

07/11/2019

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Dear Mr Ovenden

Advice on Council's Planning Scheme Amendments

1 INTRODUCTION

As requested we have undertaken a review of Council's proposed Major Amendments to the City Plan 2014. Our review has focussed on the unique landscape and visual qualities of Currumbin, and includes specific consideration of Theme 1 (Building Height and Density) and Theme 2 (Built Form and Urban Design). To inform our review we have (in the following section) undertaken an analysis of the particular characteristics and visual qualities of Currumbin. At Section 3 below we identify key provisions currently in place to protect these characteristics and values and provide our comments on the adequacy of those provisions. At Section 4 we review the proposed amendments and provide our comments on whether they will assist with appropriate protection and maintenance of Currumbin's character and visual values.

2 VISUAL ANALYSIS OF CURRUMBIN

Currumbin is well known for its unique confluence of the coastline, Currumbin Creek, and vegetated hills and ridgelines. These natural landscape features collectively define the unique character and high levels of amenity of Currumbin, and contribute to unique imageability, making it one of the most attractive and memorable suburbs of the Gold Coast. It is of some note that photos of Currumbin feature as title images of the Strategic Framework (Section 3.8.2 – Landscape Character) and the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay Code of Council's Planning Scheme (refer Figure 1 and Figure 2 below).

These natural landscape features provide a dramatic and attractive setting for the built form of the area, which is generally modest, well integrated with the landscape, and characterised by a human scale and 'village feel'. The Landscape Character Study (LCS) prepared for Council in 2014¹ explains that the combination of strong landscape elements in Currumbin (the creek, forested ridgelines, the beach, dunes, and headlands) forms a distinctive landscape setting which is readily distinguishable from other parts of the Gold Coast.

Previous high rise constructions in Currumbin have illustrated how sensitive the local visual environment is to inappropriate building height and scale. This is reflected in the Building Height Study (BHS) prepared for Council in 2017², which rates the landscape character and scenic amenity of Currumbin as being most sensitive to building height, particularly as a consequence of the topography and landscape character of the area.

¹ Prepared by Cardno; Cardno Chenoweth; Cardno HRP; and Catherine Brouwer Landscape Architects.

² Prepared by Urbis.

The LCS has identified nine broad Landscape Character Types (LCTs) across the Gold Coast. Currumbin comprises three of these LCTs: Watercourse, Estuary Ocean; Coastal Headland and Beaches, Coastal Plains and Low Hills. The LCS makes the following relevant observations in relation to the Currumbin Beach Local Character Area (LCA)³:

- the Currumbin Beach LCA consist of a number of distinguishable character units including a major watercourse, surf beaches/calm beaches/dunes, low residential areas, elevated bushland residential areas , open space;
- the ocean (which is prominent at Currumbin) is a fundamental and unifying element in the character of the Gold Coast;
- views of the ocean and creeks are considered elements of importance;
- sandy surf beaches represent an iconic image and a major tourist attraction along the eastern edge of the Gold Coast;
- coastal headlands are focal points for views from the beach and as seen by swimmers and surfers, and give dimension to the long stretches of sand and surf;
- views of the northern sweep of coastline from Currumbin is considered a signature element;
- views to headlands from beaches are considered elements of importance;
- prominent headlands occur only at the southern sections of the Gold Coast coastline;
- views of forested hills, with distant higher mountains behind, locally prominent Currumbin hill, undulating topography and established vegetation in residential areas are signature elements of the Coastal Plains and Low Hills LCT;
- continuity of vegetation cover on undeveloped headlands are considered elements of importance and elements which reinforce character
- patches and bands of native vegetation where they reinforce the natural topography and provide relief from built form reinforce the local character of Coastal Plains and Low Hills LCT (this banding is discussed further below);
- landscape features and elements that form the particular character of the LCA are Currumbin Rock, Elephant Rock, Flat Rock and Currumbin hill as well as rows of vegetation and built environment and the strip of beach.

The character and visual values of Currumbin are described more specifically below. For our analysis we have focussed on a limited study area, being the part of Currumbin to the east of the Gold Coast Highway (refer Figure 3 below). This is a similar area of investigation as adopted by the BHS, and also in the Gold Coast Urban Heritage & Character Study prepared for Council in 1997⁴

The study area is defined by Currumbin Creek to the north, the beach/ocean edge to the east, and Kropp Park to the south. We have focussed on this area because we believe it is a part of Currumbin that would be affected by the proposed amendments, and because this area comprises the landscape features and visual values that define Currumbin more broadly.

³ The LCS identifies and describes a specific character area in Currumbin. This character area is different to the study area adopted for our analysis, but the observations from the LCS are equally relevant.

⁴ Prepared by Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle; Henshall Hansen Associates; Context; HJM; Staddon Consulting.



Figure 1 - Aerial view to Currumbin from the Strategic Framework. Photograph by City of Gold Coast. Extracted from Strategic Framework, section 3.8.2.



Figure 2 - View across Currumbin Creek to Currumbin Hill. Photograph by Remco Jansen. Extracted from page 1 of Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay Code.



Figure 3 - Study area for this review.

Our analysis of the study area effectively comprised mapping of various attributes, and field investigations. Figure 4 - Figure 10 below include maps of the study area. Figure 11 - Figure 18 are photos from the study area. Our analysis revealed the following about the character and visual values of the study area:

- 1 The combination of creek and vegetated ridgeline creates a recognisable visual break along the coastline. This visual break is of significance beyond the local area. The BHS recognises the significance of visual breaks across the city, particularly in providing definition of distinct urban neighbourhoods and protecting key views to the city's natural setting.
- 2 The topography and landform of the area varies from steeply sloping hillsides and forested ridgelines of Currumbin Hill to lowland and flat coastal beach (refer Figure 4). It is this variation in topography that simultaneously provides unique development opportunities in the area (including opportunities for expansive views), as well as development constraints that would ordinarily affect the scale and form of buildings in the study area. The ridgeline extends beyond the study area, continuing to the hinterland as one of the city's main topographical features.
- 3 The confluence of significant open spaces, including the vegetated open space across Currumbin Hill, the vegetated dunes, and the beach, ocean, and creek (refer Figure 5) collectively provide an attractive frame and setting for built form. Visual and physical access to these spaces is one of the main contributors to the high levels of amenity of the locality. Like topography, the open spaces provide unique opportunities for development in the area and would also ordinarily constrain the extent and scale of built form.
- 4 A number of these open spaces are defined by identifiable landscape features which substantially define and contribute to the character of the area (refer Figure 6). These include the rocky headlands along the beach, Currumbin Hill, and a unique layering or stratification of open spaces.
- 5 The area benefits from a well-defined structure (as shown on Figure 7 below), owing to the combination of well-defined edges, a hierarchy of routes through the area, a number of identifiable nodes, and the prominent

landmarks described above. This well-defined structure contributes to both legibility and the memorability of the area.

