

01 October 2018

## **Urban Design Assessment Report**

of the proposed

### **Retirement Village Development**

at **32A Hathaway Avenue, Boulcott**

by **Summerset Villages (Lower Hutt) Ltd**

**Prepared for Hutt City Council**

## **Introduction**

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This report provides review of the urban design outcomes of the proposal to redevelop the site as a comprehensive retirement village. The application addresses the opportunity created when the site was varied by Private Plan Change 35. The proposal is to establish a 244unit retirement village on the 2.93-hectare site, which has access points at the Boulcott Street (western) and Military Road (eastern) ends. The site faces onto the Hutt River along its northern boundaries and the Military Road/Hathaway Avenue Special Residential Activity Area (SRAA) to the south.

The application has been prepared by Urban Perspectives Ltd. Architectural drawings and background rationale for the proposed development were prepared by Designgroup Stapleton Elliott. Landscape architecture design documentation, visual context representations and a landscape report that includes a visual impact assessment have all been prepared by Kamo Marsh Landscape Architects. Ian Munro has analysed the urban design outcomes in his Urban Design Assessment. This information and several visits to the site over the past year have all informed the analysis of urban design outcomes that follows.

## **Setting and Context Analysis**

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The Urban Design Assessment and Architect's Design Statement each provide brief descriptions of the site and setting. The key characteristics of the setting are:

- it is located within a broad valley, formed by the Hutt River, where views to the ridgelines of both the eastern and western hills are available.
- The urban form of the area exhibits larger building forms at nodes located along the High Street corridor. Surrounding these nodes are finer grain, smaller scale building forms. These are the residential areas.
- The neighbourhood within which the site sits is an established and attractive residential area. While some of the properties in this neighbourhood fall within the GRAA, others fall within the SRAA, so identified because of the quality of landscaping and architectural character seen in the area.
- The site is located within walking distance (500metres) to the Boulcott area shops, Hutt Hospital and public transport routes

The key characteristics of the site are:

- It appears somewhat separated from the wider area of open space extending to the southeastern bank of the Hutt River as a consequence of the northern stopbank
- It is largely clear of buildings and vegetation although several trees can also be noted. The single building on the site is the former golf clubhouse.
- Access can be gained to the site at the ends of Boulcott Street and Military Road. Another narrow access leg extends from Hathaway Avenue, but this appears not to be in use.
- A majority of the Hathaway Avenue properties that back onto the site have fences along the shared boundary and many areas also have stands of vegetation. The visual connection between the site and these properties varies.

### **Proposed development**

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The proposed development is described in the various reports referred to above. In summary, the retirement village comprises

- 42 self-contained villa residential units,
- 109 self-contained residential apartments
- 53 serviced apartments
- 30 care rooms and 10 memory care rooms.

Each of these different accommodation typologies is contained in buildings that also vary in typology, plan dimensions and height. The villas are largely arranged in semi-attached buildings distributed along the boundaries shared with Hathaway Avenue and Boulcott Street properties, with a further six blocks that vary from 2 storeys to 5 storeys in height above ground.

The site plan is largely organised around a private road extending from the Boulcott Street entry to the Military Road access points. Surface and covered car parking is arranged along the length of this roadway. One building will also accommodate vehicles at basement level. The site levels will be modified in accordance with a separate consent and by earthworks included in the current application. Some levels along the boundaries shared with Hathaway Avenue properties will be raised. The applicant's intent appears to be to create a largely level building platform for development and subsequent occupation.

The larger block buildings are arranged between the road and the northern boundary with the layout responding to the available width of the site. The villas are largely located on the southern side of the road, closest to the neighbouring properties. The overall form of the development grows in height and intensity toward the northern boundary in a manner not unlike the approach discussed in the plan change process.

The site will be comprehensively landscaped with planting of various types and height.

