



Strategic Merit Assessment

233, 249-259 MERRYLANDS ROAD
AND 52-54 MCFARLANE STREET
MERRYLANDS

6 AUGUST 2021



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
CATALYTIC DEVELOPMENT AND EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN	3
THE STRATEGIC MERIT TEST	3
METROPOLIS OF THREE CITIES	3
CENTRAL CITY DISTRICT PLAN	5
SITE SPECIFIC MERIT TEST	8
CONCLUSION	10

INTRODUCTION

The Cumberland Local Planning Panel when considering the above Planning Proposal sought additional detail regarding the site specific and strategic merit for the proposal. This submission sets out how the Planning Proposal meets the established Strategic Merit Tests and therefore warrants approval.

CATALYTIC DEVELOPMENT AND EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN

We note that the proponent is currently conducting necessary basement excavation works on part of the site to progress the broader development and the Planning Proposal, if endorsed, will provide for the delivery of additional housing supply (circa 90 apartments) in the Merrylands Town Centre on a site that is 450m from Merrylands Railway Station.

These will be delivered in the immediate future and the broader development on the site is the largest commitment to renewal in the Merrylands Town Centre by a private developer and will be a landmark development that will also ideally serve as a catalyst to other large scale redevelopment in the Town Centre, noting limited development has occurred in the Town Centre despite the planning controls being in place for several years.

The development proposal is setting the standard for high quality urban design and detailing of the scheme which will substantially 'lift the bar' beyond existing development within the Merrylands area.

THE STRATEGIC MERIT TEST

The strategic merit test is demonstrated through a series of established questions as follows:

Is the proposal consistent with the relevant district plan within the Greater Sydney Region, or corridor/precinct plans applying to the site, including any draft regional, district or corridor/precinct plans released for public comment?

YES

The relevant strategic plans for consideration include the Metropolis of Three Cities – Greater Sydney Region Plan 2018 and the Central City District Plan 2018.

METROPOLIS OF THREE CITIES

The Planning Proposal is aligned with these key themes, directions, metrics and objectives by:

1. Infrastructure and collaboration. The subject land is located within 400m of Merrylands train station and the existing strategic centre. The site is located within easy access of existing health services infrastructure as well as existing schools including St Marys Primary School, Fowler Road School and Holroyd School. The site is located just 3.3km to the south of Parramatta, the Central River City and an easy bus ride that is less than 20 minutes to Parramatta Station which is well within the 30-minute city scenario.
2. Liveability. The architectural design drawings provided with this Planning Proposal and the urban design study show that liveability for the future residents is a primary consideration for the future building design. Solar access and cross ventilation have been maximised along with general compliance with the requirements of the Apartment Design Guide. The pedestrian environment will be activated and improved because of this Planning Proposal connecting the residents in and around the Merrylands strategic centre.
3. Productivity. The proposal capitalises on the existing Merrylands strategic centre and will ensure there with sustainable future growth within this existing centre. The proposal creates a more accessible and walkable city with enhanced activation to pedestrian links and opportunity for bicycle riding as well as promoting additional local jobs through the placement of additional residents within Merrylands.
4. Sustainability. The Planning Proposal facilitates building capacity based on existing and committed infrastructure. This seeks to shape a strong and connected community by delivery catalytic development and creating resilience within this revitalised precinct.

The Greater Sydney Region Plan presents polycentric approach to Sydney which reinforces the significant role of Parramatta sitting at the heart of Sydney with Merrylands being an important precinct that supports the continued vitality and growth within the Central City. As Greater Sydney experiences a housing shortage and ever increasing property prices, the future generations will rely on housing being provided in centres such as Merrylands. The proposal will assist with delivery of new housing that can lessen the pressure on housing affordability housing by delivering supply in this key location of Merrylands.

The proposal aligns specifically with Planning Priority N1 and N5 of the Metropolis of Three Cities through provision of additional housing in a location serviced by infrastructure, expanding housing supply choice and affordability in a location with access to jobs, service and public transport.

