

Camden Residents' Action Group

Incorporated
Camden – Still a Country Town

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Local Planning Panel 15 December 2022

Re: DA 2021/1561/1

60 John Street, Camden

*Alterations to ground floor building and second storey
addition for commercial office space*

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Panel.

For this DA I speak on behalf of Camden Residents' Action Group (Crag)

My suggestions around Oxley Street asked for modest changes. 60 John Street is another matter entirely.

John street is THE street in Camden town and the HCA. It crosses with Argyle at the very geographical centre and forms the axis of the town, leading up to St John's, situated to be the spiritual centre, connecting the town with the Camden Park Estate, still the home of the Macarthur descendants.

These are not haphazard arbitrary accidents: they are planned to reflect the profound connections of town, church and founders of Camden. It is the design of an integrated village. Like mischievous choir boys the designers of 60 John Street seem to want to poke their tongue out, at the church, the town and its heritage.

Certainly, what is currently on the site is an eyesore that is within the view-lines of heritage listed items including St John's and the John Street cottages, both early recognised in the Register of the National Estate.

This opportunity in the HCA should not be squandered. The community expects an evidence based and analytical approach when dealing with such a highly valued area that intrinsic to Camden's identity. There seems to be no thought given to the design in context criteria set out by NSW Heritage for infill development. Nor is there any reasonable explanation as to how the proposal legibly combines and transitions to the John Street cottages or enhances the important and deliberately planned view-line to the Church.

We acknowledge the removal of the removal of the large panels of dark coloured steel cladding. They should never have been proposed and indicate that the design never addressed how the new build can positively contribute to and enhance the HCA as required by the DCP and Camden Town Centre Urban Design Framework. Far from embracing the town's renowned unique character, the design drivers seem to be maximising floor space, keeping the original roof as a floor which increases the height exceedance, and replacement with something less ugly.

It is not appropriate that this building should be higher and much bulkier than the original town buildings, including the nearby Victorian building on the main corner with Argyle Street or dwarf the John Street cottages. The proposed scale maximises built form on the site, with no curtilage and no softening landscaping. The footpath to the Council carpark, although it may have been widened slightly, remains extremely narrow when it could be widened and used to complement the characteristic spaciousness of the country town. The building is imposingly urban in character, not rural, not fine-grained and not of the expected human scale. It could be so much better.

The community's views are well known and are expressed in legislation of the HCA and council policy. The community expects more than lip-service on heritage conservation. It expects explanations, not assertions, as to how the proposal honours and complies with the strategy of heritage protection and enhancement expressed in the Local Strategic Planning Statement and LEP and DCP provisions.

Sadly, we repeatedly see documentation simply supporting a developer's preferred outcome. Just because what is before us may be better than what is there now, and may be better than what was first proposed it is certainly not as good as it could and should be according to all of the lip service paid to Camden's very significant place in Australian history.

Please send this DA back to the drawing board.

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