### **Assessment of urban design outcomes**

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#### **Policies**

*1) To enable a comprehensively designed Housing for the Elderly development, within the area identified in Appendix General Residential 22, that demonstrates positive, varied and visual interest in the form and layout of the development,...*

- The proposed development is comprehensively designed. This can be understood at several scales.
- At the neighbourhood scale, the form of the development is modelled to help ensure compatibility of building heights and footprint at the interfaces, where scale relationships will be most important. The form of the development is then modelled to create a 3-5 storey edge along the northern boundary. The larger buildings enable the necessary scale of development (according to industry providers) and create a presence on the Hutt River open space that is not inappropriate. Indeed, the buildings will engage positively with the open public space in a way that is not often seen along the length of the corridor. Another similar example is at the Presbyterian Support Central in White's Line West.
- At the scale of the site, the development is organised around a central driveway/street. This street extends through the entire site, effectively looping visitors and residents into the existing street network at Boulcott Street and Military Road. The buildings and open spaces are arranged appropriately along the length of the street, assisting with wayfinding and helping ensure appropriate identity of the individual villa residences. The villa units create front and back yards, not dissimilar to the site relationships seen in the surrounding residential areas.
- Larger scale buildings are arranged along the northern boundary, as noted above, and also around the communal bowling green area. Entry to the more intensive apartment and care home buildings is highlighted by the vehicle turnaround area.
- The architectural response is appropriate, the buildings are designed in ways that offer appropriate variety and visual interest while at the same time having qualities that link the individual parts into a coherent whole.
- The landscaping design helps to punctuate open areas of the site, provide appropriate feathering of the edges of buildings and adds considerable visual interest and amenity.
- Overall, I am confident that the application demonstrates positive, varied and visual interest in the form and layout of the development.

*...while ensuring that development achieves the following:*

- (i) *Development adjacent to a Residential Activity Area boundary is compatible with the scale, location and form of development on the existing Residential Activity Area properties;*
  - Overall form of the development steps building height and grain down to the boundaries shared with residential activity areas and the school.
  - The scale of the buildings adjacent to these boundaries is greater than, but not incompatible with, the scale of buildings on the adjacent residential activity area properties.
  - The buildings adjacent to these boundaries adopt the 5-metre setback prescribed for development of this site. It is considered that the locations of the new buildings is therefore compatible with the form and location of buildings in the residential activity area.

- It seems the strongly consistent form and location of buildings adjacent to the shared boundaries is inconsistent with the nature of existing development in the residential activity area – which is naturally varied. While the new development lacks the visual richness that comes with variety and more importantly in the context of this assessment, will appear different, such an outcome can be expected with comprehensive developments of the scale proposed in this application. Any negative effects arising from this will be less than minor in my opinion, largely because perceptions of the site from surrounding areas will be limited. While the shared boundary is long, its full length will never be perceived from on the ground. Individual properties in the existing residential activity area will perceive one, and at the most two buildings, in each lateral direction away from the direct interface. It is also expected that planting will help limit visibility laterally.
- (ii) *Development adjacent to the Boulcott School boundary is of a scale and form that responds to the existing scale and intensity of development on the school site;*
- The scale of school buildings is a little larger than the scale of most residential buildings in the existing residential activity area. While the terminology of this criterion does not express a qualitative expectation, I have assumed that outcomes should be compatible, or at least that the relationships between development scale and intensity is not incompatible across the boundary
  - The open space of the playing field is a mitigating factor as is the consequential separation distance. Similarly, existing and planned planting will further help mitigate against incompatibilities.
- (iii) *In achieving (i) to (ii) above, development should be planned and designed, constructed and managed in a manner that contributes to a positive relationship to its neighbours through good urban design.*
- With a starting point of a retirement village development, which could be expected to include buildings and development intensity similar to those proposed here, I consider that the layout of buildings across the site, the form these buildings take, the details of the building facades and planning arrangements of the internal spaces have all been managed in a manner that will lead to not-incompatible relationships with its neighbours.
  - The site layout is highly legible, with the buildings and common areas of the site laid out along a long internal road. The architect has characterised this organising element as a green spine, with clear reference to the way the spaces along the length of the road would be landscaped.
  - However, with an expectation that the site will be developed for the purposes currently proposed by the applicant, I am confident that the project has adopted good urban design practices.

*(m) To enable, for a development where (l) above applies, larger buildings and buildings taller than the permitted height of 8m in the General Residential Activity Area to recognise the large site and the opportunity to take advantage of views across the Lower Hutt Golf Course from the edge of the new stopbank where the layout, massing, arrangement and design of all buildings is demonstrated in a comprehensive development to achieve:*

*(i) All aspects of policy (l) above;*

I have noted above how I consider that the site planning and overall development design satisfies the criteria noted in (l).

