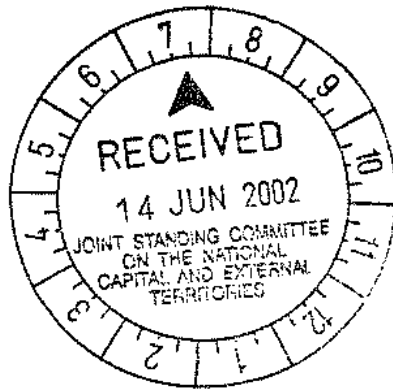


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14 June 2002

The Secretary
 Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital
 and External Territories
 Parliament House
 Canberra Act 2600

By Facsimile: 02 6277 2067

FAXED

Dear Sir / Madam:

**Draft Amendment Number 39
 National Capital Plan**

We wish to participate in the Joint Committee on the National Capital and External Territories hearing concerning Draft Amendment Number 39.

The Draft Amendment proposes a set of Principles and Policies

The reasons for this change is that the proposed area is currently used for residential purposes under the plan and is to enable the territory to manage the aspects of residential development that are relevance to local community needs while ensuring the protection of the special character of this critical part of the National Capital.

The Draft Amendment will not ensure the protection of the special character of the area, as the Policies and Principles do not adequately address the National Significance of the area, are difficult to interpret and are ambiguous.

The area in question lies between State Circle and National Circuit. It is also an area of National Significance, and properties within this area should be subject to different Policies and Principles from the surrounding residential areas.

National Significance is attributed to:

- Its location within Land Axis.
- Its proximity and relationship to Parliament House;
- State Circle being one of the premier Main Avenues identified in the National Capital Plan;

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Policies and Principles of future development within this area need to address these issues of National Significance. In this regard the future desired built form and landscape character should respect its proximity to Parliament House, its location within the land axis and the desired future built form to State Circle and National Circuit as well as the existing character of the area.

We have outlined our analysis of the key issues and recommendation in the attachment to this letter.

Please contact Rohan Dickson, 9319 1500 if you require any additional information or if you have any questions.

Sincerely

Civitas Partnership Pty Ltd



Rohan Dickson AILA RLA ASLA AIA
Director

Former Executive Director - National Capital Design
National Capital Planning Authority

Encl.

ATTACHMENT

The following has been informed by work undertaken by Rohan Dickson while Executive Director, National Capital Design and has been confirmed by urban designers within his practice.

1. The Land Axis

The land axis is one of key elements in the Central National Area that provides an order and a structure to the heart of the National capital.

The land axis, Griffins interpretation of the axis urbis is extraordinary and beautiful man made element that springs from the topography of city and provide a unique thread between Mount Ainslie and Red Hill and to the Brindabella Mountains beyond. The axis connects the national government, the administration, and the cultural institutions in a symbolic alignment of the natural features of the site.
Design Dialogue, Central National Area Study 1995, National Capital Planning Authority

The axis extends south from Parliament House to Red Hill and beyond. The proposed area lies within this axis.

The connectivity between these elements that make up the land axis needs to be maintained and strengthened. This can be achieved through the built form. The built form should:

- Define the axis by its orientation, arrangement and massing.
- Be of a mass and density commensurate with its location.
- Be used to define the edges to various landmarks.

The density and intensity of development should also be greater within the land axis with each building individually contributing to the overall built form of the land axis. Buildings in this area should define the outer edge of the State Circle and the inner edge of National Circuit.

The density and scale of development should lessen the further one moves away from the land axis in either the east or west direction.

2. Proximity and relationship to Parliament House

The proposed built form should be mutually supportive and enhance the setting curtilage/open space against which Parliament House is seen. The setting includes the landscaped immediately adjoining Parliament House, Capital Circle, the Annulus, State Circle and the area between State Circle and National Circuit.

The fundamental issues in terms of the built form is that future development between State Circle and National Circuit:

- Complements Parliament House;
- Is of an appropriate mass and density to define the outer edge of the open space / curtilage around Parliament House

Our own analysis of the existing setting / curtilage for Parliament House including York Park in the east, the diplomatic area in the west and Forest to the south clearly indicates that the building mass and density around Parliament House should more intensive in order to provide a deliberate sculptured built edge. This will ensure Parliament House will be perceived as the most prominent place within the Nations Capital.