- 6 The area currently accommodates a diversity of land uses and built form (as shown on Figure 8). While there are some built form anomalies in the area, there is also some order resulting from the clustering of similar uses and forms. For example, there is recognisable consistency in building scale and form between Woodgee Street and Pacific Parade.
- 7 There are a number of high quality and important views from the study area (as shown on Figure 10 below). These include:
 - a) Views from the bridge over Currumbin Creek, and from the creek, towards the mouth of the creek, the headland, and Currumbin Hill (View A on Figure 10 and Figure 18);
 - b) Views from the headland near the mouth of Currumbin Creek, north and south along the coastline, and towards Currumbin and Currumbin Hill (View B on Figure 10 and Figure 15);
 - c) Views from the beach (numerous locations) along the beach and towards Currumbin and Currumbin Hill (View C on Figure 10 and Figure 12);
 - d) Views from the Elephant Rock, north and south along the coastline, and towards Currumbin and Currumbin Hill (View D on Figure 10 and Figure 13);
 - e) Views from the beach and Kropp Park along the beach and towards Currumbin and Currumbin Hill (View E on Figure 10 and Figure 17);

There are also high quality views from many of the elevated residential areas along the slopes of Currumbin Hill.

Regarding views from the local area, the LCS makes the following observations:

- elements of importance include views to headlands from the beaches and from one headland to another (and Landmark Views) and views to and from beaches, plus glimpses from surrounding streets and public open spaces as seen between buildings and vegetation;
- water has the highest scenic preference value and consistently receives a high rating;
- gently sloping to undulating topography, and even minor changes in elevation allow views to surrounding or nearby landscape and built form features.

It is clear that Currumbin generally and the study area more particularly benefits from an attractive and well-defined character, punctuated by a number of attractive landscape features and landmarks. The features and qualities warrant protection from development that may erode those features and values, for example: by obscuring views to the identified landscape features (including the banding of vegetation and skyline vegetation); built form that was incompatible with the prevailing scale, particularly along the esplanade interface; or development that resulted in degradation of landscape features, such as removal of skyline vegetation or substantial modification of topography.

The characteristics identified above combine to create what we believe are five discrete character units through the study area. These are identified and described on Figure 9. Of particular note, Unit C, which includes the Neighbourhood Centre, presents a unique and clear character comprising an obvious pattern of built form along Pacific Parade, then a clear band of vegetation on the steep slopes behind, then another band of low rise built form, then another band of vegetation in the form of skyline vegetation along the local ridges and Currumbin Hill (illustrated in Figure 19). This unique pattern of development is most apparent from the beach and ocean, but is also observable from viewpoints along Pacific Parade.

Unit C is also characterised by the appealing human-scale built form along Pacific Parade, which is predominantly 2-3 storeys and 9-12 metres high. This built form reflects a uniquely modest scale (historically limited by topography and vegetation) and a tight arrangement of built form (owing to the lot configuration and the sinuous alignment of Pacific Parade).

