Date of Issue: 25.10.12
Design Review Project 08-01

RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT:
The Parks Community Centre Redevelopment
This Design Review Panel session occurred on 04.10.12 and comprised of the following Panel members:

Peter Dungey (Chair)
Richard Hanslip,
Stuart Harrison,
Simon McPherson,
Greg Healey,

Endorsed by:

Benjamin Hewett
Head of Design Review

The team from the Integrated Design Commission wishes to thank the partner organisations who provided content, comments and suggestions for the Design Review Panel.

If there is any part of this report which the reader does not understand or which requires clarification. Please contact the Integrated Design Commission of South Australia.
Introduction +
Executive Summary

**Project description**

The Parks Community Centre was developed in the late 1970’s to accommodate a high school and a range of other community services. The infrastructure is now generally in poor condition and maintenance are cost prohibitive.

In May 2012 the Government announced a major redevelopment and re-purposing of the Centre, including changes to management and built form. Part of the funding for the Project will come from land sales for private sector housing and retail developments.

Three existing buildings, a childcare centre, a theatre complex and a sports and recreation complex are to be retained and upgraded, including a major extension to the recreation complex to house a new swimming pool. Sites are provided for a new Council funded library and commercial developments including a health centre.

A central green ‘plaza’ is proposed as the focus of the redevelopment. Car-parking is dispersed in various locations around the site.

**Key suggestions**

The early stage of development of the project and its urgency are acknowledged.

The following key comments and suggestions are offered for consideration:

- The approach of removing aging elements and building on the valued ‘bones’ of the Centre (trees, planning geometry, the built form of retained elements, community arts heritage, etc) is supported and should be further developed as a key strategy;

- The balance of commercial requirements, and its integration with context and site should be considered early in the design of the scheme; and

- Security is an issue for the community and the approach of opening up the site to vehicles, dispersing car parking, activating external spaces and creating clear sightlines is supported. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles should be referenced in the design of the Project.

- The layout and design of the public realm is important to inform building location and design. The current layout needs further development to establish a clearer access and movement structure for vehicles and pedestrians, with response to both site externalities and elements to be retained;

- The idea of an activated green plaza as the principal organising element is supported but further consideration of how it would be differentiated and defined is suggested. Also its visibility from Cowan and Trafford Streets should be considered;
Context

It is noted that the redevelopment of the pool was the initial focus of the brief. The decision to expand the scope of the brief and consider the site and wider context in redeveloping the pool is strongly supported.

Greater documentation of existing conditions will assist in understanding the decision-making regarding the extent of building demolition. Whilst the process of ‘design by subtraction’ is supported in principle, an appreciation and articulation of the history of the site, including the original master-planning intent, will be valuable in understanding proposals for its revitalisation.

Despite its current poor condition, the evolving community it serves value the Centre. It is suggested that the characteristics that have defined it in the past (and currently) be respected and strengthened.

These include:
- An emphasis on landscape and the public realm as reflected in its name, with;
- Buildings reading as pavilions in a park;
- The plan, geometry and forms of retained buildings;
- The many native trees; and
- The arts, particularly community arts programs, contributing to new components.

These characteristics and others that may emerge from closer examination of the historical and physical context will assist in forming guiding principles for ongoing development of the site.

Consideration and integration of the following is strongly recommended as part of current work:
- Proposed new residential development to the north, particularly on site movement patterns and at the interface and through the block; and
- Proposed use and possibility of future redevelopment of open land to the east.

Built form

Ideally the residential subdivision should be considered in tandem with the reconfiguration of the Centre to optimise access and movement patterns and this work be presented to the panel to enhance a holistic understanding. Although not strictly part of the Project under review, the relatively low density of residential accommodation proposed on the excised land to the north is questioned. The size of the land and its proximity to the Centre and public transport suggests higher densities could be achieved, in line with State population targets and in support of viable commercial tenancies on the Community Centre site.

