



3 June 2020

Lisa Shaw & Johann Rajaratnam
RDV & Borough of Queenscliffe

Dear Ms Shaw and Mr Rajaratnam

Queenscliffe Hub - Design Review May 2020

We thank Regional Development Victoria and the Borough of Queenscliffe for requesting a review of the Queenscliffe Hub by the Victorian Design Review Panel.

The Office of the Victorian Government Architect's views, which are based on a meeting with Kerstin Thompson Architects on 5 May 2020, a site visit on 31 October 2019 and the Victorian Design Review Panel discussion are as per the following report.

If you require further clarification, please contact our office on 9651 6583 to discuss.

Yours sincerely,

Stefan Preuss
Associate Government Architect

cc: Kerstin Thompson, KTA
Claire Humphreys, Kerstin Thompson Architects
Kelsey Jovanou, Kerstin Thompson Architects
Kerri Erler, Acting Regional Director, RDV
Martin Gill, Borough of Queenscliffe
Emma Challands, Project Manager, Cerno
Susan Howard, Geelong Regional Libraries
Patti Manolis, Geelong Regional Libraries
Garry Spry, Queenscliffe Historical Museum
Stephen Lee, Queenscliffe Historical Museum

Panel Members

The VDRP members who attended the design review session were Stefan Preuss (Chair), Rachel Nolan, Stuart Harrison, Kim Roberts and Claire Martin.

Confidentiality

The advice contained in this letter and attached report is offered in confidence.

The OVGA will use reasonable endeavours to keep information confidential. For instance, VDRP panel members are subject to a duty of confidentiality.

The advice contained in this letter and report is confidential but the OVGA reserves the right to provide its reports, advice and documents relating to panel hearings to other parties, such as the Minister, responsible authority or decision maker. The OVGA also reserves the right to authorise others to distribute its advice and reports more broadly where it deems necessary to do so; for instance, to accord natural justice.

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VICTORIAN DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Queenscliffe Hub

49-57 Hesse St, Queenscliff

May 2020

Documentation

Information presented at review:

- Digital presentation by Kerstin Thompson Architects

Information provided to panel ahead of review:

- Design Report Queenscliffe Hub, Kerstin Thompson Architects, dated 13.05.2020
- Space data sheets, Kerstin Thompson Architects, dated 20.03.2020
- Functional Brief and Cost Plan, Kerstin Thompson Architects, dated 20.03.2020

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Queenscliffe Hub

Design Review Report – May 2020

The Borough of Queenscliffe and Regional Development Victoria (RDV) requested an independent design review of the Queenscliffe Hub by the Victorian Design Review Panel. We thank Kerstin Thompson Architects for their presentation of the project, and the Borough of Queenscliffe, the Geelong Regional Libraries, Queenscliffe Historical Museum and Cerno for attending the review. This is the first review of the project.

Currently the Visitor Centre and Library are housed in the Library building, the original component which holds heritage significance, with the Museum in a separate building. The new Queenscliffe Hub will collocate the Museum, Library and Visitor Centre in a single, purpose-built facility with shared resources. The existing Museum building will be demolished.

There is opportunity for the proposal to not only become a key piece of civic infrastructure within the township, but also to provide a focus for the local community and visitors. We support the ambition of the proposal and commend all stakeholders as well as the project team on the approach taken to this project which displays a focus on design quality and community contribution. It is a significant project for the town of Queenscliff as well as the Borough of Queenscliffe and has the potential to rejuvenate Hesse Street.

Summary issues

This report aims to provide an overview of the VDRP discussion and issues raised in the review. A summary of key issues includes:

- The thorough site analysis and overall approach is commended. Both display a deep understanding of Queenscliff.
- The building setback, height and horizontal expression are responsive to the context and supported including from a heritage perspective.
- The intent behind the veranda structure is supported. Further resolution is required to ensure the structure ties to the design and narrative of the building, does not block views to the heritage buildings and becomes a welcoming gesture that give the building a civic presence.
- Permeability and the connection between the front and rear of the site should be strengthened, including flow through the building and visual permeability.
- The theme of curiosity including the concept of peep holes, is supported and should also inform design of the public realm and landscape.
- An arborist report is needed to inform decisions regarding the retention of the trees and the impact of the tree protection zones. This may unlock some of the constraints associated with the retention of the trees.
- The organisation of entry areas can be optimised further.

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Site strategy

Site, context and street analysis have been thorough and display a high level of sensitivity and detailed thinking. The analysis has revealed urban conditions, such as permeability and setbacks, that should be maintained and inform design decisions.

Hesse Street Interface

The site currently presents as a pocket park. There is a tension between maintaining this while also giving the building a civic presence. The intention behind the veranda structure to breach this tension is supported. However, its form and expression require further resolution in order to achieve this. The setback of the new part of the building is supported. It allows prominence of the surrounding heritage buildings and recognises the community value of the small park. Items such as bins, light poles and services need to be identified to ensure they can be well integrated into the design of the park to avoid urban clutter and to achieve the simplicity intended by the design team. The removal of the existing bus stop and shelter and for this to be integrated as part of the veranda structure is supported. Elements that are part of a bus shelter, such as signage and advertising, need to be carefully considered to not detract from the experience.

