant views within and from the site

An analysis plan of existing views within the site, especially around the Heritage Core area is attached in appendix 3, drawing HVS 5. Some submissions, including that made by the Boroondara City Council, commented on the loss of views both within the site and to Willsmere from the site which would arise from the development. The following discussion shows the extent of existing views on site and how the proposed design retains significant views.

Existing views to the six buildings on the Victorian Heritage Register are very limited because of other surrounding buildings, the landscape and topography, including trees, retaining walls and fences outside of the Heritage Core. Important views are not available from Main Drive or Boundary Drive which are further from the Heritage Core.

Currently views to the heritage buildings from Lower Drive are substantially blocked by the Boiler House (refer V3), and vegetation, hedges and fencing (V4 and V6). Vegetation and a fence also obscures views to B5 from Lower Drive (V9) and from the east (V10). One of the advantages of the proposed green spine leading to the Heritage Core is that views from the north looking up the hill towards B6 will be greatly improved. The road around the Heritage Core, and the path which continues Lower Drive across the open space, will also provide improved views of the Heritage Core.

Views to other Heritage Core buildings from the east are mainly blocked by the Network Q building (V11) and also the change in levels (V12).

Any views to B2 from the east show only its new wings, particularly the roof line as this building is set down in relation to the surrounding land to the south and east (V13 and V14). This is also the case when B2 is viewed from the south as there is a tall retaining wall south of the building, with a fence and planting above it (V15 and V16). At the southern end, the walkway surface is also higher than the floor level of B2 (V18).

A better view is available to B3 from the south because of the longer grassy slope down from the tree mound (V17 and V21). B6 can also be seen in the distance and this is an important relationship and view which will be retained in the development.

The view from the south past B1 and down the walkway (V22) will be retained in the development. The spatial relationship with B3 and B6 in this area is important and will be retained. The open space between B1 and B3 which is important to the relationship (V23) is being retained in the development.

Views from the west looking towards the Heritage Core do not show much of the heritage buildings (V24, V25, V26 and V27). Partly they are blocked by fences and trees but also the heritage buildings have been substantially modified on the western side. From further northwest, views to the Heritage Core are blocked by the large double storey cream brick building (V28).

Closer to the Heritage Core, B6 can be seen from the existing carpark (V29). This side of B4 has been substantially altered.

More important is the relationship between the heritage buildings within the Heritage Core. V31 shows a view from the retaining wall immediately south of B6, looking at B1, B2 and B3. The important spatial relationship and views between these buildings will be retained. It is proposed to replace B2 with a new apartment block which will have a similar scale and placement on this edge as the existing building (refer to HVS 4 and HVS 6). This means that existing views of the area between B2 and B3 will be retained (V34).

The line of the walkways will be retained and the removal of the canopies will enhance viewlines. The significant trees, east of B6 and in the VPO in the planning scheme, will be retained (V32).

From the higher southern ground (V20 but barely visible in this photograph) existing views to the Willsmere Towers are to be retained and will not be lessened by the apartments proposed.

Within the Heritage Core, limited views are available to Willsmere because of the existing buildings and trees. The Willsmere Tower is visible looking past B1 and B3 and the tall trees behind B1 (V33 but Willsmere is hard to see in the photograph). This view will not be lost with the proposed apartment on the site of B4. Refer to HVS 4 and HVS 6. It should be noted that a view to the Willsmere Tower is not available further north of B4 and B6 (V35) so increased height in this area will not lessen views.

Views from the KRS site to the Willsmere Towers are also available from the southern areas on higher ground (refer to photograph on HVS 6). The construction of apartment buildings will impact on some of these views however, there are also existing buildings which limit views. A substantial amount of the land in this area is the treed site buffer which is included in the VPO for the site. This area and the large setback from the Willsmere boundary ensure that views will be retained in the south, southwest of the site.

In summary, the following views have been identified as significant and will be retained by the proposed development:

- Views along Main Drive, Lower Drive, Oak Walk and Boundary Drive.
- The view to B3 looking north from the tree mound with B6 in the distance.
- The view looking north past B1 down the walkway.
- Views of open space between B3 and B6, B1 and B3.
- The view from the retaining wall immediately south of B6, looking at the spatial arrangement of B1, B2 and B3. Note that B2 is proposed for demolition but existing views of the area between B2 and B3 will be retained.
- Views to the significant trees, east of B6 and in the VPO in the planning scheme, will be retained.
- From the higher ground just south of the Heritage Core existing views to the Willsmere Towers are to be retained.
- Views to the Willsmere Tower past B1 and B3 will be retained.

