

Salamander Shores/Bannisters redevelopment, 147 Soldiers Point Rd

TRRA Submission Guide, 5 January 2022

Major Project MP 06_0183 CP Mod 2 - on exhibition until 21 January 2022 at http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=10703

Submissions should be to the Dept of Planning, not Port Stephens Council

TRRA welcomes, in principle, investment in the redevelopment of the ageing Salamander Shores hotel and in particular the provision of a modern conference facility. The scale of the proposed redevelopment has taken many residents by surprise, and many will be opposed. However, that battle was lost in 2011 when the original concept plan for a similar redevelopment was approved. The renovation of the hotel and pub approved in 2017 was only ever a temporary measure. Short of a very costly legal challenge for which there are no obvious grounds, or a prohibitively expensive buy-out, the community needs to accept that a large scale redevelopment can take place.

The issues now open for comment are the modification to the approved design and layout, which include some modest height increases and a change in the mix – no longer any serviced apartments but 6 more hotel rooms and 24 more permanent residential apartments. The design and layout changes are mainly a response to the constraints of hard rock on previous plans for excavated car parks.

The key issues for the community remain as they were in 2010 – the visual impact of the new buildings and the traffic implications.

Visual impact

The proponent argues that the small increase in heights (up to 2.2 metres on one building but only 600mm on the highest building) are balanced by the growth of the surrounding trees in the last decade, resulting in the visual impact being little different. This may be the case but no 'photomontages' showing the new design relative to the treeline from various viewpoints have been provided. Council has confirmed that subsequent DAs will be referred to Council's Design Review Panel for comment, but any input from the Panel will come too late to limit the overall height and bulk of the buildings once they have been approved in a revised Concept Plan. We note that the reduction in the number of separate buildings from 8 to 6 may have a material effect on the visual impact and perceived bulk of the complex.

We submit that 'photomontages' showing the new design relative to the current treeline from various viewpoints should be required, allowing for a comparison with the photomontages of the approved plan. The new photomontages should be made public for comment before any decision is made on the Concept Plan.

Traffic & parking

In the decade since the 2011 approval, traffic on Soldiers Point Road will have increased significantly, with many new residences on the peninsula, and many more approved or proposed. In its meeting with the developer in October, Council noted that an updated Traffic and Car Parking Report would be required to include integration with the road network. However, the Report submitted (App F) mainly addresses parking (see below).

The proponent claims that the plans satisfy all relevant parking requirements, although there appears to be no provision for parking associated with the conference facility – it seems unlikely that

conferences would be confined to hotel guests, as stated. Given the experience with inadequate parking for the Cheeky Dog pub, leading to overflow parking on public land, we question whether there is sufficient provision for parking for visitors to the new complex.

We submit that a revised and updated traffic assessment, including current and forecast traffic counts on Soldiers Point Road both at the site and at the Wanda Beach shops 'choke-point', should be required and made public for comment before any decision is made on the Concept Plan. Similarly, further consideration of parking demand and provision is required.

Ecological impact

Another important issue is the effect on the tree cover on the site and adjacent reserve, beyond the unavoidable inevitable loss of 28 trees under or close to the new building footprints.

These concerns are compounded by an unfortunate recent history of excessive and possibly unauthorised clearing of vegetation on the seaward side of the existing hotel by the proponent.

A related concern is the apparent agreement with Council to allow an asset protection zone (APZ) to be established by an easement over the adjacent Council reserve rather than on the proponent's own land - the proposed building footprint is between 5 and 6 metres from the lot boundary, which is not wide enough for an acceptable APZ. While APZs do not have to be completely cleared, vegetation has to be limited. While the adjacent reserve to the south and east is no longer considered bush-fire prone (as it was in 2010), asset protection requirements still apply. The proponent is seeking a modification of the condition in the 2011 approval. The Bushfire Compliance Report (App E) suggests that the APZ on the easement over the reserve could now be scaled back to improve biodiversity outcomes and recommends a further assessment. Council should support any such change that could improve outcomes for the community and environment.

We submit that the bushfire protection requirements and proposed solutions, including the arrangement with Council for an easement, need to be clarified and made public for comment before any decision on the Concept Plan.

The EIS argues that the effect on flora and fauna is not significant enough to require a full Biodiversity Assessment (BDAR), but the recent Flora and Fauna report (App G) does not confirm that a BDAR waiver is justified – it instead asks that question in the context of the assessment pathway.

We submit that a full BDAR should be required and made public for comment before any decision is made on the Concept Plan.