Permeability

Currently a singular park, the proposed building further divides the park into a front and back. There is the risk of the site permeability being lost. The connection between the front and the rear of the site and relationships of the two parks require further consideration and should be strengthened. The two parks perform different functions and although a physical link may not be required, at least clear visual permeability should be maintained. Flow and movement through the building, connection after hours and how the design languages of the parks relate to one another should be considered.

The level change across the site adds an additional challenge in creating permeability. Being the only physical link between front and back, we question the lightweight nature of the staircase leading from the building to the open space at the rear of the site. A more generous gesture and more gentle transition and stepping, with integrated seating, may be more appropriate. A more robust space would also help activate the rear of the building.

Landscape

The retention of trees is supported, however due to their dense nature it also constrains the site, including circulation and sightlines. An arborist report and impact assessment are of key importance at this stage of the project. This will provide further information regarding the life expectancy of trees and provide more specificity regarding tree protection zones. We encourage a collaborative approach with an arborist to balance the life expectancy of the trees, community expectations and the best long-term strategy for the site.

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Architectural Expression

The concept and theme of curiosity, linked to the museum collection, is supported. This should not only be limited to the Hesse Street façade, but also inform the design of the public realm and landscape. The playfulness of the front façade has the potential to flow through the building and thereby connect the front and rear of the building, resulting in a more permeable outcome.

Veranda

The urban design intention behind the veranda is generally supported. The veranda typology however is normally associated with a conventional High Street building and therefore may not be appropriate for a building with a civic focus. The heritage buildings immediately bordering the Hub do not have verandas. We encourage further exploration of an appropriate typology. One approach may be to interpret it as a pavilion and for it to become part of the park, thereby creating a stronger narrative for the project. The structure needs to link to the civic nature of the building and avoid separating the street and park. Instead it should read as an entry to a public space and become an object associated with the museum and library. A stronger connection to the landscape is needed to ensure that the structure does not act as a barrier, but rather draws people in.

The architectural language of veranda/structure and building are currently inconsistent and appear like two separate design exercises. We encourage a more intrinsic relationship between the two. This can help to ensure that the structure is not deleted at a later stage. The experience of being under the veranda/pavilion also needs to be addressed. As such, the underside of the veranda/pavilion becomes an additional elevation and has the potential to link to the building.

Façade

The trees located at the front of the building have dense canopies and therefore block views from the street to the building. This jeopardises its civic presence and means the expression and articulation of the façade needs particular care and attention. If all trees are to be retained, pending the arborist report, the façade may need a stronger civic presence. Details such as the way the building hits the ground need to be resolved. The Hesse Street façade currently comprises of several elements: the metal screen to the courtyard, glazing to the entry and the serrated concrete façade that contains the peep holes. A more singular approach may be considered to create more legibility and reinforce its civic nature.

The notion of the façade being a curtain has strength and should be explored further. Perhaps the curtain can be 'pulled back' further and transparency increased to strengthen visual permeability and create a softer transition from exterior to interior as well as from front to rear.

The interactive façade including the idea of peep holes and the concept of the cabinet of curiosity is supported. Moving forward, the peep holes and their relationship to the collection and the internal space require resolution. The approach of low tech and simple solutions that require limited maintenance are appropriate. The serration of the façade offers potential for further engaging the public. Different visual appearances of the two aspects of the serration could be explored.

The day and night appearance of the façade should be carefully considered.

The amount of glazing facing east is extensive and shading should be considered as part of the façade to avoid reliance on blinds.

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Heritage

The building setback, height and horizontal expression are responsive to the context and supported from a heritage perspective. The contrast in materiality between the proposed extension and the existing library building is also supported. The intersection between old and new is of particular importance and should be a key consideration moving forward.

Layout

Reorganising the entry sequence and consolidating the building entry and courtyard by swapping the office and Visitor Centre area with the building entry may result in a stronger connection between front and rear of the site enabling a more permeable outcome. This may also activate the courtyard space, which may otherwise not be programmed sufficiently, given that a café is not included. It should be explored further how people will use this space and how it could be serviced by collaborating, rather than competing, with local traders.

The separation of lift and stairs risks compromising equal access. Co-locating lift and stairs may be a better outcome and result in universal access rather than only compliance with DDA requirements.

The amenity and outlook of the spaces on the upper level to the rear of the site, such as the auditorium, require further consideration to benefit from views and the elevated nature of the spaces.

The intention for the undercroft at the rear to become more than a loading and service area is supported. However, in its current form the undercroft space is dark and limits passive surveillance. This requires interrogation to achieve the design team's ambition of maximising the potential of the rear of the site to become a space for the community. Locating stairs here may be considered to activate the space. The landscape design should aid in changing the nature of the space and to soften the experience.

Future proofing

Given there is some concern from stakeholders regarding spatial allowances, options for future proofing and enabling future extension should be explored. Making structural allowances now to add an additional storey in the future is a relatively simple and cost-effective exercise and should be considered.

Indigenous heritage

Given the importance of heritage for this project, we encourage to also engage with the indigenous heritage and narrative of the place, rather than only focussing its colonial history. It has the potential to inform an authentic understanding of site and response to the site. Principles of country may come to the surface that could inform the design early rather than applying cultural references late in the project.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

There may be both strategic and technical issues not raised in this letter that will require resolution.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this important project for the Borough of Queenscliffe. We would welcome the project back for a second review once the design has been developed.



Stefan Preuss
Associate Government Architect