- Views to the Willsmere Towers from the south and southwest of the site. These will be impacted upon by the apartments but will remain unchanged in the boundary buffer zones and VPO areas which are substantial.

In addition, the following views will be substantially improved by the development:

- Views from the north looking up the hill towards B6 will be greatly improved.
- The road around the Heritage Core, and the path which continues Lower Drive across the open space, will also provide improved views of the Heritage Core.
- The line of the walkways will be retained and the removal of the canopies will enhance viewlines.

3.2 Significant views to the site

Further information has been requested regarding the impact of the proposed apartment buildings located on the higher section of the KRS site in relation to the landmark former Willsmere Hospital (H0861) which is adjacent.

The Willsmere towers are particularly important as they are visible above the tree canopy forming a landmark when viewed from surrounding areas to the north and west. Drawing HVS 7 shows three of those views; from Yarra Boulevard, East Melbourne and Chandler Highway.

The reduced level at the top of the Willsmere Towers is at 89.7 AHD. The reduced level to the top of the tallest apartment proposed at KRS is approximately 81.2 AHD, some 8.5 metres lower. This apartment is also a considerable distance away from the Willsmere Tower. Red lines on the plan indicate these two levels in the views.

The photographs also show that the top of the tallest apartment is about the tree canopy level when viewed from a distance. It is proposed that the apartments will be of a muted colour to more easily blend with the vegetation in comparison to Willsmere which is white and stands out in vistas.

The relationship between the levels of the proposed new development at KRS and the existing Willsmere buildings is shown in more detail in the section e-e on drawing HVS 6. This shows how the apartment buildings are stepped down the slope and lower than the Willsmere Towers and shows the critical Reduced Levels of the development compared with Willsmere.

Views will be available to the new apartment buildings, particularly from the green spine within the KRS site. Trees to the south will largely screen the proposed apartments from views from the south. The higher apartment blocks address the green space rather than being located with the lower density dwellings. Near the Heritage Core, the buildings are four storeys, and at the south of the site, they are five storeys. This minimises over-shadowing of the lower density residential blocks and eliminates any potential for overlooking into house blocks that will accommodate the KRS residents relocated on site.

Hence the placement of the apartment buildings on site has been carefully done to improve the quality of the KRS development. Due to the distance from the Willsmere Towers and the lower height proposed, the KRS development will not detract from the landmark value which forms part of the significance of the former Willsmere Hospital site.

4.0 Design considerations

4.1 Masterplan for the site

Further information is provided in this submission about the issues which informed master planning of the site.

Many of the urban design issues have been determined by strict compliance with the principles of the UDF (October 2003) and Planning Scheme Development Plan Overlay Requirements. These include provision for 27% of the site to be public open space. The five storey maximum height provisions and all other heights were guided by UDF Section 8 'Building Envelopes and Setbacks Diagram'. Prescriptive guidelines were also provided for the edges of the KRS site and setbacks required in order to provide integration with the surrounding area.

The approach to heritage was included (now superseded by the addition to the Victorian Heritage Register) with two buildings identified for retention, B3 School House and B6 Dining Room. Vegetation identified in the Vegetation Protection Overlay was to be retained. The central focus of the development was to be around the retained heritage buildings, along with memorials to be retained but able to be relocated on site.

In response to these principles, and with consideration of the site and its proposed uses, the Masterplan was developed with an overall lower density approach that aids the integration of the single storey Community Houses for KRS clients with the detached housing. There was also a desire for the provision of diverse housing types across the whole of the site.

The design approach was to locate the higher density elements in the layout along the Open Space Spine so that apartments achieve an optimum commercial location and also overlook open space rather than private homes.

It should be noted that where the UDF document permitted five storeys on the northern side of Lower Drive, this was not pursued due to environmental, commercial and amenity considerations. In relation to the topography, higher development in these locations only creates an exaggerated overshadowing affect on the urban areas directly south of this section. Higher density development along Lower Drive was rejected as it compromised the overall integrity, amenity and intent of the scheme.

