

Camden Residents' Action Group

Incorporated

Camden – Still a Country Town

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Camden Local Planning Panel

14 December 2023

CLPP03 Re: 2-4 John Street, Camden

DA s4.56 Modification: 2008/644/9¹

Section 4.56 Modification - Consolidation of buildings 4 and 6 into one building, addition of 3 seniors living units and related design amendments.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Panel.

I am trusting that the history of the development of the contaminated Camden High School site is known to Panel members. 4 minutes does not accord time to cover that.

Initially particular concessions concerning both bulk and height were pursued to make the undertaking commercially viable. Following negotiations an acceptable design was found. Though it exceeded both height and scale allowed in the area, the design showed care to distribute the over-height portions, setting them sufficiently back from the road frontages so that there was minimal visual intrusion and the overall design was deemed a tolerable compromise. There was one particular condition, however: this was to be ***an exception, not a precedent.***

Subsequent history shows that memory is short. That particular clause has been forgotten, and not infrequently we find the High School development cited precisely as a precedent.

We are now at the ninth iteration of the original design and find ourselves at such distance that in a perfect world, there would be a call for a wholly new DA, and here it must be said, the design currently on offer would not pass muster. By degrees the shape and concept have all been undermined, whereby many of the virtues of the first approval have been turned up-side down.

¹ To approved development: *Staged redevelopment of the Former Camden High School Site comprising: demolition of disused school buildings, remediation of contaminated land, earthworks, staged subdivision, the erection of 26 multiple-unit dwellings, 162 self-contained seniors living dwellings, 76 bed residential care facility, 51 bed motel, restaurant, cultural & community centre, medical centre, ancillary shops, undercroft car parking and landscaping works*

The LPP Agenda states that the development is a 'private development'. However, the 2008 DA shows the design was to be integrated into the township as a living space where residents could enjoy both safety and security but still feel themselves to be part of the Camden township. Visitors would be invited to share facilities, including at one point, a cinema, coffee shops and other attractions.

That ideal has now been scuttled, and though the design to date does not quite reflect a gated community, there is equally no attempt to integrate an inclusive environment which originally included public access, a public plaza and public community area. The model has, slowly, changed from inclusion to exclusion.

The colour scheme as originally proposed was to be of sandstone colour, integrating with the predominate palette of the township. That has now been overtaken by a battle-ship grey eminences, startling to towns-folk and visitors alike to the nearby Camden Markets.

There was an undertaking that the original buildings were to be photographed and recorded. This was a recognition that the old High School had been an important part of the town's memory, and of course an historic place for many students who had been schooled there. Challenged on this the developer withdrew a DA modification to delete that requirement. Now it seems that a photographic record is in the 'too-hard' basket and that the requirement is being ignored. And so, a slice of history is literally lost in the dust forever.

This is the ninth amendment, and, judging by experience, will hardly be the last. So drastic have been these changes that there is a viable, not to say compelling argument, that the design should be submitted as a new development.

In this modification concerns about the impact, on neighbouring Heritage listed Nant Gwylan, of the proposed consolidation and bulking up of two residential developments into one mass, may have been mitigated by changes that council have encouraged.

However, at every stage we are faced with another modification. Although it is always argued otherwise, the community does not believe that what is appearing on the site is substantially the same as what they were led to believe in 2008/2009. In fact, they find it shocking and incompatible with the town. We request that the modifications be directed to stop and a new proposal for the site be required.

Thank you

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