*(ii) An appropriate urban design response to the wider context so that the coherence of the adjoining neighbourhood's urban form is not adversely affected to an inappropriate degree;*

- When the Activity Area for the site was changed from General Recreation to General Residential, a potential for the existing neighbourhood's urban form to also change was created.
- The coherency of the current transect will undoubtedly be diminished with the introduction of larger scale buildings at the periphery (i.e. along the northern edge of the site), adjacent to the Hutt river open space.
- The taller buildings along the northern boundary of the site will establish a clear *edge* to the Hutt River open space. This hard *edge* will contrast with the typical edge condition, which is less pronounced, comprising smaller building forms and most often a solid or open fence. Given that this hard edge is only a small proportion of the overall length of the Hutt River corridor, I am confident that this condition will not be perceived negatively.
- From certain vantage points within the SRAA, one's perceptions of the close relationship between the neighbourhood and the Hutt River open space will no longer be possible. An example of this is Viewpoint 4, where one can currently look down a shared driveway to see open space and hillside beyond. However, in other cases (refer to Viewpoint 3) there will be no change as a result of the development.
- Taking a broader view, as is suggested by the phrasing of this criterion, I do not believe the effects are adverse to an inappropriate level. In coming to this conclusion I note that along the length of the Hutt River corridor there are other similar variations in the urban form. The changed circumstances of this site will fit quite comfortably with those existing formal punctuations.

*(iii) Appropriate visual permeability across the site;*

- Just what might constitute appropriate visual permeability across the site is not clearly articulated in this policy. This lack of clarity has also been noted in the Urban Design Assessment.
- Views across the site at the level of the buildings (the band created between the level of the site and the tops of building, i.e. the built form) would be unlikely with any form of development that approaches the intensity of the current proposal – without describing

view corridors. This is because people perceive buildings and space in three dimensions and phenomena such as juxtaposition come into play.

- The form of the development is not inconsistent with the District Plan expectations i.e. building up to more intensive edge along northern edge.
- The application represents the effects of the development on views that were identified as relevant to consider during preapplication discussions.
- My evaluations of the effects of the development on these views have been made on site, using the visual representations as a guide.
- I agree with Mr Munro's assessment that that the most significant negative effects of the development will occur in relation to the Boulcott School property. Viewpoints 1 and 2 suggest this; in the case of VP1 the impact of the new buildings would be to completely block the view of the western hills across the site that is currently available.
- What is the effect of this? The intention behind this criterion is undoubtedly to help people understand where they are in space, relative to the well understood geographical markers provided by the hills and to preserve the current positive visual amenity and outlook. In addition, it recognises the amenity value such views of the landscape provide. However, I also understand that Hutt City District Plan has not identified these as being either outstanding natural or significant amenity landscapes in its District Plan.
- In understanding the effects I also take a pragmatic view, changes to existing conditions will occur with development. More importantly, I do not focus on the representation of the view but consider the views in situ. That is, the photo montages are helpful to be able to understand relationships between the new interventions and existing conditions but it is important to consider these in place.
- Views are serial and peripheral. Views are not constrained to the graphically convenient, fixed positions represented in the visual representations. This reassures me views will still be available from other positions in the school grounds toward the hills. During visits to the site I have noted that many, if not most, views of distant ridges and hillsides that are currently available will remain unaffected by the development.
- Other viewpoints of interest are those from public areas such as Hathaway Avenue and Boulcott Street. Views from the nominated viewpoints and other public locations throughout the area will be affected but in most cases it will still be possible to see something of the distant physical features, such as hillsides, trees and vegetation and ridgelines. In some cases this remains available through views over the new buildings.
- The conclusion I draw here is that while views will be negatively affected from some viewing points, most significantly from those around the Boulcott School playing fields, that the effects of this will be moderated by having some views still available above the buildings or around the site. From selected viewing positions there will also be views available between the proposed buildings but this will be limited.
- While views across the site will in some cases no longer be available with the completion of this development, on balance I consider the visual permeability to be appropriate. In forming this opinion I have taken into account the anticipated scale and form housing for the elderly might take on the site and the effects of the proposed development on visual perceptions that I understand to be dynamic, searching and wide. I have also

contemplated the availability of views of the landscape that will remain unaffected and how these might help to offset any losses.