A major benefit of the design proposed is the provision of a high quality public domain for individual residents and the community as a whole that supports social interaction. This is achieved with the allocation of a public open space central spine connecting the broader community through the site into the Yarra Bend open space network via a direct link from the south-west corner.

The road hierarchy throughout the site focuses on the primary access via Main Drive and through to a connection onto Hutchinson Drive. The establishment of this circuit around the green space and Heritage Core as the primary connector system helps to emphasize the importance of this precinct. It provides for a strong sense of arrival as it connects to the

central spine, apartment precinct and Heritage Core. This sense of arrival is to be established in both a built form and landscape entry statement. It means that the central focus of the development is around the retained heritage buildings and it makes strong use of the existing historic avenues of trees.

A different approach was put forward in the Kew Cottages Coalition (KCC) Precinct Proposal, part of a submission to Heritage Victoria dated 23 June 2005. This proposal is not supported for the following reasons.

A clear goal of the permit application masterplan was to encourage and provide for an integrated and inclusive neighbourhood with a mix of residential and community facilities. The KCC precinct proposal has the circular drive around the Heritage Core which dislocates this precinct from the remainder of the development. The isolated Heritage Core retains only carparking and the heritage buildings. It is unlikely that this would result in viable ongoing uses of these buildings and encourage public use and interpretation. The Masterplan addressed this issue by integrating the retained cottages into the 'central hub' of the site creating a greater opportunity for the reuse of the Heritage Buildings within a residential setting. Consideration was also given to its connection to the Central Open Space Spine through to the Yarra Bend Park which will encourage public use and the provision of interpretation.

The KCC proposed relocation of apartment buildings within the Open Space spine to the North East corner of the site is not a preferred or sensitive response. Due to the steep topography of the site, higher development in this location only creates an exaggerated overshadowing affect on the proposed neighbourhood areas directly south of this section. Section 8 'Building Envelopes and Setbacks Diagram' in the UDF did not allow for higher density within this sector. As these locations compromised the overall integrity and intent of the scheme, this area was not considered appropriate nor viable for siting apartment buildings.

This aspect of the KCC proposal doesn't take into account the existing site conditions, such as topography, undulations, and effects on trees. For example, some of the changes to roads proposed would make them very steep, limiting pedestrian access by KRS residents and potentially impacting on significant vegetation due to the change in levels compared with existing root levels.

The Masterplan contained in the permit application is a more practical approach which utilises the key heritage assets of the site, both built fabric and landscaping, and the natural assets of the hillside location and proximity to other public open space to create an inclusive neighbourhood for the community.

4.2 Design of the Heritage Core

A central design concept for the KRS site was to provide an open space linking the wider community through the site into the development and through to the Yarra Bend Park and Yarra River. Central to this 'river arc' connection was the establishment of the Heritage Core to retain and celebrate the heritage buildings within a publicly accessible space. The desire was to establish this area as the central hub or meeting space within the proposed neighbourhood.

Key design determinants for the Heritage Core are discussed below.

Three heritage buildings have been retained along with many significant trees. Refer to Section 2.1 of this report for an analysis of the selection of heritage buildings to be retained based on the physical evidence that they provide about the cultural significance of the site.

The design allows for the retention of significant views within the Heritage Core, from the Heritage Core to Willsmere and improved views to the Heritage Core from other parts of the site (discussed in section 3.1 of this report).

Retention of the existing pathways and spatial arrangements that highlight the establishment of the cottages on the site is an important factor. The VHR Citation H2073 has established the importance of the relationship of buildings and this needs to be retained and interpreted during development.

The works within the Heritage Core include the establishment of a viable use for the retained buildings and the addition of surrounding apartment buildings. The placement of these additional buildings respects existing spatial arrangements with the retained heritage buildings whilst capturing views within and external to the site, in particular towards the Willsmere Towers. It should be noted that the Heritage Core includes a viewing area to the south to look down over the heritage buildings and beyond to the green spine. The apartment buildings are located to the side of this public area and are also not on the main spine of the heritage buildings when viewed back up the hill from the north. This will allow for greater opportunity for appreciation of the heritage assets than currently exists on site.

New building envelopes for the proposed apartments will generally align with the established building footprints of the buildings to be removed. This allows part of the former footprints to be revealed and included in interpretation.

