

NATIONAL CAPITAL DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

THE PANEL'S CRITIQUE

BLOCK 15 SECTION 49 KINGSTON
(KINGSTON ARTS PRECINCT)



Australian Government
National Capital Authority



ACT
Government

NATIONAL CAPITAL DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

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Project: Kingston Arts Precinct

Date: Wednesday 16 October 2019

Meeting location: Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG),
Cnr. London Circuit and Civic Square, Canberra City

Site visit: Wednesday 16 October 2019

Proponent: Geocon

Observers: Representatives from the:
Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD)
National Capital Authority (NCA)
City Renewal Authority (CRA)
Suburban Land Agency (SLA)

Conflicts of interest: None

MEETING SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Property address: 11 Wentworth Avenue Kingston (Block 38 Section 50 Kingston)

Proposal: In late 2015, Section 49 Kingston was released by the ACT Government through a Request for Tender (RFT) process seeking a design response that would consider development opportunities within the land, celebrate the presence of heritage within the site and include a visual arts precinct which facilitates the individuality of selected arts organisations.

The proposed master plan and design concepts is the response to the 2015 RFT process which required respondents to prepare a development proposal for the design and delivery of a mixed-use precinct incorporating a range of public assets, including new visual arts buildings, car parking (with approximately 500 publicly available spaces) and an outdoor events space.

The Suburban Land Agency (SLA) has negotiated an agreement with Geocon (the proponent) that includes project delivery conditions, approval processes and a four year timeframe for handover of arts facilities and other public assets.

The Kingston Arts Precinct (KAP) master plan and design concepts propose a public domain designed to celebrate the site's history and context, honouring the presence of the heritage buildings. A new central square is proposed (known as the 'public canvas') to provide a green space adjacent to the fitters' workshop and the old bus depot, to accommodate events, festivals and outdoor markets. Activated streetscapes, laneways and pocket parks are proposed as the 'glue' that binds the heritage buildings and the new buildings at the edges of the site.

The proposed building heights are between two to six storeys.

Proponents' representative address to the panel: The proponent opened the presentation outlining that work on the master plan commenced approximately three years ago and that several aspects of the proposal are now being reinterrogated as part of the next stages of the design process.

The proponent outlined key elements of the master plan and design concepts noting that the buildings and architectural expression were conceptual only and were not yet designed. A set of principles had been prepared as part of the master plan, which guides the key elements of the proposal.

Elements of the master plan were discussed including access routes, views through the site and to the lake, and the proposal for a centrally located Arts Hub and 'public canvas'. The existing Power House was noted as a prominent feature of the proposal. The proposed built form and materiality were described as conceptually having an industrial and robust character.

The 'public canvas' was expressed as a significant public open space at the heart of the precinct that showcases the Power House and fitters' workshop heritage registered buildings. The 'public canvas' was also described as the 'street face' to the Arts Hub to allow for multiple points of entry and activation, linking the varied arts organisations.

A mixed use precinct was proposed at the edges of the site with a series of interconnected public spaces and laneways located through the site joining to the adjacent areas of the Kingston Foreshore.

Recommendation: Based on the documentation provided prior to the design review panel session; a site visit by the panel on Wednesday 16 October 2019; and the proponents presentation, the following comments and recommendations are provided:

The Panel thanks the proponent for bringing this proposal for design review at this early design stage in the design process and for the comprehensive and informative presentation.

While the Panel notes that the design concepts are in their early development and that several elements are yet to be further detailed, the Panel is encouraged by the vision and design concepts for the proposal. Specifically, the Panel considers that the 'public canvas' concept has the potential to become an iconic public space that could attract Canberrans and visitors to the Kingston Foreshore precinct. The Panel supports this concept proposal and encourages the proponent to continue to work towards the proposed vision as a place that celebrates the heritage significance of the site, is public and activated, and has a creative arts character.

In the next iteration, the Panel encourages the proponent to further explore opportunities to provide greater prominence to the existing heritage registered buildings (particularly the Power House), further refine the pedestrian access and laneways, and further develop the potential character and architectural expression across the precinct.

The Panel also recommends that the proponent reinterrogate if the proposed location for the structured car park, accommodating more than 500 car parking spaces, can achieve the best outcome for the site and wider precinct as a whole.

The Panel recommends that the proponent address the key issues and recommendations outlined below in the next iteration of the proposal and look forward to further engagement on this important heritage site.

Key Issues and Recommendations

The *Key Issues and Recommendations* provide detail advice to the proponent, consistent with the above recommendation.

To achieve the best possible design outcome for the proposal, the proponent is encouraged to consider the following issues through the next stages of the design development:

1.0 Context and character

- 1.1 The Panel recommends the proponent undertake further contextual analysis of the Kingston Foreshore Precinct and broader area to better inform the opportunity for views into and out of the site, and to refine the location and character of the vehicular and pedestrian access routes through the Kingston Arts Precinct (KAP). A particular focus of this analysis should also clearly define the opportunities close to the existing heritage buildings on the site, such as identifying the heritage curtilage and what opportunities this may provide for KAP.
 - 1.2 The view into the site from Wentworth Avenue and the visibility of the activity spill from the highly successful Bus Depot markets and other events from Wentworth Avenue are important is making the public aware of the place and its activities. A larger open space to Wentworth Avenue providing clear viewing of the Powerhouse and maintaining the opportunity for use of the area associated with activities within the Powerhouse, Fitters Workshop and Bus Depot buildings should be further investigated.
 - 1.3 The Panel would appreciate a greater understanding of the proposed separation between the proposed buildings from the existing heritage registered buildings. While the Panel acknowledges that the concepts are in their early evolution, the Panel considers that it would be beneficial for the overall proposal to understand the separation and interface issues with the heritage registered buildings early in the design phase to ensure the broader vision and concepts can be achieved.
 - 1.4 The Panel welcomes the opportunity for a diversity of interesting and activated public spaces through KAP. The Panel encourages the proponent to continue to analyse and explore the opportunities for the public domain to provide further clarity about the character and function of each space. This could include preparation of a series of 'mud map' style diagrams to explore the best orientation for each space for their use, including the orientation of the 'public canvas'.
 - 1.5 The proposed streets and laneways through and into the site would benefit from further clarity about their purpose, character, width and future role within the context of the broader precinct. To better understand this issue, the Panel encourages the proponent to prepare a series of street cross sections related to function and that take into account the need for shaded pedestrian pathways.
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2.0 Landscape