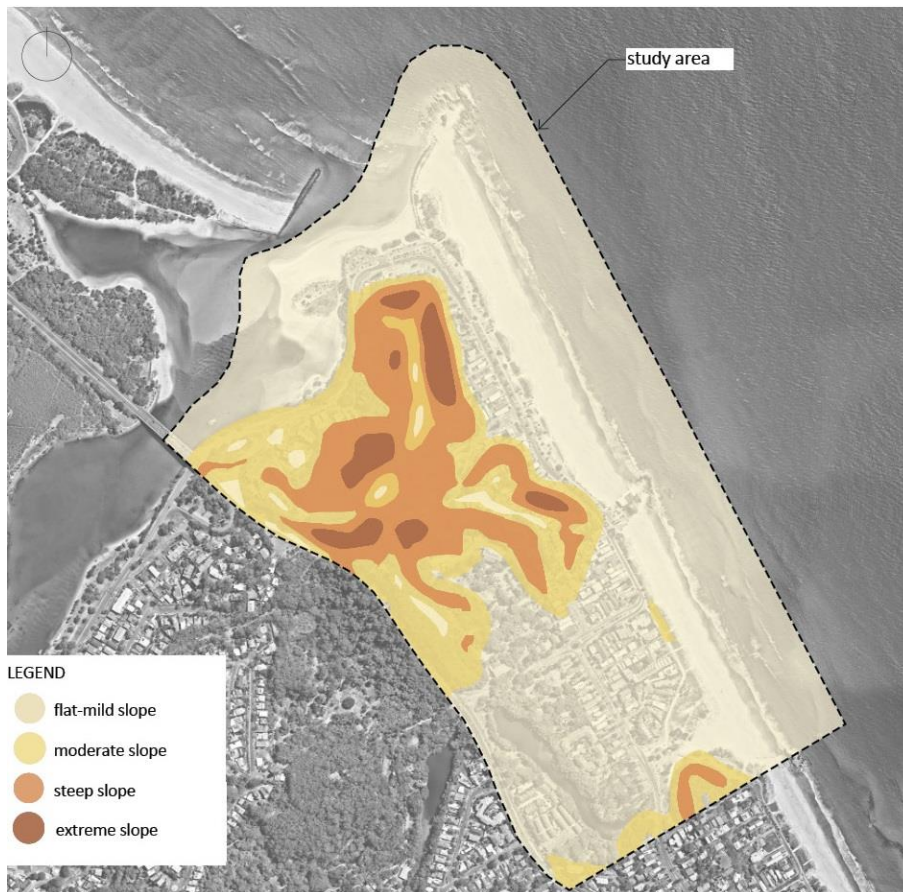


Figure 4 - Slope

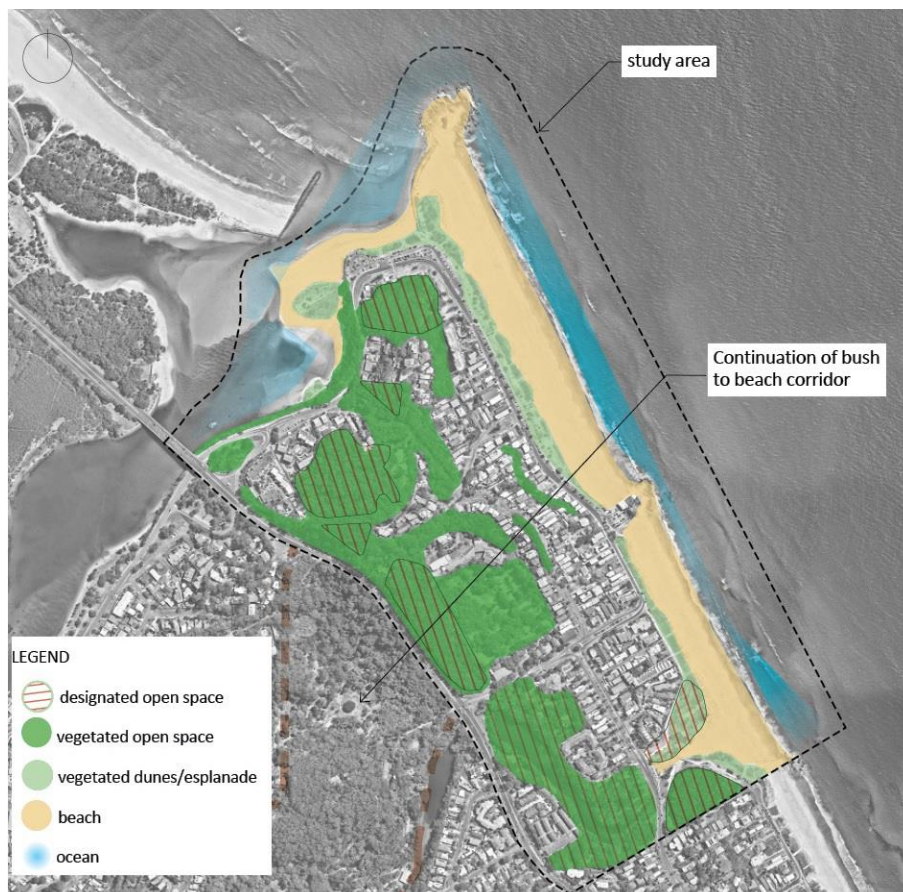


Figure 5 - Prominent open spaces.

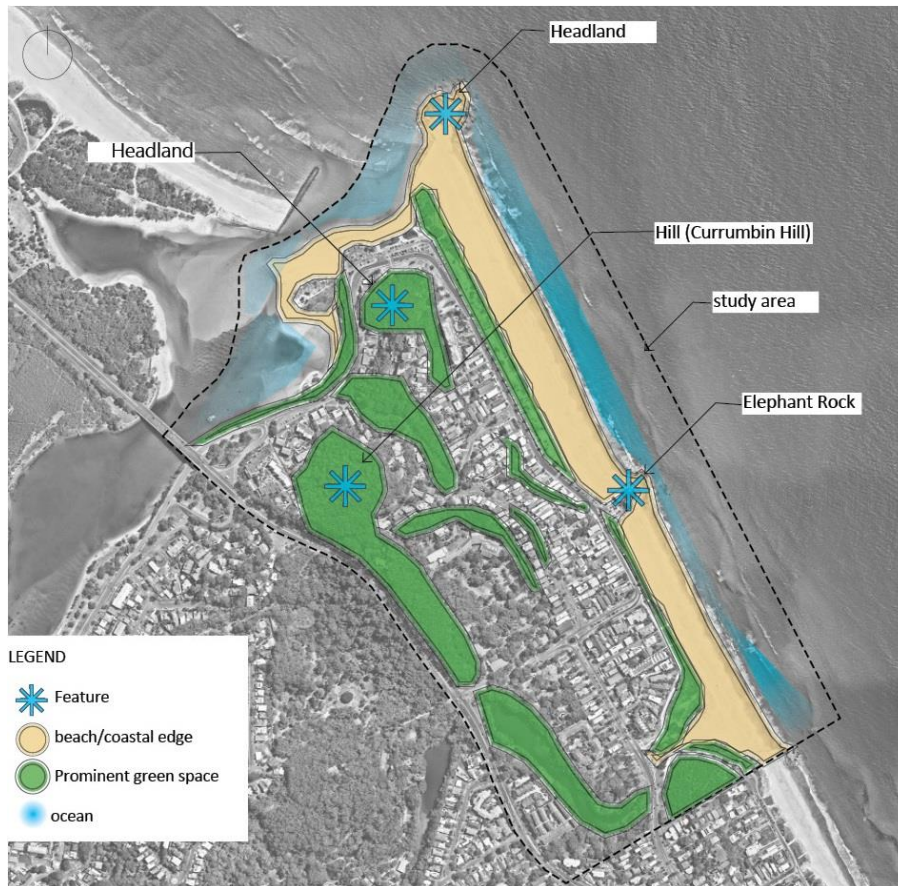


Figure 6 - Key landscape features.

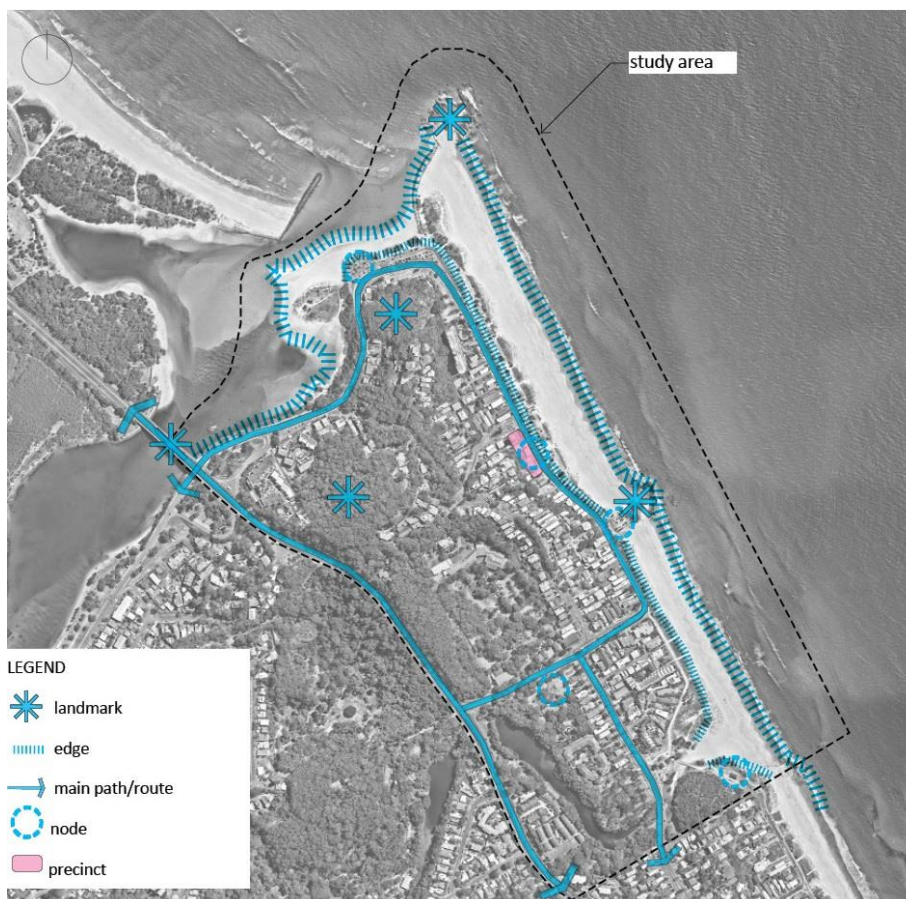


Figure 7 - Main structural elements.