- *Planning Priority N1: Planning for a city supported by infrastructure*
- *Planning Priority N5: Providing housing supply, choice, and affordability, with access to jobs, services and public transport.*

Urban renewal is a key priority particularly with the focus of new housing in existing centres with frequent public transport that can carry large number of passengers and in locations that have already the community infrastructure in place such as medical services, social services, educational facilities, recreational opportunities and employment. This clearly places emphasis on the revitalisation of Merrylands as an ideal location to deliver this accelerated housing, more affordable housing typologies and a greater variety of housing choice. This housing can be brought forward only if the planning controls represented in this Planning Proposal are endorsed.

CENTRAL CITY DISTRICT PLAN

The Central City District Plan sets out the priorities and actions for this District and these are structured around the same key themes as presented in the Greater Sydney Region Plan. As relevant to the subject site the importance of the growth within strategic centres in terms of both jobs and housing are continually emphasised in the District Plan. The Planning Proposal seeks to deliver both additional housing but also jobs within a 30-minute city scenario.

Expediting the delivery of housing brings more dwellings to the market which in turn drives prices down. Delivering more dwellings and within shorter timeframes aims to respond to the current housing crisis in Sydney where scarcity has resulted in an affordable priced housing shortage. The Planning Proposal seeks to deliver housing to the market quickly and in a highly liveable location which is within the 30-minute city scenario.

In summary, this Planning Proposal seeks to deliver on the vision set forward in the Central City District Plan by:

1. Increasing diversity of housing choice.
2. Delivering housing to meet strategic housing supply targets.
3. Expediting the delivery of new housing stock to ease the pressure of demand resulting in a generally more affordable priced housing product.
4. Contribution to energy efficiency through aims to deliver a development that meets environmental performance criteria.
5. Reduced emissions through both building environmental performance but also through reduction in reliance on private vehicle travel. Focusing increased housing on the subject site which is highly accessible to local bus and train services means that future residents are more likely to walk, cycle and use integrated public transport systems.

6. Enhancing the role of Merrylands as the economic anchor with the vision to deliver both jobs and housing.

The objectives of the Planning Proposal are incontestably aligned with the documented priorities for the Central City District.

Is the proposal consistent with a relevant local strategy that has been endorsed by the Department?

YES

The proposal gives effect to the relevant local strategy which is the Cumberland Local Strategic Planning Statement by supporting additional housing supply and job growth within Merrylands in the McFarlane Street Precinct. The Planning Proposal:

- Gives effect to a local strategic planning statement insofar as the Cumberland LSPS seeks to supports additional housing supply and job growth within Merrylands town centre in the McFarlane Street Precinct and aligns with the Merrylands Station and McFarlane Street Precinct Planning Objectives to:
 - Develop a strong identity for the Merrylands Centre through a vibrant mix of retail, commercial and residential development.
 - Achieve urban design strategies that acknowledge the role of Merrylands within the Cumberland subregion.
 - Renew and revitalise the Merrylands Centre catering for a diverse community.
 - Ensuring buildings are designed to maximise appropriate amenity outcomes for the Precinct.
- In addition to the above the proposal is further consistent with the following aspects of the Cumberland LSPS:
 - 5. *Getting around – access and movement* – The proposal is aligned with the type of transport-oriented development promoted by the LSPS. The proposal will result in an increase in residential density within the western portion of the Merrylands Town centre, with good access to a range of public transport options, including Merrylands train station, that connect Cumberland’s town centres and employment hubs, both locally and to Greater Sydney.
 - 6. *Places and spaces for everyone* – The proposal will increase the number and variety of housing types available in Merrylands, to meet the needs of Cumberland’s growing and changing population. The site will facilitate a modern development that will provide a high level of amenity for people living in and around the development, providing many opportunities for recreation and social connection.

- 7. *Local jobs and businesses* – The proposal will help to sustain a strong and diverse local economy by making it possible for more people to live within Merrylands Town centre. It will promote access to local jobs, education opportunities and care facilities. Specifically 60 additional short term employment opportunities will occur over a 9 week period to construct the additional levels to the building.

The Planning Proposal will encourage diversity and liveability of places and will enhance the status of Merrylands as a village in which people want to reside, work and visit.

Is the proposal responding to a change in circumstances, such as the investment in new infrastructure or changing demographic trends that have not been recognised by existing planning controls?

