

**Supplementary
Submission
No 36A**

INQUIRY INTO APARTMENT DESIGN STANDARDS

Organisation: Manningham Council

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Better Apartments in Neighbourhoods - Submission

September 2019

Better Apartments in Neighbourhoods Discussion Paper Response

September 2019

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has announced further potential changes to the planning rules for apartment developments. In August 2019, the Department invited comment on the Better Apartments in Neighbourhoods Discussion Paper 2019.

The Better Apartments in Neighbourhoods Discussion Paper 2019, proposes potential changes to the Better Apartment Design Standards and the Apartment Design Guidelines for Victoria.

The paper explores five policy aims for new apartment developments, including the need for:-

- Green space in common areas of buildings, which preferably include trees to provide shade and urban cooling, and landscaping that softens the street.
- High quality building facades made from robust, durable and attractive materials that complement surrounding buildings and provide visual interest.
- Protection from wind impacts on surrounding streets and open space, so the spaces are comfortable to use and likely to be used more often.
- Attractive, engaging streets that enhance the amenity, safety and walkability of the neighbourhood.
- Better managed construction impacts of building work on existing neighbourhoods.

Feedback on the discussion paper is due 27 September 2019.

This submission is prepared on behalf of Manningham Council.

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Managing change and growth in the residential areas of Manningham is a key issue facing Council. Council's Strategic land use framework plan provides key strategic directions for future land use planning and development. It identifies locations where specific land use outcomes will be supported and promoted. It also identifies potential "development opportunity areas" where significant land use change may be expected, as well as areas where land use constraints restrict future development.

The Manningham Planning Scheme identifies a need for a greater mix of housing in the form of medium and higher density residential developments. Higher density housing is encouraged in close proximity to activity centres and along major roads and transport routes.

The *Manningham Residential Strategy* (2012) and the *Manningham Residential Character Guidelines* (2012) are key policy documents that seek to direct and manage the level of change in a manner that will best serve the interests of the municipality in terms of housing needs, built form and environmental outcomes. These documents encourage a range of housing types that meet the changing needs of the community and promote high design standards.

GREEN SPACE

Proposed Outcome:

Consistent, high quality landscaping for all apartment developments

Landscaping

In Manningham, apartment development generally occurs along main road corridors, on the periphery or adjacent to commercial areas and within the Doncaster Hill Activity Centre zone. This is a result of clearly defined zoning and overlay controls which specify the preferred location of higher density development for the municipality.

The Design and Development Overlay controls clearly stipulate apartment typology within the Main Road sub-precinct and within sub-precinct A (where certain criteria can be met).

Within the Design and Development Overlay (residentially zoned land), buildings are generally setback a minimum of 6 metres from the frontage of the site. Balconies, terraces and verandahs are permitted to encroach into this setback up to 2 metres, resulting in a depth of 4 metres for landscaping across the width of the site. The DDO encourages landscaping around buildings to soften the built form. Furthermore, the DDO stipulates a minimum number of canopy trees within the front setback depending on the number of stories and encourages landscaping along side boundaries. Fencing must also be at least 50 per cent transparent.

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Within the Doncaster Hill area, setbacks vary from 2-5 metres at street level to create treed boulevards framed by podiums, consistent front setbacks and high quality landscaping opportunities along Doncaster, Williamsons and Tram Roads. These areas comprise a mix of hard and soft landscaping along with the provision of public art to maximise opportunities for landscaping in both the public and private realm.

For Manningham, the impact of planning scheme controls are clearly evident, with deep soil landscaping opportunities being provided for the majority of developments.

It should also be recognised that front, side and rear boundary setbacks are key contributors to the provision of landscaping on a development site. A 1 metre side boundary setback will not provide adequate space for the the planting of a canopy tree to soften the built form and minimise visual impacts to neighbouring properties. Appropriate setbacks, deep soil planting and landscaping are fundamental to the success of any development and this should be clearly reflected throughout the apartment standards.

Furthermore, the maintenance and upkeep of plants contained within planter boxes in private ownership to “green” a façade of a building continues to be problematic for many apartment developments.

Overall, Manningham Council supports changes to the standards to improve landscaping for developments.

Communal Open Space

It is acknowledged that communal open space provides landscaping opportunities for a development. In smaller developments however, the consequence of the provision of communal open space may result in land fenced off in the front, side or rear of a building, potentially at the expense of ground level secluded private open space or a potential influx of proposed rooftop decks. On smaller sites, roof top decks may cause other amenity impacts to adjacent properties such as added visual bulk and height due to screening requirements.

It is important to note that context of development is important and not all municipalities are the same. Sites located in residential areas may be located within close proximity to parks, walking tracks and the like. If the objective of communal open space is to provide for increased landscaping, then it is considered for smaller developments that this can be achieved by the Landscaping Standards. Additionally, larger balcony sizes could be provided for a development which include planter boxes for the additional provision of landscaping.

It appears that the definition of communal open space may be amended to indicate that communal open space can be either indoors or outdoors. These changes are suitable for larger scale developments where external podiums are provided along with indoor facilities however it is questionable whether communal open space is required for the smaller scale apartment buildings.

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Furthermore, communal open space requirements for smaller scale developments may result in increased owners corporation fees to residents in relation to the upkeep and maintenance of these areas.



