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Attention: Quahita Samie
From: Environment & Heritage Management – Heritage section
Date: 04/09/2020
Subject: Comment on HIA
Erf no: 8019-RE
Site location: 130 Sir Lowry Road, Woodstock

Background

The application involves the demolition of all existing structures and the development of a new mixed use eight storey building with four basement levels. The proposal, as described in the HIA, comprises 6500 m² retail space over two levels, a hotel, 680 parking bays, a mix of 157 studio and 1 bedroom residential units as well as 20 affordable residential units. The height from ground level to roof parapet is 24,59m with a 2m lift overrun set back from the facade.

Process

It is mentioned in the HIA that the process was communicated to key interested and affected parties during March 2020, including a month long commenting period and that an interactive process was followed with various stakeholders to arrive at the design. E&HM would like to point out that we do not have a record of any submission or communication with the applicant prior to the receipt of this HIA in August 2020. It is assumed that E&HM will be offered an opportunity to provide further input during the LUMS/ HPOZ stage.

Detailed architectural plans have not been made available and this assessment is based on the low resolution sketch plan images included in the HIA.

Heritage value & context

Heritage significance of existing buildings

The site has been graded as Not Conservation Worthy. The existing structures relate to the middle to late 20th century development of Woodstock. They are of a nondescript nature and not of heritage significance.

Heritage significance of context

The site is located inside the Victoria Road HPOZ. Victoria Road is an exemplary streetscape of later 19th and early 20th century commercial buildings, demonstrating the expansion of Cape Town along a historical route towards both the south and the hinterland. Later commercial buildings from the Art Deco and modernist periods offer an interesting counterpoint to the colonnaded Victorian and Edwardian buildings. Colonnades, shop fronts, parapet walls and the fine grain of the area are critical components of the streetscape.

It should be noted that even though only a portion of the site falls inside a declared HPOZ, the remainder is located inside a proposed HPOZ and considered to be of equal sensitivity in light of the heritage significance of the context as a remnant of District Six.

Assessment

E&HM agrees with the statement of significance and associated indicators as set out in the HIA. We would however like to note the importance of additional indicators relating to the typical character of Main Road, the issue of scale and setbacks, which we do not feel has been adequately responded to.

In principle, E&HM is supportive of the proposed development of a relatively large mixed use building within this context, as it is in line with various spatial policy directives. The modern insertion is acceptable as part of a layered townscape, as long as some impacts are appropriately mitigated. It is agreed that the visual impact of the building envelope is acceptable in the context as assessed in the VIA.

Impact of proposal

Although the proposal does not directly relate to the preservation of a historic streetscape (with the exception of the buildings on the opposite side of Francis Street), it does however need to respond to the surrounding townscape as a heritage resource. This context, as a remnant of District Six and part of the historic Main Road activity corridor, requires human-scaled and pedestrian-friendly active interfaces and edge conditions. In addition it needs to be acknowledged that District Six/ Woodstock is a sensitive environment in terms of living heritage, social values and intangible heritage.

The design principles, as described in the project motivation, for example the 'reduction of the visual scale' through setbacks and articulation and an 'interactive and engaging pedestrian street edge' is commendable. However the application of this design intent is not always clear in the actual proposal.

- Ideally upper levels of taller buildings along Sir Lowry/ Victoria Road and other low rise surroundings, would be set back by at least 3-4m in order to adhere to the streetscape pattern where one or two storeys directly relate to the pedestrian scale and further height is sufficiently set back to recede from the street level view. Although the building has been horizontally articulated along Sir Lowry Road with a visual differentiation between the levels, a setback above the 'podium' level would be preferable to address the impact of the sheer height and scale experienced from the sidewalk. Some examples of recent interventions in the area of a similar typology, include Woodstock Quarter and The Iron Works, where there are street setbacks of at least 4,5m for the upper levels.
- The other main concern relating to the proposal, is the impact on the character of Francis Street, where a very sensitive transition in scale is required to respond to the historic single storey terraces. The elevation provided in the HIA does not appear to respond in any way to the scale and typology of the terraces, in contrast to the project description.

Specific concerns regarding the various interfaces are summarised below:

North elevation – Sir Lowry Road



- Scale of 'podium': Heights are not known due to image resolution, but it is evident in the image that the two lower levels do not adequately respond to the human scale and pedestrian environment. It might be that a further visual articulation of the ground floor itself will assist in this regard, as applied in the The District building across the road.
- This overscaled effect is exacerbated by the lack of a setback for the upper floors.
- Reference is made to 'the main façade of Sir Lowry Road setback from the street edge creates a large terraced platform that facilitates the flow of pedestrian movement and enhances the public street edge at this key gateway between the City, Woodstock and District Six.' From the available information, it is not clear how this is achieved.

West elevation – Russel Street



- Not enough design clarity is provided to assess the character of this edge, given the strategic requirements to activate Russel Street as an important linkage to Hanover Street.
- The scale of the podium level does not relate to a human—scaled pedestrian environment.
- Parking is accessed primarily from Russell Street; detail is required on the dimensions and materiality of this access and the facade treatment generally.

South elevation – Francis Street



- The facade shown on the elevation drawing is very concerning as it implies a sterile three storey interface with the historic remnant single storey terrace houses.
- The text/ motivation describes this edge as comprising 'inclusionary housing on the Francis Street elevation, replicating the typology of the terraced housing prevalent in the area, with all units having front 'porches' to encourage/facilitate interaction with the street and avoiding blank facades. Above these units the building is set back which allows it to maintain the scale and context of Francis Street.' This is not evident in the drawing.

East elevation – Basket Lane



- Materiality still to be assessed.

Recommendation

Although E&HM is in principle supportive of the redevelopment of the site, we are of the view that the current proposal can be refined in a number of ways to respond more sensitively to the context and the townscape as a heritage resource. Although we largely agree with the indicators of the HIA, we do not agree that they have adequately been responded to and are therefore not supportive of the plan in its current form without further mitigation.

In particular the height of the lower 'podium' level appears to be overscaled in relation to the human figure and the typical streetscape pattern established elsewhere along Sir Lowry Road/ Main Road. This is exacerbated by the lack of a setback on the Sir Lowry Road edge. There is insufficient information on parking accommodation and how the various facades might be sterilised by this. Based on the diagrams, large sections of the west, south and east elevations appear to be blank/ inactive. There is no clarity on materiality and the quality of glazing which has a large impact on permeability and active edges. Further detail is also required around public realm improvement including hard and soft landscaping.

Further information should be provided for assessment during the HPOZ application, including detailed plans, sections and elevations indicating appropriately dimensioned setbacks, materials and landscaping in mitigation of the above impacts.

Yours sincerely



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