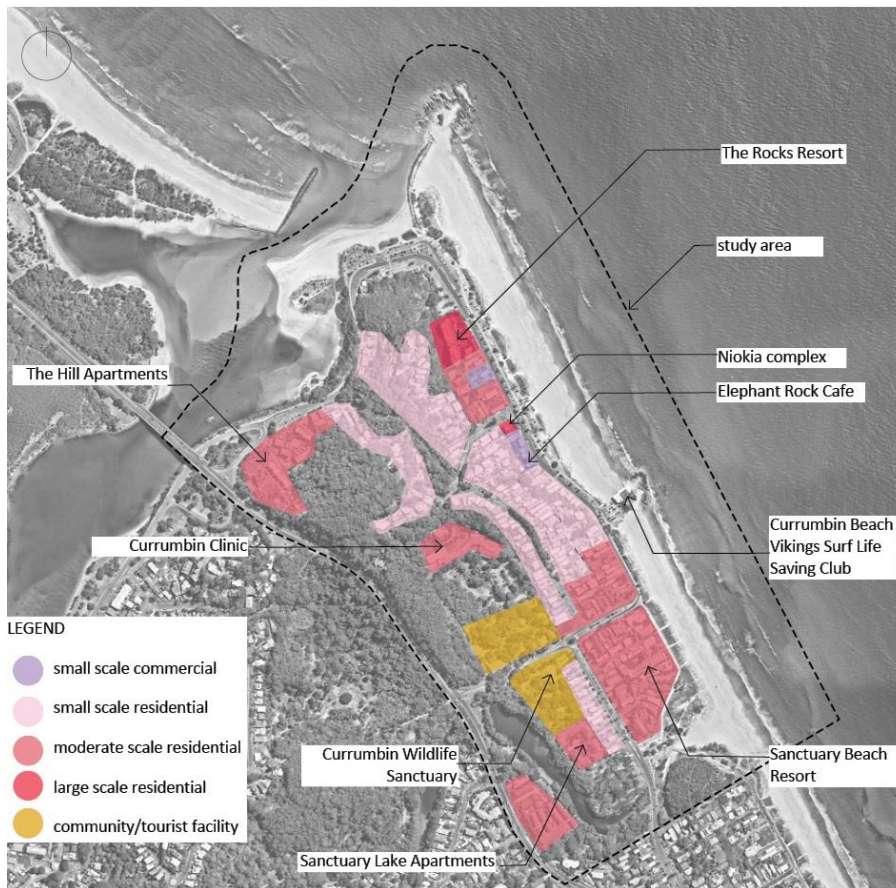


Figure 8 - Built form.

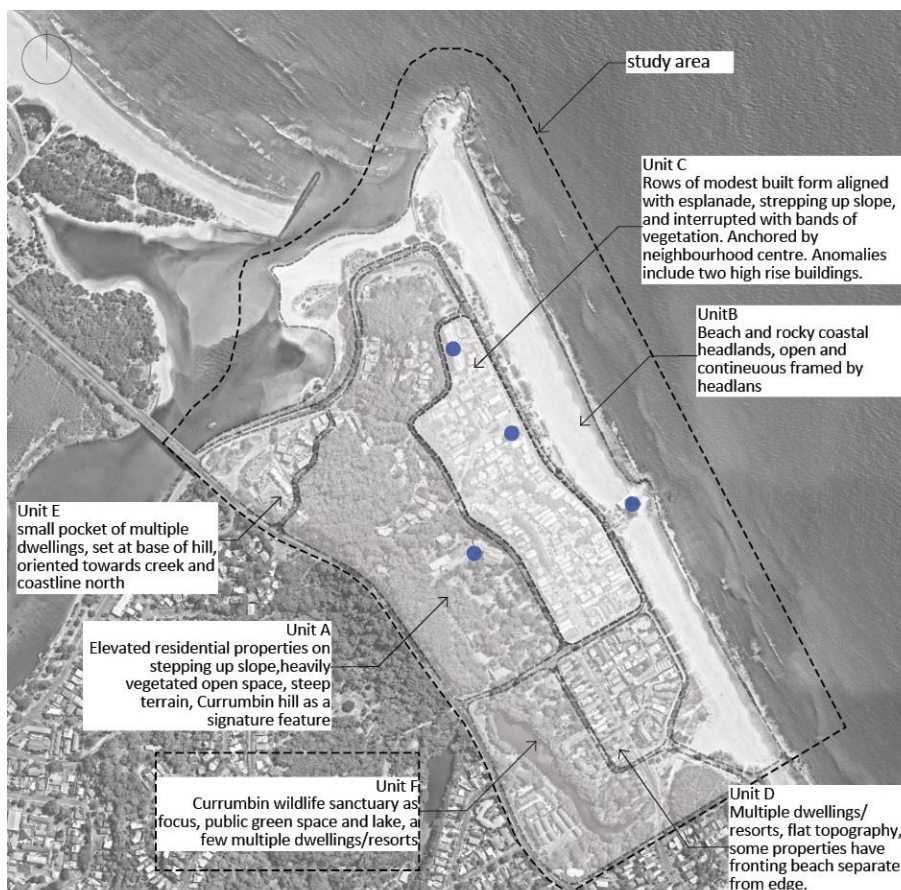


Figure 9 - Character units within study area.

