SCEGGS Darlinghurst Concept and Stage 1 Project (SSD 8993)

UPDATED PROPOSAL COMMENTS 16/4/20

Thank you for the invitation to provide further comment about this proposal. I refer to my remarks made on the previous SSD submission by the applicant, appended to this submission.

My previous comments primarily addressed the New Multipurpose Building. For the most part the applicant appears to have addressed the issues raised, certainly the issues of design and planning relating to the height plane, overshadowing and views - so they should be commended for that. Similarly, the issues abut population and efficiency seems to have been addressed with no apparent increase in bulk and scale while improving the education opportunities and learning spaces.

I have two concerns and a question.

The new buildings along Forbes Street, the Wilkinson and Administration buildings, as shown on the master plan, in my opinion, create a blandness to the street. The heritage analysis seems to suggest that a brick building would be more appropriate for the Wilkinson but the current proposal shows more of the same style of the more recent buildings in SCEGGS. The addition to the Barham Building similarly just seems like a box, filling out a suggested envelope without much consideration for the street or a nod to its historical and cultural context. This is a pity as there is a richness and texture to the urban fabric in Darlinghurst that I don’t believe is shown here. It appears to be a continuation of more of the same institutional style. Understandably, this is only a master plan and doesn’t represent a final design, but I would hope that the resulting buildings would be richer and celebrate their location and context more.

The second issue is parking and traffic. This continues to be a problem and the information from the applicant’s submission acknowledges a slight increase to the peak flows, which will just make it worse. There are two issues, peak traffic flow and parking. While I am not a traffic engineer, the peak traffic flow is already a problem, affecting the amenity of the residents in Forbes Street as well as the safety of all pedestrians, especially the students. More than once I have seen near accidents between cars and pedestrians at these peak times and it is only a matter of time before someone is hurt. Parking is generally only an issue at these times and when there are events on in the evening (which is quite a lot). I would hope that there is a recognition that the school is well serviced by many public transport routes and the need to drive should be actively discouraged, indeed I would suggest that teachers should not be allowed to drive and student drop off should only be allowed by exception, for kids who need it, people with a disability or injury etc.

Finally, my question is that while it appears that the issues I had concerns about in the original proposal have been addressed, this proposal is still only a master plan and by its very nature subject to change. What assurances are there that the outcomes shown in the proposal will be controlled and won’t increase with the further proposals for the individual projects? I refer to the disingenuousness of the previous proposal and the mistrust (in my mind at least) created by that. What powers does (and will) the IPC have to ensure that the master plan is followed through?

Once again thank you for the considerations of these concerns.

Kind Regards

Guy Luscombe

*Appendix: Comments on previous proposal*

*I am the owner resident of 249 Forbes Street and an architect and while supportive of good development and understand that good planning and design can help to achieve that, I have serious objections to the master plan proposal put forward for the development of SCEGGS Darlinghurst. My neighbours will no doubt address their concerns, but I will address my objections primarily to the proposed multipurpose building.*

*I understand that this building is the last of the proposed buildings under the master plan, with the least definition, but it is also the largest and the one that will have the most significant impact. There are some very illogical aspects about it.*

*POPULATION*

*The proposal has acknowledged that the school population won’t increase, which in itself seems disingenuous, but leaving that aside and the possible inclusion of a 90 place early child care centre, if there is no increase in the school population and the master plan is ‘increasing efficiency’ with its proposal, led by the other two major moves (the new gateway building and Wilkinson House), why does the multipurpose building need to be so big? It seems to not so subtly suggest, indeed create, a path for some grander future expansion plan that is not being made clear. Suspicious and disingenuous. There needs to be more clarity around this, the school needs to come clean with their intentions.*

*The implications of the increase in school population are obvious: increased traffic, safety, parking, noise etc.*

*FLOOR SPACE*

*Similarly, the proposal claims not be a floor space grab but, again, if the master plan is making the layout more efficient, why does the same floor space make a larger building? It is either bad and inefficient planning and design or a backdoor for greater expansion.*

*This significant building also seems to be the one where the school (or their consultants) have thought, “where can we get the most area on this constrained site?” and are trying to push it as far they can, understandable, but an overreach and it is clear to me that this is a ‘lets try this’, in that ambit-claim-negotiation-style kind of way: ask for an outrageous amount and then settle for the increase that was wanted in the first place.*

*DESIGN*

*As an architect, I know that good design can make a difference and that there is a solution that will meet all SCEGGS demands and the concerns of the neighbours and so my objection here is that the proposed design, albeit very vague at this stage, doesn’t do this.*

*Some of the other key issues are overshadowing and views.*

*The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) makes it very clear that overshadowing is an issue (and a ‘high’ risk in the risk assessment analysis). It also acknowledges that the houses in Thomson Street and Forbes Street may have their Harbour Bridge views blocked (also with a ‘high’ risk assessment).*

*The report shows that the proposed multipurpose building is over the height limit but takes the attitude that it is similar to the existing science building (at least where the section is shown). There seems to be no recognition that the reason the height planes exist is for local amenity: to restrict overshadowing and view blockage and to increase solar access. The existing building is also much smaller in bulk and is angled (possibly to allow views when it was built?). So not an appropriate precedent.*

*Again, we need to have further information. One cross section isn’t good enough. I’m sure the architects will have created a 3D CAD model and the 3D height envelope could easily be shown along with the existing buildings in order to more easily understand the impact this building will have.*

*There are also many tools available today that could more accurately plot the sun paths and could ensure that the existing overshadowing could be ameliorated. Similarly, a proper view analysis could be carried out and the building could be hewn to a shape that would keep the views.*

*There is scant regard for these issues in the EIS – they are deemed ‘acceptable’ in the report. They are not acceptable, especially as I am certain that they could be overcome with good and clever design using the tools above and efficient planning to create a building that will all stakeholders objectives.*

*COMMUNITY CONSULTATION*

*The community consultation was, in my view, tokenistic and rudimentary. Despite several representations by various members of the local community, there has been little engagement from the school or their consultants. Rather than respecting and building trust with the local community, the various sessions seem to have taken the divide and conquer approach, separating the various local groups into different sessions, rather than seeing this as a more united local community. Again, this suggests a disingenuous approach with a hidden agenda. It’s no wonder the locals are upset.*

*This SSD review process, to be genuine, must take the concerns of those most seriously affected by the proposal as the most significant in order to build robust communities, or it is just another Government initiative that pays lip service to what it is trying to achieve and will just serve to undermine community building and fracture support.*

*As mentioned, I am not anti-development, I rely upon it for my livelihood. But it can be good or bad. There is a great opportunity here to do things properly and meet the objectives of the school and the community, but I strongly believe this proposal falls well short.*

*I thank you for your consideration of these concerns.*

*Kind Regards*

*Guy Luscombe*