A sensitive design response to the built form and scale of the proposed apartment buildings will ensure integration with the retained heritage buildings. On the side of the apartments which face onto significant heritage spaces and towards the heritage buildings, the design of the edge of the apartments will relate to the scale of the existing retained heritage buildings. The actual design of the apartment buildings has not been finalised and would be subject to further consideration by Heritage Victoria.

The façade treatments for the proposed apartment buildings will include an appropriate palette of materials to respond to the existing heritage nature of the surrounding context. It will not copy the heritage buildings but will include materials such as panels of face brickwork, timber detailing and elements which reflect the scale of the verandah line of the heritage buildings. The apartments will be designed to both face the surrounding road and to face inwards towards the Heritage Core.

Section 2.1 of this report discussed that the retention of B2 (House Hostel) was not seen as beneficial in that the physical fabric of this building no longer adds to our understanding of the cultural significance of the site. Retention of B2 (House Hostel) would also detract from the creation of the Heritage Core as the central hub of the site. The current front address of B2 (House Hostel) is outside of the central Heritage Core rather than within. Its South-western edge is sunken from the existing ground levels. From the approach taken off the Main Drive entrance, the building's submerged roof line will be visible. As the main entrance into the hub of the site, this does not provide for an appropriate welcoming and integrated treatment.

Some submissions suggested retention of B2 (House Hostel) and the relocation of the proposed apartment building northwards onto the site indicated for public parking. Others suggested its relocation onto the open space section to the north of the proposed carpark. These suggestions are not supported as they result in negative impacts for the cultural heritage of the site which outweigh the value in retention of B2 (House Hostel).

Firstly, any movement of the apartment building northward results in further separation of the central spine open space from the surrounding neighbourhood. The permeability of this open space requires open edges to this segment of the site. This open segment also provides views through the spine up towards the Heritage Core.

Secondly, the location of the carpark allows the retention of three significant trees in the VPO whilst providing parking necessary to facilitate the re-use of the B6 (STAD Building) for a public function. The parking in this vicinity adds to the viability of the reuse of the heritage building. The area to the north of B6 (STAD Building) is very high quality public open space which will also be advantageous to the reuse of this building. It is not desirable for this open space to be cut off to the east by apartment development.

Hence the retention of the heritage buildings, significant trees, important views, pathways and open spaces is considered desirable for the public use and interpretation of the Heritage Core as the key component of the site. Parameters have been established for the placement, scale and articulation of the proposed apartment blocks but their future design is subject to further detailed submission.

5.0 Conclusion

Further information has been submitted in this report to support the permit application made by DHS to Heritage Victoria in May 2005. In addition, submissions provided by Heritage Victoria and issues which were discussed on site have been given further consideration.

Many of the submissions focussed on what they would prefer to see on the site rather than dealing practically with the existing conditions. It would be great from a heritage perspective to be able to turn back time and reveal the innovative nature of the establishment of the original 'Hospital for Idiot Children' on this site from 1885-8. However, careful analysis of the remaining built fabric shows that, except for two of the three buildings proposed for retention, very little physical evidence remains.

It would be poor heritage practice and misleading to rebuild by conjecture. The consequences of such a blinkered approach would be the loss of other aspects of the site's history over 120 years which have already been established as culturally significance.

The masterplan for the site has balanced the needs of KRS residents, with the opportunities created by retention of the heritage fabric and the natural advantages of the site. It has taken a practical approach to retention of significant views and the creation of a viable Heritage Core as the hub of the development. Information provided about the apartment design demonstrates that it will not detract from the landmark prominence of Willsmere Towers in views towards the site. It also shows that parameters have been set to make sure that the apartments can co-exist with the heritage buildings in the important Heritage Core. Other suggested approaches, made in submissions to Heritage Victoria, resulted in detrimental urban design outcomes in terms of isolating the Heritage Core, overshadowing and overlooking. Some did not comply with planning regulations.

The design of Stages 1 and 2 has been submitted in detail and should be permitted. This will allow for the relocation of KRS residents to be commenced immediately to meet Government's commitment to a timetable of completion by the end of 2006. Approval should be given for the masterplan and Heritage Core subject to further details being submitted to the Executive Director's approval as set out in Section 6.3 of the Heritage Impact Statement, May 2005.