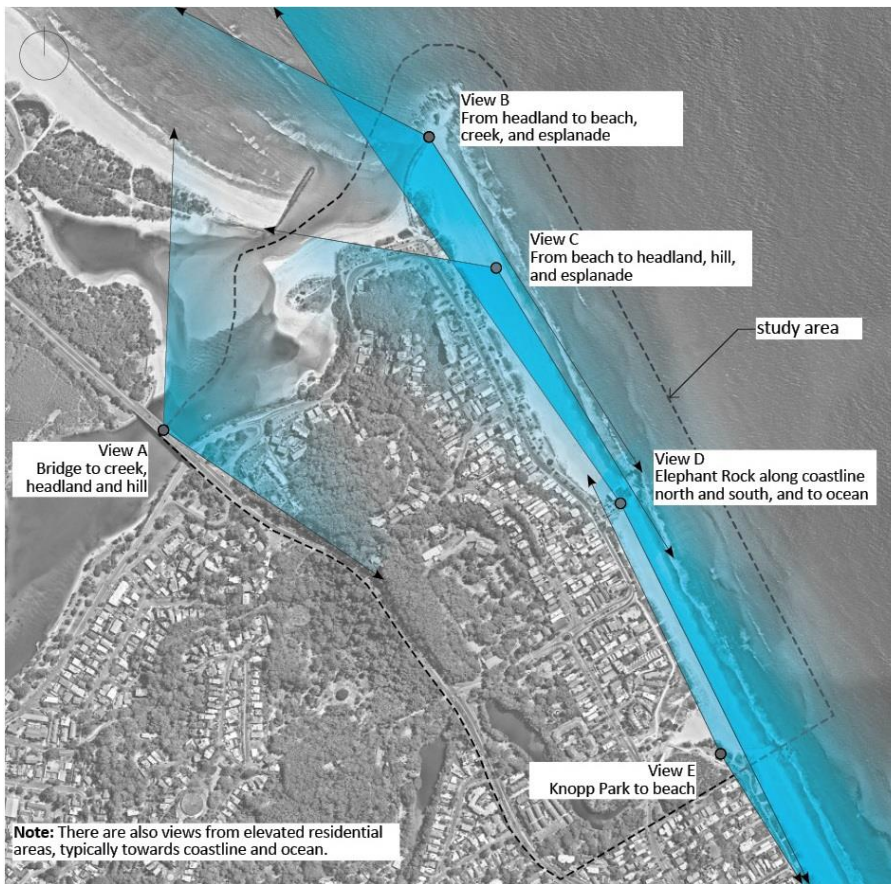


Figure 10 - Key views from study area.



Figure 11 - Aerial view to Currumbin (and character Unit C identified in the analysis).



Figure 12 - View from beach to neighbourhood centre along Pacific Parade, and built form behind.



Figure 13 - View from Elephant Rock lookout towards Character Unit C.



Figure 14 - View south along Pacific Parade, past neighbourhood centre,



Figure 15 - View from beach (near headland) north along coastline.



Figure 16 - View south from beach along coastline.



Figure 17 View from beach near Kropp Park, towards Currumbin.



Figure 18 - View from bridge over Currumbin Creek towards headland and Currumbin Hill



Figure 19 - Diagram illustrating banding of built form and vegetation through Character Unit C.

3 CURRENT PLANNING SCHEME CONTROLS PROTECTING CHARACTER AND VISUAL VALUES

3.1 From the Current Planning Scheme

Under the current Planning Scheme, the study area is:

- within the Suburban Neighbourhood designation on Strategic Framework Map SFM2 – Settlement Pattern;
- identified as part of a Landscape Character Area on Strategic Framework Map SFM4 – Greenspace Network (one of only nine such designated areas across the city);
- at the confluence on two ‘critical corridors’ identified on Strategic Framework Map SFM4 – Greenspace Network (the Currumbin to Currumbin Valley corridor, and the Currumbin to Cobaki Broadwater corridor);
- comprised of land within the Open Space zone, the Conservation Zone, the Major Tourism Zone (Major Tourism Wildlife Park Precinct), the Low Density Residential Zone, the Medium Density Residential zone, and the Neighbourhood Centre zone; and
- almost entirely within affected by the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay – Currumbin and Burleigh are the only areas affected by this overlay.

The following section identifies provisions from the Strategic Framework and relevant Zone and Overlay Codes which are concerned with maintaining and protecting character and visual values of the study area.

From the Strategic Framework:

- “...well designed buildings and places will continue to reinforce local identity and sense of place, and provide places that are attractive, functional, safe and accessible...”⁵
- “In suburban neighbourhoods and townships, better opportunities for home businesses and low intensity development will support residents’ lifestyles, changing housing needs and affordability. These changes will be in keeping with the existing scale, intensity, amenity and character of local areas, in particular their desired low-rise appearance.”⁶
- “The city’s green space network will continue to provide for the nature conservation, scenic amenity and recreation needs of the city across private and public land.”⁷
- “Housing is provided in a form, height and scale consistent with the function, amenity and desired future character of local areas and centres...”⁸
- “Varied building height and form throughout the city reinforces local identity, creates a sense of place...”⁹
- “Suburban neighbourhood areas are maintained as low-intensity, low-rise residential environments that retain and enhance local character and amenity.”¹⁰
- “Suburban neighbourhoods are places for low intensity, low-rise, predominantly detached housing that retains and enhances local character and amenity by maintaining existing scale, building height and intensity despite its proximity to public transport or other services. They are less clustered and characterised by a feeling of openness, with buildings positioned in a generous landscaped setting.”¹¹
- “Building height in neighbourhood centres complements the function and desired future appearance of its surrounding neighbourhood.”¹²
- “The design, location and operation of neighbourhood centres ensures they:... (e) are not dominated by supermarkets or bulky and large built form;... (g) maintain the reasonable amenity expectations of nearby

⁵ Pg3, 3.2.1 of the Strategic Framework.

⁶ Pg11, 3.2.2 of the Strategic Framework.

⁷ Pg11, 3.2.2 of the Strategic Framework.

⁸ 3.3.1(3) of the Strategic Framework.

⁹ 3.3.1(5) of the Strategic Framework.

¹⁰ 3.3.1(11) of the Strategic Framework.

¹¹ 3.3.3.1(11) of the Strategic Framework.

¹² 3.4.5.1(5) of the Strategic Framework.

residents, having regard to local character, built form and residential amenity in terms of noise, parking and other associated trading impacts.”¹³

- “A comprehensive green space network of natural landscape areas is enhanced, maintained and protected... enhances the city’s powerful image of green, gold and blue.”¹⁴
- “The diverse green space network provides for... scenic amenity...”¹⁵
- “Development does not erode, and, wherever practicable, contributes to, the expansion of the extent, function and values of the green space network.”¹⁶
- “Areas of landscape character that contribute to the city’s unique landscape and built form are identified and protected.”¹⁷
- “Important elements of urban character and community significance are protected and enhanced to strengthen the sense of identity in local areas and the city.”¹⁸
- “The distinctive rural, semirural and natural character of the city’s river valleys, hinterland settlements, extensive natural landscape areas, rural production areas and rural residential areas provide a clear hard edge to, and natural backdrop setting for, the city’s urban area.”¹⁹
- “The city’s natural, non-urbanised appearance is protected for its contribution to the city’s outstanding scenic amenity, image and role as a major tourist destination.