*(iv) An attractive and well-designed edge treatment when viewed from the new stopbank and avoids buildings that have inappropriate length or mass.*

- I note that the rule that would normally limit the overall length of buildings in the General Residential Activity Areas has been abandoned for development of the current site, suggesting that it has been anticipated that larger building footprints may locate adjacent to the north boundary.
- The scale of the buildings, deriving from their overall height and plan area dimensions, is graduated across the site. Starting from the smaller scale buildings anticipated along the boundaries shared with existing residential properties in the SRAA, the scale of buildings increases toward the northern boundary onto the Hutt River open space. This is an appropriate modelling of form across the site with enables the necessary (according to the applicant) intensity of development for a viable retirement village. This criterion is concerned with perceptions of the developed site from the Hutt River open space and in particular with views that may be available from elevated vantagepoints along the stopbank. An elevated position will naturally diminish perceptions of height, a phenomenon evident in my experience of the recent Ryman Healthcare development in east Petone.
- The architectural forms are varied, as are the facades of the buildings along the northern site boundary. These buildings exhibit appropriate levels of visual interest within an overall ordered framework. The buildings are well designed.
- Steps have been taken to avoid creation of a consistent and monotonous *wall* of buildings along this boundary. Specifically, the buildings are articulated in plan and height such that the silhouette will appear varied. Steps in plan alignment have been incorporated between buildings.
- Some large scale planting will be evident in the gaps between buildings, which will help limit perceptions of continuous building form.
- In my opinion, the project achieves the expected “attractive and well-designed edge treatment when viewed from the new stopbank” and it has been designed in ways that help avoid perceptions of inappropriate building length or mass.

#### **Matters of discretion**

*(iv) Urban Design Effects, Architectural Treatment, Effects on Amenity and Character Values and Wind Effects*

*(a) The extent to which the proposal would adversely affect the amenity and character values of the surrounding residential and recreational area, including:*

- i. The effects of buildings and structures on neighbouring and surrounding residential and recreational sites, Boulcott School and Boulcott Kindergarten, and, in particular, the location, design, appearance, bulk, spacing and articulation of buildings; and*

- The proposed development is of a scale anticipated in the District Plan
- The design models the form of the development appropriately to create compatible scale relationships where they are closest
- I note below the potentially negative effect the development will have on privacy of the residents along the shared boundary with Hathaway Avenue properties. This arises because of the increase in site level along this shared boundary. Reference Kamo Marsh drawing 3.
- Appropriate response along the northern site boundary shared with the Hutt River open space. This relationship will be moderated by the stopbank adjacent to the development site and by the open nature of the recreational area. While the visual representations focus attention on the development itself, our visual perceptions are different to this. Serial, searching, peripheral are aspects that distinguish visual perception in space as compared with analysing a photograph.
- The architectural forms and materials assist in making the development attractive and compatible with the existing development around the site.
- Existing and new landscaping (on and off site) will also help moderate the impact the development will have from different vantage points.

*ii. Whether the proposal would cause significant loss of sunlight, daylight or privacy on adjoining residential properties and Boulcott School.*

- Considering what the District Plan anticipates for the site, the sunlight and daylight effects on properties surrounding the development site are benign. As the proposed development observes relevant building recession planes there will be no untoward, unanticipated shading of these adjoining properties.
- However, I do have some concerns about privacy effects onto some residential properties along the boundary shared with Hathaway Avenue sites.

*iii. The degree to which the proposal meets the Design Guide for Medium Density Housing (Appendix 19).*

### **Design Guide for Medium Density Housing**

#### *Fitting in the neighbourhood*

***Background: the aims of the guidelines under this heading are to ensure new developments respect the existing character and patterns of the neighbourhood and that they are undertaken with an awareness of how adjoining sites may be developed in the future. A particular concern is the visual bulk of medium density housing, which can contrast starkly with the character in areas of detached housing. Medium density housing should be designed to fit with, rather than contrast with, existing patterns.***

Significant scale of development, will affect neighbourhood character irrespective of design.