- 2.1 The Panel is supportive of the concept to activate the upper floor levels of buildings across the precinct and encourages the proponent to integrate green infrastructure into the rooftop spaces. This includes the opportunity for genuine tree canopy cover to mitigate urban heat.
- 2.2 The Panel supports the mix and diversity of uses proposed within KAP and seeks clarification about how communal spaces can be provided for the residential uses. While the Panel is conscious the concept is in its early stages, the provision for usable and 'green' communal open spaces will be an important consideration for the overall layout of the future development sites.

3.0 Sustainability

- 3.1 The Panel requires further information about the sustainability measures being introduced for this proposal. Currently, the proposal provides limited information about the opportunities for how sustainability elements, such as water re-use, could be integrated into KAP. As the site is being designed and delivered as a precinct, there is a real opportunity to integrate exemplar sustainable development measures into the proposal.

4.0 Density and connectivity

- 4.1 As noted under *1.0 Character and Context* above, the Panel considers that at this early stage of the design process there is an opportunity to reevaluate the main pedestrian connections within KAP to the broader Kingston Foreshore precinct and surrounds. This includes consideration of the proposed dimensions and positioning of the 'public canvas' to become more of an extension to the Kingston Foreshore waterfront public domain. This analysis could assist the proponent to better identify where the main pedestrian routes are and may be in the future, to ensure that KAP is well integrated with the Kingston Foreshore and wider Canberra networks. Consideration of these connections to the existing water's edge would also be beneficial for the proposal.
 - 4.2 The Panel recommends that the proponent further explores how pedestrians access the future public facilities, particularly between the proposed public car parking structure to the 'public canvas'. The Panel encourages the proponent to consider if basement car parking could be introduced and allow people to 'pop up' into buildings and public spaces to ensure KAP can be highly accessible for all.
 - 4.3 The Panel questions the need to retain all of the open space to the north of the site surrounding the electrical infrastructure. The Panel considers there may be opportunities to utilise the northern open space area for other uses that may then offer opportunities to provide more generous open spaces and wider laneways around the central and southern areas of KAP.
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5.0 Built form and scale

- 5.1 The Panel acknowledges that the design concepts are in their early stages and that the buildings are a conceptual representation. In future iterations, the Panel recommends that the proponent continues to explore potential design themes and scale of future development that can express a distinct character of the KAP, particularly in the context of the existing heritage registered buildings. As the built form is further progressed, it is noted that the Panel is supportive of the high ground floor to ceiling heights (approximately 6 metres) and recommends that this aspect is maintained in future iterations.

6.0 Legibility and safety

- 6.1 The Panel recommends that an access strategy for KAP is prepared that considers vehicular access into the site and considers how vehicles interact with the existing and proposed pedestrian networks. The Panel recommends that this strategy is prepared with a clear objective to safely connect KAP to the immediate and broader pedestrian networks to encourage visitors to access KAP in sustainable modes of travel.
- 6.2 The Panel considers that strong visual and physical links from the Wentworth Avenue frontage needs to be considered in developing the proposal for entry and pick-up/drop-off function. Additionally, the Panel encourages the proponent to consider how people could move from the Wentworth Avenue frontage to the key attractors in KAP and to the Kingston Foreshore beyond.
- 6.3 The panel recommends the connectivity of the public spaces be fully considered with a sustainable hierarchy of users and prioritising of pedestrians.

7.0 Diversity and amenity

- 7.1 The Panel notes that due to the scale of KAP and the heritage/arts character of the future precinct that there is an opportunity to design and deliver a diverse range of architectural responses. In this regard, the Panel recommends that the proponent considers the opportunity to engage a range of suitably qualified Architects to design individual buildings or a series of buildings through the precinct to achieve diversity in design and architectural expression. The Panel notes that a similar process was successfully undertaken for Sydney's Barangaroo precinct and could form a suitable model for KAP.
- 7.2 The proposed car parking structure is considered by the Panel as an important building that could determine the success of the precinct. Currently, the proposed car parking structure reads as a large building that visually blocks access between the 'public canvas' and the Kingston Foreshore waterfront. While the Panel is not necessarily opposed to the proposed location of the car parking structure, the Panel recommends that the proponent undertake an exercise to explore other suitable
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locations for this use, including opportunities to provide parking spaces within a basement level.

- 7.3 Further clarity on parking provision for weekend activity is required, noting the requirement for 800 spaces to be available to the public spaces on weekends.
 - 7.4 The Panel congratulates the proponent for the concept of the Arts Hub and the diversity of spaces to meet the currently known organisations. The Panel encourages the proponent to consider what other opportunities exist to provide flexible spaces within the Arts Hub, or elsewhere on the site, for other 'unknown' arts uses.
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