The city’s natural features include:

- (a) ocean beaches, dunal systems and natural foreshore areas;
- (b) major and minor coastal vegetated headlands, hills and rocky outcrops;
- ...
- (f) rivers and creeks)”²⁰

- “Within the coastal strip, natural elements such as beaches, adjoining parkland, rocky outcrops, vegetated headlands, natural estuarine landscapes and coastal vegetation are retained and enhanced.”²¹
- “Natural landscape areas are protected for their contribution to the city’s scenic amenity...”²²
- “The landscape significance of the major ridgelines and minor ridgelines, including... Currumbin Hill, characterised by their steep slopes and native vegetation cover, is protected by retaining and enhancing vegetation cover where possible; restricting building heights; and ensuring building designs preserve the existing natural landform and complement the vegetated hillscape character.”²³
- “Development is cognisant of the function and desired future appearance of each individual area and reinforces or reinterprets the character of that area.”²⁴

¹³ 3.4.5.1(8) of the Strategic Framework.

¹⁴ 3.7.1(1) of the Strategic Framework.

¹⁵ 3.7.3.1(1) of the Strategic Framework.

¹⁶ 3.7.3.1(9) of the Strategic Framework.

¹⁷ 3.8.1(1) of the Strategic Framework.

¹⁸ 3.8.1(2) of the Strategic Framework.

¹⁹ 3.8.2.1(1) of the Strategic Framework.

²⁰ 3.8.2.1(2) of the Strategic Framework.

²¹ 3.8.2.1(4) of the Strategic Framework.

²² 3.8.2.1(6) of the Strategic Framework.

²³ 3.8.2.1(6) of the Strategic Framework.

²⁴ 3.8.3.1(1) of the Strategic Framework.

From the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay Code:

- “The purpose of the Ridges and significant hills protection overlay code is to regulate development to ensure the protection, maintenance and enhancement of the natural and scenic values of identified ridges and significant hills within the city.”²⁵
- “The landscape significance of the major ridgelines and minor ridgelines, including Burleigh Ridge and Currumbin Hill are characterised by their steep slopes and native vegetation cover, is protected by retaining and enhancing vegetation cover where possible and ensuring building designs preserve the existing natural landform and complement the vegetated hillscape character.”²⁶
- “Site cover is controlled to
 - (a) reduce dominance of buildings and structures;
 - (b) protect scenic and amenity values; and
 - (c) maintain existing vegetation cover.”²⁷

The corresponding acceptable outcomes contemplate site cover of 40%, except in the Neighbourhood Centre Zone where 60% is contemplated. The figures are generally lower than the acceptable outcomes otherwise set out in the Zone Codes.

- The building design:
 - (a) minimises visual impact and prevents buildings from dominating the natural landscape;
 - (b) is compatible with the natural characteristics of the area; and
 - (c) avoids skyline intrusion.”²⁸

No acceptable outcome is provided.

- “Buildings are sited to minimise the impact on the natural landscape and topographical features and to avoid any unnecessary removal of vegetation.”²⁹
No acceptable outcome is provided.

From the Neighbourhood Centre Zone Code:

- “Housing is provided at a form, scale and intensity that is appropriate for the zone and each particular locality it is in where the following outcomes are satisfied:

...
 - (v) whether intended outcomes for building form/city form and desirable building height patterns are negatively impacted, including the likelihood of undesirable local development patterns to arise if the cumulative effects of the development are considered;
 - (vi) retention of important elements of neighbourhood character and amenity, and cultural heritage;
 - (vii) whether adjoining residential amenity is unreasonably impacted;
 - (viii) achievement of a high quality urban design through highly functional, accessible, attractive, memorable and sustainable buildings and public spaces...”³⁰
- “Built form –
 - (i) is of a height and density that complements its surrounding neighbourhood;

²⁵ 8.2.15.2(1) of the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay Code.

²⁶ 8.2.15.2(2)(a) of the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay Code.

²⁷ PO1 of the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay Code.

²⁸ PO3 of the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay Code.

²⁹ PO4 of the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay Code.

³⁰ 6.2.5.2(2)(b) of the Neighbourhood Centre Zone Code.

...

(vii) is not dominated by supermarkets or bulky and large built form.”³¹

- “Development is of a height that:
 - (a) promotes the intended character of the zone; and
 - (b) does not impact on the amenity of adjoining uses.”³²

The corresponding acceptable outcomes refers to the building height overlay map, which for the neighbourhood centre area in the study area, contemplates buildings to a height of 3 storeys and 15 metres.

From the Low Density Residential Zone Code:

- “Land uses –
 - (i) consist of a range of low intensity, low rise, predominantly detached housing that retains and enhances local character and amenity by maintaining existing scale, building height and intensity despite its proximity to public transport or other services...”³³
- “Character consists of –
 - (i) low intensity, locally serviced suburban neighbourhoods that offer a high level of amenity and a sense of openness, with buildings that present well to the street and are set amongst generous landscaping...”³⁴
- “Built form –
 - (i) is low rise and blends with local character and amenity;
 - ...
 - (iv) maintains a medium site cover to provide adequate area for private open space and landscaping.”³⁵
- “Building height and structure height is low rise.”³⁶

The corresponding acceptable outcomes contemplates building height that does not exceed 2 (and partial 3) storeys and 9 metres.

From the Medium Density Residential Zone Code:

- “Housing is provided at a form, scale and intensity that is appropriate for the zone and each particular locality it is in where the following outcomes are satisfied:
 - ...
 - (v) whether intended outcomes for building form/city form and desirable building height patterns are negatively impacted, including the likelihood of undesirable local development patterns to arise if the cumulative effects of the development are considered;
 - (vi) retention of important elements of neighbourhood character and amenity, and cultural heritage;
 - (vii) whether adjoining residential amenity is unreasonably impacted;
 - (viii) achievement of a high quality urban design through highly functional, accessible, attractive, memorable and sustainable buildings and public spaces;...”³⁷
- “Character consists of –

³¹ 6.2.5.2(2)(d) of the Neighbourhood Centre Zone Code.

³² PO3 of the Neighbourhood Centre Zone Code.

³³ 6.2.1.2(2)(a) of the Low Density Residential Zone Code.

³⁴ 6.2.1.2(2)(b) of the Low Density Residential Zone Code.

³⁵ 6.2.1.2(2)(c) of the Low Density Residential Zone Code.

³⁶ PO3 of the Low Density Residential Zone Code.

³⁷ 6.2.2.2(b) of the Medium Density Residential Zone Code.

(i) urban neighbourhoods that vary from pockets of detached housing on smaller lots to medium or higher intensity places containing medium-rise buildings;...”³⁸

- “Built form (excluding Dwelling houses on small lots) –

(i) has a building height that does not exceed that indicated on the Building height overlay map;

...

(v) has varying site cover to reduce building dominance and provide areas for landscaping.”³⁹

The building height overlay map identifies building height of 3 storeys and 15 metres for land in the study area that is within the Medium Density Residential Zone.

- Built form for Dwelling houses on small lots –

(i) has a building height that does not exceed that indicated on the Building height overlay map;

...

(iii) visually integrates with the character of the locality;

...”⁴⁰

- “Building height and structure height does not exceed that shown on the Building height overlay map...”⁴¹

No acceptable outcome is provided.