Appropriate modelling of form to relate to existing residential fabric

Creating edge along the northern edge of site is appropriate

In my opinion, will fit appropriately with the neighbourhood, particularly in consideration of the anticipated development typology (housing for the elderly).

#### Integrated buildings and spaces

**Background: this guideline seeks to ensure that new developments are planned for energy efficiency, that outdoor spaces are provided for the enjoyment of residents and that steps are taken to reduce the impact of development on urban infrastructure.**

Meaningful common areas created within the development; buildings and landscape design reinforce these. Large scale and comprehensive nature enable these criteria to be met.

Due to the plan dimensions, heights and arrangement of buildings on the site, some areas of the site will be shaded, particularly during the winter months. A particularly extreme example of this is the bowling green, situated on the south side of a building that is in parts five storeys high. While this well-defined common area will receive early morning and later afternoon sun, particularly between the spring and autumn equinoxes, it will be shaded during the middle parts of the day. My reading of the wind analysis also reveals that this activity area will be affected by downdrafts and swirling winds. The usefulness and attractiveness of this area as a recreation area can be questioned. Nevertheless, it is likely to be attractive to look out onto from within the development.

On balance, and considering the steps that have been taken to model the form of the development to achieve the necessary scale while avoiding shading and other effects onto properties to the south and east, the buildings and spaces are appropriately integrated.

#### Vehicles

**Background: this criterion seeks to ensure that provisions for storage and movement of vehicles on the site do not compromise the quality of the streetscape or for people walking or using the site in other ways.**

Problematic that vehicle parking bays are dominant in many places along the length of the internal street.

Similarly, cars significantly visible in front of the smaller villa buildings.

However, the effects are largely internal.

#### Fences and Walls

**Background: this guideline seeks to ensure that fences and walls are used effectively to delineate space and yet do not hinder communication between the private and public spaces. The design of fences should enhance the degree of fit with the surrounding neighbourhood.**

All appropriate, part of the comprehensive landscape design proposal.

#### Site facilities

**Background: this guideline seeks to ensure that the development accommodates pragmatic issues such as clothes drying and rubbish storage in ways that do not compromise amenity.**

These appear to be provided for.

#### Privacy and safety

***Background: this guideline seeks to ensure that privacy within the development for residents, particularly when using their indoor spaces, is not compromised.***

I have concerns about the effect the development will have on the privacy of adjoining residential properties along the length of boundary B-C, as seen in the Kamo Marsh drawing 03 rev 3. This indicates that the level of the Summerset Village villa dwellings is lifted above the existing levels of properties along these shared boundaries. The privacy conditions for these properties will be negatively affected.

I do not consider that there will be any untoward privacy outcomes in the relationship between the proposed development and Boulcott School. This is largely as a consequence of distance between the new dwellings and the school playing fields as well as internal planning, which locates the living areas of the villa units to the north and away from overlooking the school.

Within the development the privacy of residents seems to have been managed through a comprehensive site design.

#### Landscaping and vegetation

***Background: this guideline seeks to ensure that sites are landscaped to enhance integration with the surrounding community and to provide amenity for residents.***

In design terms, I find the landscaping proposal to be appropriate.

*(xi) Positive effects arising from provision of Housing for the Elderly in a comprehensively planned development.*

- For others to assess, but I can confirm that offering people choice of housing that will meet their diverse needs in existing areas and close to physical, economic, social and cultural infrastructure is very important. The proposal fills a current gap in a residential typology that research has identified to be missing.

## **Submissions**

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The submissions raise matters that I have largely covered in in my analysis of the application and urban design outcomes. I have not read any argument in these submissions that has persuaded me to change my mind.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

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The application presents a development of a scale and form that is anticipated by the district plan, even if the overall building heights are not.

The project is well considered to avoid significant negative effects on adjoining properties and public spaces.

While the impact on the Boulcott School is greater than on any other property or space in the area, I believe the effects are manageable.

I'd like to see better management of the effects on the privacy of those living in properties along Hathaway Avenue and sharing a boundary with the application site.

Following my assessment of the outcomes in relation to the District Plan criteria, and on balance, I am able to support the urban design outcomes.

**Morten Gjerde FNZIA**