5-7 Curlew Court, Doncaster – 30 dwellings
Communal open space area in front setback providing landscaping opportunities



1091 Doncaster Road, Doncaster East – 8-unit development
Communal open space in front setback providing landscaping opportunities

APPEARANCE OF THE BUILDING

Proposed Outcome:

Apartment buildings are attractive and built from durable materials, so they stand the test of time

The proposed changes are supported to ensure that buildings are constructed from durable materials that have the ability to stand the test of time. Manningham Council supports the idea for a design rationale to be submitted with an application. Material schedules are already requested as part of the application process. Whilst high quality materials can initially be proposed, changes post issuing of a planning permit often occur whereby materials are simplified or “cheapened” to minimise construction costs.

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What support and information do planners need about design quality and external materials to implement the proposed standard?

Not all Councils have in-house urban designers/architects who can provide advice and assist planners with identifying durable and quality materials. Additional support could be provided from the State to assist Local Government in these matters by:-

- Requiring developers to provide a “certified” materials board to ensure that the materials selected are quality materials and durable by a suitably qualified professional; or
- A materials Wikipedia set up to assist planners in identifying appropriate materials; or
- A requirement that a materials schedule is referred to an architectural panel for advice.

WIND IMPACTS

Proposed Outcome:

Apartment developments do not exacerbate windy conditions to public and private open spaces

Manningham Council supports the introduction of a new standard requiring wind assessments to be undertaken for apartments greater than 5 storeys. In Manningham, this information is generally requested for apartments in the Doncaster Hill area to minimise wind impacts on the occupants and within the public realm.

Wind assessments should be undertaken by a qualified professional at the conceptual stage of the design process, to avoid wind related problems and to enable design modifications to be undertaken prior to lodging an application. An assessment by a qualified professional clearly identifying whether the proposal complies with the standard and the objective should be submitted or a statement detailing further design changes to minimise wind impacts on the site and surrounds be submitted.

Application requirements for Doncaster Hill already require a wind tunnel assessments in accordance with the Doncaster Hill Urban Design requirements:-

Developers must submit a written expert assessment of the likely environmental wind effects of their proposal on its surroundings, address in the following:-

- *The comfort and safety of people in the area likely to be affected by the development;*
- *The likelihood of down drafts or wind gusts that would be uncomfortable or dangerous to pedestrians and/or destructive to street trees and landscaping;*
- *The effect that the development will have on existing wind conditions in the vicinity;*
- *The use of secondary building elements to attenuate existing and/or expected detrimental wind effects, and their compatibility with the building façade and streetscape.*

To further formalise this requirement in a Standard is seen as a positive across municipalities.

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STREET INTERFACE

Proposed Outcome:

Apartment developments are attractive at street level and contribute to the life of the neighbourhood

Manningham Council supports greater emphasis on improved building facades at ground level which contribute to the public realm.

Existing controls in Manningham assist with design outcomes that create attractive, active street frontages. Front fencing is required to be transparent and low scale and emphasis is placed on landscaping opportunities. It is acknowledged however that further work is required to better integrate site services into the design of buildings and minimise the impact to streetscapes.



6 Thiele Street, Doncaster – 50-unit development
Integrated services within landscaped front setback

Site Services

The proposed changes to the Site Services Standard are strongly supported, in particular:-

Meters, utility services and service cupboards should be designed as an integrated component of the façade.

Too often, these matters are an afterthought, which leads to compromised architectural/landscape outcomes.

Manningham Council strongly suggests that State Government liaise with all service providers to clearly establish their minimum requirements for all buildings to avoid the proliferation of blank meter boxes and other services along frontages which can severely visually impact on the public realm.

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Access

Manningham Council also supports proposed changes to the Access Standard however questions whether the wording... “no more than one single-width crossover should be provided for each dwelling fronting a street frontage” is appropriate in the context of apartments. Rather, the wording should be modified to require that the number of crossovers be minimised to further reduce the visual dominance of car parking access requirements for a proposal and to increase landscaping opportunities across the site.

Furthermore, it is considered that greater emphasis is also required to be placed on entry lobbies and “wait spaces” ensuring that apartment developments provide a reasonable sized lobby area with a clear and identifiable sense of address.

CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS

Proposed Outcome:

The impacts of apartment building construction are consistently managed with less disturbance on existing neighbourhoods

It is considered that requiring an applicant to describe how a site will be “managed prior to and during the construction period” prior to a decision being made on an application will result in generic statements that are of no real assistance to the planner assessing the application.

Most Council’s already require CMP’s as a permit condition for larger scale developments or for any other development where it is considered warranted ie: in court bowls for multi dwelling development. Furthermore, a CMP process involves other areas of expertise within Council ie: local laws or traffic engineering. Issues such as traffic management often involve lengthy negotiations with the relevant Council department/s and cannot at such an early stage be predetermined. Traffic management throughout the construction period plays a key role in minimising complaints from surrounding properties and these issues need to be addressed to ensure that minimal/if any impacts occur within existing streets ie: parking of contractor vehicles etc.....

Manningham Council is currently in the process of reviewing the entire CMP process, looking to standardise CMP requirements, with the overall aim to simplify required information and to fast track the internal referral process.

Conclusion

Overall the proposed changes are seen as a positive however it is also considered that further work is still required to improve the application of other relevant standards.