3.2 Observations from the Building Height Study

Although not a statutory document, it is useful for this exercise to also consider some of the principles and guidance set out in the BHS, particularly to see the extent to which it aligns with the current planning scheme provisions.

A key principle emerging from the BHS is to maintain the visual prominence of green elements in framing distinct areas of the city and urban neighbourhoods, particularly by ensuring building heights at the foothill of hillsides and ridgelines do not exceed tree height. Another key principle is to maintain key visual breaks in the urban form, as defined by significant natural features such as ridgelines, and creeks, by avoiding building height within them.

Specific guidance arising from the BHS included recommendations to:

- establish low building heights within the foothills of ridges and headlands;
- keeping building heights along view corridors below views to ridge-lines;
- maintain low building heights in key visual breaks in the urban form;
- step building heights down towards headlands to ensure they are visible from distant viewpoints;
- maintain openness along long linear view lines within lowlands, coastal plains, and low hills to articulate building height transitions between distinct neighbourhoods;
- ensure building heights do not impede existing key strategic views from coastal headlands back to the hinterland and ridgelines;
- ensure no new buildings meet or breach the Currumbin ridgelines or coastal headlands;
- preserve citywide strategic view corridors to and from coastal headlands.

The BHS recommended no changes to building heights in Currumbin and notes that the existing tall building on the beach is an anomaly and should not set a precedent for building height in the area.

Ultimately, for the study area, the BHS generally reinforces provisions relating to character and visual values that are set out in the Planning Scheme, and sets out some more specific principles and guidance in relation to views.

³⁸ 6.2.2.2(c) of the Medium Density Residential Zone Code.

³⁹ 6.2.2.2(d) of the Medium Density Residential Zone Code.

⁴⁰ 6.2.2.2(e) of the Medium Density Residential Zone Code.

⁴¹ PO3) of the Medium Density Residential Zone Code.

3.3 Summary

For the reasons set out in Section 2 above, it is clear that Currumbin is a particularly attractive part of the Gold Coast, owing to the confluence of prominent and appealing landscape features (the creek, headland, beach, Currumbin Hill, and vegetated slopes). The unique character and important visual qualities of Currumbin are recognised in a number of recent studies, including the LCS, and reflected in the planning scheme, where it is identified as one of only nine Landscape Character Areas across the city, and one of only two areas that are explicitly protected by the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay.

Throughout the current planning scheme there is an abundance of higher level provisions (those in the Strategic Framework and well as overall outcomes of Zone Codes) which aim to protect the character and visual values of local areas and of the city generally. These higher order provisions are generally reinforced by the BHS. While many of these provisions are not specific to any locality, some (particularly those in the Strategic Framework) are particularly applicable to Currumbin and the study area.

Notably, the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay Code has the effect of reducing acceptable outcomes for site cover in the zones throughout the study area, but has no effect on building height limits, meaning the acceptable outcomes for building height are those expressed in the relevant zone codes. Of particular note this means that, within the study area, the acceptable outcomes for building height remains at 3 storeys and 15 metres within the Neighbourhood Centre Zone and the Medium Density Residential Zone. The BHS recommended no changes to these building heights

We are concerned that, given the particular characteristics and visual qualities of the study area, realisation of these building heights would threaten the achievement of these higher order benchmarks (i.e. effective protection of landscape character and values). Taking Character Area C as a focus, development along the Pacific Parade and on the slopes behind could be appropriate at 3 storeys, but if built form exceeded 12 metres above ground it is possible that the dramatic topography and the unique banding of vegetation across those slopes would be obscured. This scenario is diagrammatically illustrated in Figure 20 and Figure 21 below.

Built form above 12 metres could also erode the relatively consistent and attractive human-scale of development fronting Pacific Parade. We note as well that there are few provisions (lower order or higher order) that would effectively control building articulation and modulation to ensure that built form along Pacific Parade reflected the modest scale and tight arrangement of built form prevailing through this part of the study area.

Having reviewed the recent development application made for 780 Pacific Parade (where Council Officers recommended approval, but Council ultimately refused), we are also concerned that effective controls may not be in place to limit the extent to which the topography of the local area (which is an important part of the landscape character) would be excessively modified, that visually significant vegetation could be removed, and that a built form that effectively presents 5 storeys to Pacific Parade could be achieved. This outcome is diagrammatically illustrated in Figure 22 below.

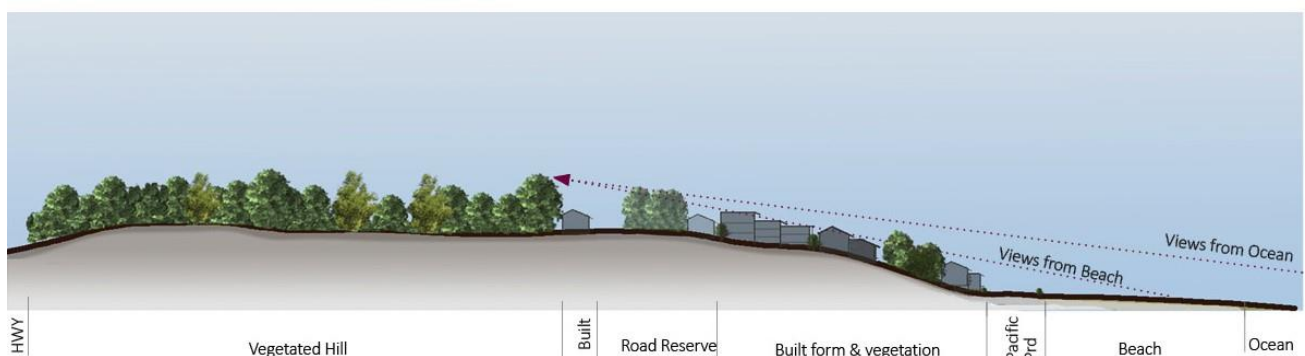


Figure 20 - Transect through Character Area C showing built form along Pacific Parade to 9 metres. Views from the beach take in the banding of built form and vegetation up the slope.