YES

Merrylands Town Centre will play a key control in the supply of housing and the site sits within the McFarlane Precinct where the current planning controls were endorsed in 2016. Since that time, the Cumberland Local Strategic Planning Statement has been adopted which outlines there is planning underway for a number of centres and strategic corridors to facilitate additional housing supply and jobs growth. Specifically, the LSPS contains the following statement: “The Merrylands and Wentworthville Centres and Parramatta Road Corridor are the focus of much of this planning for growth. Approximately 4,200 additional dwellings are proposed for Merrylands (McFarlane and Neil Street Precincts)” (Cumberland Council Local Strategic Planning Statement 2020, pg. 16).

This Planning Proposal responds to a change in circumstances whereby changing trends have seen more people wanting to live in highly accessible centres where they can rely less on the need to use a private motor vehicle as their primary means of transport. Since the global pandemic of 2021, people are wanting to live in strategic centres such as Merrylands where they can work remotely but also be part of a vibrant community lifestyle that will be delivered through this Planning Proposal.

In relation to concerns regarding the proposed planned yield within the Precinct it is noted that the 90 additional dwellings equate to approximately 2% of the planned additional dwellings in the Precinct- which is largely inconsequential in the context of 4200 planned dwellings desired over the next 5-10 years.

We further note that the proposal does not seek to ‘take’ yield from other sites, but simply expand housing supply across the Precinct as a whole and enable delivery in the short term. Demand for housing is increasing at the present time and increases in house prices are also pushing up pricing for units at the same time and over time it would be anticipated that demand will lift relative to supply.

The Merrylands housing supply targets are targets- and this scheme will enable contribution to those targets and the addition 27 dwellings relative to that approved on site already, equating to 1% of the planned density, has no discernible impact on the desired supply and should not impact on the ability of other sites in the Precinct to deliver and provide apartments to the market.

SITE SPECIFIC MERIT TEST

**Does the proposal have site-specific merit, having regard to:
The natural environment (including known significant environmental values,
resources or hazards)?**

Yes. The proposal will not impact on the natural environment beyond that of the development originally approved with a minor and acceptable increase in shadow impacts and heights of buildings from the public domain that will not cause any adverse impacts. See the Urban Design Report by Woods Bagot for further detail.

**Does the proposal have site-specific merit, having regard to:
The existing uses, approved uses and likely future uses of land in the vicinity of
the land subject to a proposal?**

YES

The Planning Proposal does not seek to change the permitted uses on this site. The Planning Proposal seeks to amend the controls relating to building height and floor space ratio which will permit a better strategic outcome for this ideally located land. The proposed density responds to more recent policies of Cumberland Council where high density development is to be delivered in existing urban centres.

**Does the proposal have site-specific merit, having regard to:
The services and infrastructure that are or will be available to meet the demands
arising from the proposal and any proposed financial arrangements for
infrastructure provision?**

YES.

The site located within the existing Merrylands strategic centre and is therefore ideally positioned to act as a focus for significant urban transformation. The area is well serviced by schools, tertiary institutions, childcare centres, community services, recreational and sporting facilities and an established commercial centre. Furthermore, the locality has excellent connectivity with access to several key arterial road networks including the Great Western Highway and the M4 Motorway as well as regular public transport services.

The proposed amendments are driven by a desire to deliver a superior urban design outcome for the site, ensure the maximum building height control and maximum floor space ratio control are aligned to facilitate development that is consistent with the desired future character of Merrylands. The proposed amendments to planning controls will facilitate the delivery of catalytic development contributing to much needed housing supply and public domain improvements at the street within this strategic precinct.

In relation to the issue of Public Benefit the landowner is keen to commence discussions with Council about entering into a Voluntary Planning Agreement as set out in the initial VPA Letter of Offer which can include infrastructure (roadworks) and potential Council facilities or monetary contribution.

The specific details of this agreement can be formalised during the Gateway process for this Planning Proposal.

CONCLUSION

This letter confirms that the Planning Proposal meets the Strategic Merit Tests applied in these circumstances; exhibits urban design merit; and does not result in unacceptable impacts in the streetscape or surrounding environment.

Should you require any further information, I can be contacted on 9687 8899.

Adam Byrnes
Director
Think Planners Pty Ltd