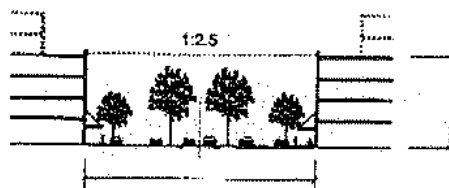
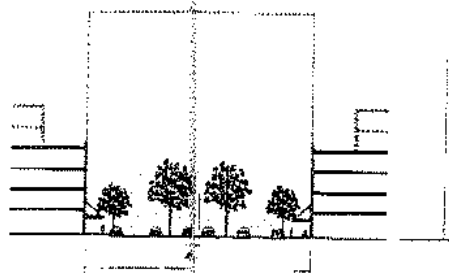
3. Main Avenues

State Circle being one of the premier Main Avenues identified in the National Capital Plan.

Buildings are located on private space, but address and have a relationship with the public domain. The manner in which a building interacts with the public domain has important implications for both the quality of that space and

the way a space reads in relation to the overall urban context. Specifically in this regard, a principal street is expected to incorporate (and reads best) with a greater intensity of development relative to other areas.

Similarly, the scale relationships between street width and building height suggest that taller buildings work best on wider streets. A key principle in this regard, extrapolated from detailed examination of urban environments the world over, is that the "feeling" and human scale of a street is enhanced by ensuring that the ratio of building height to the width between buildings across a street falls between the parameters of 1:1 and 1:2.5. Given that the existing street width of State Circle is of the order of 60 metres wide, the corresponding building heights under such a principle are between 60 metres and 24 metres. Given existing built form and cultural context however, the upper end of such heights is such that they would not be acceptable. Heights set at the lower end of the ratio will enable strong definition of the street while also more closely approximate existing precedents, as long as they are within the tree canopy height.



4. Existing Character

The existing character of the area comprises relatively large buildings on large lots, ranging from one to two storeys in height.

The streetscape is consistent through out the area. It is important to preserve this character by maintaining the existing carriageway widths and wide verges, consistent street trees planting, and the consistent front setbacks.

Buildings are typically separated by generous landscaped side and rear setbacks.

A significant part of the special character of the area comes from the deep soil zones at the rear and side of each lot, which allow plant material to grow to a significant size. It is this landscape located on private properties (often referred to as the borrowed landscape) that makes a significant contribution to the special character of the area.

The proposed Amendment will not preserve the special characteristics of the area. The Draft Amendment will allow:

- Narrower side and rear setbacks
- Buildings to occupy more surface area of each existing lot

The outcome will be a loss of deep soil planting zones.

To maintain the existing character, particularly when sites are amalgamated the Policies and Principle should include statements concerning the following:

- Minimum front, rear and side setbacks, which would match the existing setbacks
- Permissible site coverage as a percentage of the lot area;
- Required minimum landscape area as a percentage of the lot area
- Building will not exceed the tree canopy height.

It is our view that taking such an approach with regard to the Policies and Principles will maintain the desired outcome of buildings within the landscape.

5. Proposed Policies and Principles

The future desired built form and landscape character should respect its proximity to Parliament House, its location within the Land Axis, the desired future built form to State Circle and National Circuit, as well as the existing character of the area

The Policies and Principles also need to be clear and unambiguous, i.e.

1. The Draft Amendment would not preclude dual occupancy residential uses fronting State Circle with multiple vehicular crossings, as they will not maintain the existing character of the area
2. *...Maintain and enhance the character of the National Capital*
The specific qualities that give the National Capital its character need to be clearly articulated as they relate to this area.
3. *'Design of buildings in proximity to the Prime Ministers Lodge should reflect the dominant **urban design character** of the locality.'*
To avoid misinterpretation, the 'dominant urban design character' of the area needs to be defined and stated as part of the Policies and Principles. The qualities should be expressed in terms of setbacks, site coverage, landscape area, architectural character, streetscape, planting, etc
4. *'...with an architectural treatment that reflects the **principle residential character** of the locality.'*
To avoid misinterpretation the *principle residential character* of the locality needs to be defined and included in the Amendment. The qualities should be expressed in terms of setbacks, site coverage, landscape area, architectural character, streetscape, planting, etc.
5. *'Signs, roof mounted aerial, masts and satellite dishes **should** be located to have **a low visual impact**'*
The phrase low visual impact is unclear.

6. Recommendations

Our recommendations are as follows:

- The National Capital Plan is quite explicit with regard to York Park and the Diplomatic Areas that front State Circle and National Circuit. We fail to see why this area should be exempt from similar controls and scrutiny.
- The Draft Amendment therefore should contain at a minimum, the following merit based Policies and Principles:
 - Maintain the existing generous landscaped front, side, and rear setbacks for the purpose of maintaining deep root zones between buildings.
 - Provide a maximum site coverage of 60%
 - Provide a minimum landscape area of 40%
 - Allow building heights in the order of 4 storeys and not to exceed the tree canopy height