It is suggested that new buildings be designed as ‘pavilions’ in a park setting to best integrate with existing. This should include the new swimming pool, noting the sharing of facilities can still be accommodated in buildings that have the appearance of pavilions.

It is suggested that further detail be provided regarding the commercial development proposed in order to understand the best potential for the greater site, including increased activation and optimise use.

The angling of buildings at 45 degrees to the suburban grid is a
distinctive feature of the Centre but also a factor in way-finding problems. Acknowledging that at this point the planning of new buildings has yet to be considered, departing from the established geometry has potential advantages and disadvantages. Exploration of these in the next phase of design is encouraged with a view to maintaining and enhancing character whilst improving legibility.

Public realm

The concept of a substantial green public space as the ‘heart’ of the Centre is supported, as is the intention that it form a reference point from which to navigate the complex. However, it is suggested that to achieve this the space needs to be made more obvious from the surrounding streets, possibly by connecting it to the site perimeter, creating strong axial approaches or incorporating prominent design elements. The playground and technologies proposed for the plaza are supported as important contributors to creating a lively, family oriented place.

The scale, size and proportion of this space should be carefully considered to ensure best functionality, use and maintenance.

A range of complementary smaller scale external spaces is also desirable for ‘breakout’ activities from adjoining buildings, community activities such as gardening, or just for quiet withdrawal and relaxation.

It seems likely that the large numbers of existing mature trees on the site reflect the aspirations that led to naming the complex ‘The Parks’ in the first place. It is suggested that they are now an essential part of the character of the site and as such locality should be mapped, retained and used as a key design generator.

The proponent is encouraged to explore opportunities for celebrating and promoting the strong community arts culture of the Parks through the design of the public realm and associated elements.

Acknowledging the early stage of project development, further detailed design of the public realm is anticipated, based on exploration of potential activities, character (including the balance between hard and soft landscapes), safety, amenity, and sustainability. Safety is a community concern and CPTED should be a key design consideration.

Access and inclusion

The proposed pedestrian focus is strongly supported, as is the intention to allow vehicle access through the site to encourage activation and increase surveillance (shared streets are supported). The relationship of public transport to the site is also worth considering. However, the large number of perimeter access points for vehicles is questioned.

The principle of dispersing car parking across the site is supported as a means of providing greater pedestrian movement and passive surveillance to the development.

Way-finding in the Centre is currently difficult and redressing this is a key design challenge. The proposed north-south spine between the theatre and recreation complexes is seen as having strong potential as an ordering element, possibly as a shared street with defined edges and shop fronts. However, its present kinked form potentially limits this occurring.

The intention for the plaza to act as a key point of orientation is supported but its minimal visibility from the perimeter of the site questioned. The rationale for pedestrian desire lines is not immediately apparent and there is insufficient information at this early stage to comment on the definition of routes and pathways. The manner in which architecture and landscape might contribute to way-finding has also yet to be addressed.

It is suggested that community groups be encouraged to contribute to the new Centre by making available and/or designing the smaller external spaces for their use.

Sustainability

Little Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) information was provided for this early review, apart from the intention to manage storm-water across the site and include green technologies in new buildings. Both of these are supported but should be further evidenced.

The comparison of the environmental benefits of adaptive re-use against cost and fitness for purpose in determining the extent of building removal is recommended.

The Panel encourages incorporation of ESD principles in ongoing development of the master plan, and in the design/refurbishment of the public realm and buildings. Sustainable transport options could also be investigated.

Summary

The Proponent is thanked for engaging in the Design Review Panel process. Exploration of the issues and opportunities detailed in this report is recommended to assist the Proponent in achieving an optimal design outcome for the Centre and the community it serves.
Project name
The Parks Community Centre Redevelopment

Lead architect
Grieve Gillett

Landscape architects
Tract

Project type
Master Plan

Project phase
Design Development

Location
2-46 Cowan St, Angle Park
South Australia

Client
Department for Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI)

Local authority
DPTI/City of Port Adelaide Enfield