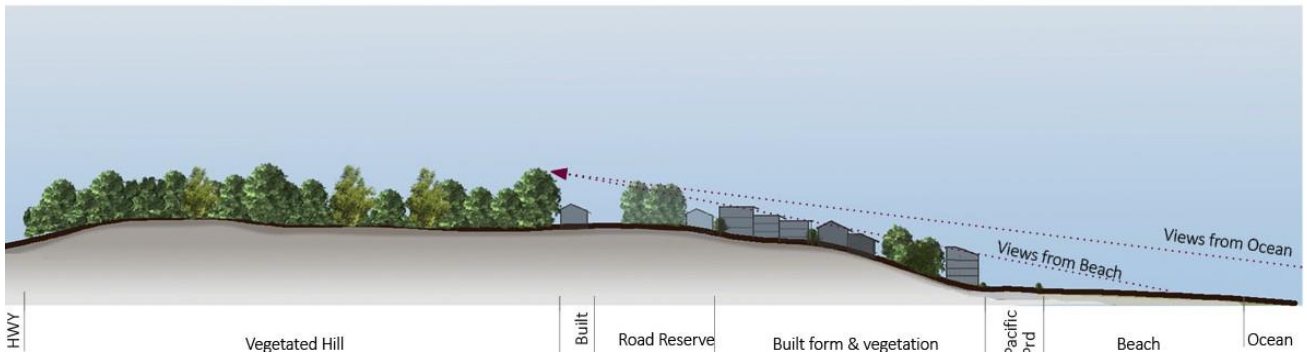


Figure 21 - Transect through Character Area C showing built form along Pacific Parade to 12 metres. Views from the beach to the banding of built form and vegetation up the slope would be obstructed.

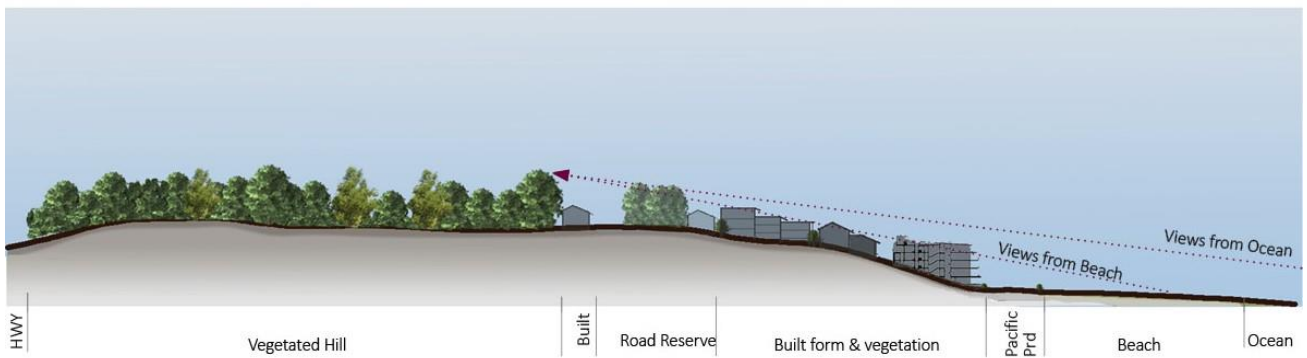


Figure 22 - Transect through Character Area C showing built form along Pacific Parade similar to proposal for 780 Pacific Parade. Vegetation behind the lower level built form may be removed and views from the beach to the banding of built form and vegetation up the slope would be obstructed.

4 THE EFFECT OF PROPOSED PLANNING SCHEME AMENDMENTS

The parts of the proposed amendments that are of particular relevance of concerns about character and visual values are Theme 1 (Building Height and Density) and Theme 2 (Built Form and Urban Design). Key aspects of these changes are identified below.

4.1 Theme 1 - Building Height and Density

Of particular relevance, it is proposed that:

- 1 Building heights across parts of the city will be redefined. Of note, within the study area, it is proposed that building height limits that are currently 15 metres be reduced to 12 metres.
- 2 Building heights will be defined in metres only, not storeys.
- 3 A new Low-Medium Density Residential zone will be created. Most of the land in the study area currently zoned Medium Density Residential would be changed to be zoned Low-Medium Density Residential.

We note as well that references to the building height overlay map have been changed, notably:

- 1 the existing Low Density Residential Zone Code does not make reference to the overlay map, while the amended Low Density Residential Zone Code refers to it at the overall outcome level;
- 2 the new Low-Medium Density Residential Zone Code makes reference to the overlay map at the overall outcome and performance outcome levels;
- 3 the existing Medium Density Residential Zone Code makes reference to the overlay map at the overall outcome and performance outcome levels, as does the amended Medium Density Residential Zone Code refers to it at the overall outcome and performance outcome levels;
- 4 the existing Neighbourhood Centre Zone Code makes reference to the overlay map at the acceptable outcome level, while the amended Neighbourhood Centre Zone Code refers to it at the overall outcome and performance outcome levels.

Referencing the overlay map at the overlay and performance outcome levels is a positive outcome in so far as it provides greater assurance that height limits will be adhered to.

The reduction in building heights through the study area (from 15 metres to 12 metres) is also a positive outcome that will assist with achieving an appropriate scale of built form, and with maintaining views to key landscape features. This would especially be the case when a development application was informed by a Site Context and Urban Design report (discussed in Section 4.2 below). It is expected that preparation of such a report would further refine the considerations of appropriate building height on a site-by-site basis.

We are concerned however that defining building heights in metres only (not storeys) could be detrimental to the character of the study area. Specifically, a 12 metre high building could feasibly be designed and expressed as a 4 storey building. A 4 storey building, particularly one that was prominent or of substantial scale, may not be appropriately compatible with the 1-3 storey, modest built form that characterises parts of the study area, particularly Character Area C and particularly the Pacific Parade streetscape.

4.2 Theme 2 - Built Form and Urban Design

Of particular relevance, it is proposed that:

- 1 Six key design principles have been introduced into the Strategic framework that require all future development to be responsive, connected, engaged, sub-tropical, attractive and adaptable.
- 2 A new Site Context and Urban Design Policy, strengthening the setbacks and site cover provisions in City Plan's residential zones and the light rail urban renewal overlay area.
- 3 Zone codes will be updated to reflect the key design principles, and clarify desired built form and urban design outcomes.

The requirement for the provision of a Site Context and Urban Design Report, and the provision of a supporting policy is considered a positive change. If and when such reports are properly prepared they will be likely to contribute to more considered and responsive design outcomes, including outcomes that assist with the protection of important character and visual values.

The main concern we have about the policy is whether or not it is adequately 'triggered'. We note that Table 1 of the policy states that a SC&UD report *should* be prepared when certain benchmarks of certain codes are applicable. Where these benchmarks appear, the reference to the SC&UD report is raised only as a Note (rather than as part of a performance outcome), and only in terms of such a report being Council's *preferred method* to addressing the benchmark.

We believe that for sensitive character areas (such as the study area, and certainly for land affected by the Ridges and Significant Hills Protection Overlay Code, the preparation of an SC&UD report should be a requirement, not simply a preferred method that should be prepared.

We also note that the benchmarks wherein the SC&UD policy is called up generally relate to context, setbacks, and site cover. It is unclear to us why the policy is not also referenced in relation to benchmarks relating to building height.

I trust the above assists with your submission to Council. Please let me know if you require anything further.

Regards

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