

Strategy, Planning & Regulatory Unit

Partial Urban Design Assessment

to support s.95 assessment

Date: 19 December 2024 – Final
From: Ekin Sakin, Principal advisor urban design
To: Scott Blair, Senior Planner

RMA/2024/2460 390-408 Prestons Road

Scope

I was asked by senior planner Scott Blair to provide comment on the adverse effects of the application for the establishment of a Mitre 10 and five other commercial buildings at 390-408 Prestons Road. This assessment is to support the planner's s.95 assessment hence it does not refer to any positive effects which, in the planning context, would be relevant to the s.104 assessment following the s.95 assessment.

The matters I am asked to comment on are as follows. It is noted that there is no suburban master plan for this commercial development area and the site is not within or contain a site of Ngāi Tahu Cultural Significance.

Consider whether:

A. *Development does not recognise the centre's role, context, and character including any natural heritage or cultural assets.*

In addition, consider the policy outcome: "Local Centres, maintain a low-rise moderate scale of built form to respect and integrate with their suburban residential context."

- B. *Undermines or provides insufficient engagement with adjacent streets, lanes or public spaces.*
- C. *Undermines or provides insufficient vibrancy and attractiveness of adjacent streets, lanes or public spaces.*
- D. *Insufficient recognition of nearby buildings in respect of their exterior design, architectural form, scale and detailing in subject building design.*
- E. *Proposed buildings do not have a human scale or bulk appropriate to its context having regard to the functional requirements of the activity for which the building is designed.*
- F. *The overall design is not safe in terms of creating opportunities for criminal activity.*
- G. *Insufficient landscaping or 'other means' are provided for shade or weather protection.*
- H. *In sufficient provision has been made for legible and efficient access for all transport users.*

Urban design assessment

Policy

Policy outcome: Local Centres, maintain a low-rise moderate scale of built form to respect and integrate with their suburban residential context.

- Is 10m as proposed low rise in this context?
- Is the scale as it faces the surrounding areas moderate in this context?

Provided that the development occurs as stated, the proposal with the six proposed buildings on the application site presents as a campus, rather than a single building from most viewing angles, except from the south.

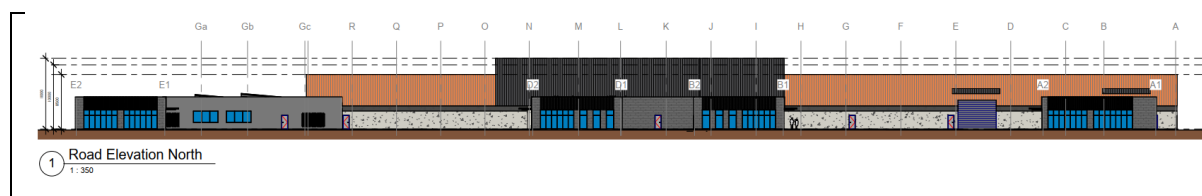
The five buildings proposed along Prestons Road range between 343m² and 967m² in floor area and are single storey. I consider these to be low height, moderate scale buildings in context of their large site and the large area of the commercial zone. The sixth building is the Mitre 10 building which is a low height, large scale building.

If the Mitre 10 building were on its own, I could not conclude that it integrated into its small scale and small grain suburban context.

However, considered as a campus with the accompanying five buildings, then the perceived (though not the actual) scale can be considered to be moderated down with these, because they limit the views of the Mitre 10 such that the full scale of it is only visible once within the complex, where the views of the proposed Mitre10 building are otherwise oblique or behind these buildings. The placement of the lower parts of the Mitre10 at the public space interface, the moderation of parapet height and the dense and wide planting are further factors which reduce the impact of the large scale to a just acceptable level in its environment.

North- from Prestons Road

From the north, in addition to the smaller buildings being located between the road and the Mitre10 building, further moderation of the perceived scale of the Mitre 10 building is achieved through the differentiation of the Mitre10 parapet heights along the north elevation. I consider that this graduation combined with the 90m distance between the north elevation and Prestons Road, mitigates the perceived bulk to a just acceptable level for these views.



Proposed north elevation from Prestons Road- the Mitre10 building is approximately 90m away from the road with the single storey buildings in the foreground (elevation update dated 18 Dec 2024).

The graduation of heights from east to west (left to right on the image) away from Marshland Domain is also demonstrated on this elevation.

East- from Marshland Domain

The views from the northern 57m of the site would mostly comprise the single storey building E and distant and oblique views of the Mitre10 buildings, similar to those from Prestons Road. Therefore, the main eastern views of the larger scale of the Mitre10 building would be along the remaining 120m boundary of the site with Marshland Domain.

The lowest component of the Mitre10, the garden centre building, is located at the Marshland Domain interface and is approximately 69m long along this boundary. I consider it to be a low rise, moderate scale building, similar to the five buildings located along Prestons Road.

The garden centre is a low building with a perimeter wall height of 3.5m with an additional 1.5m of see-through mesh fence above. The light roof structure and the walls are separated, hence it is open to air. The height of the roof is approximately 5m.

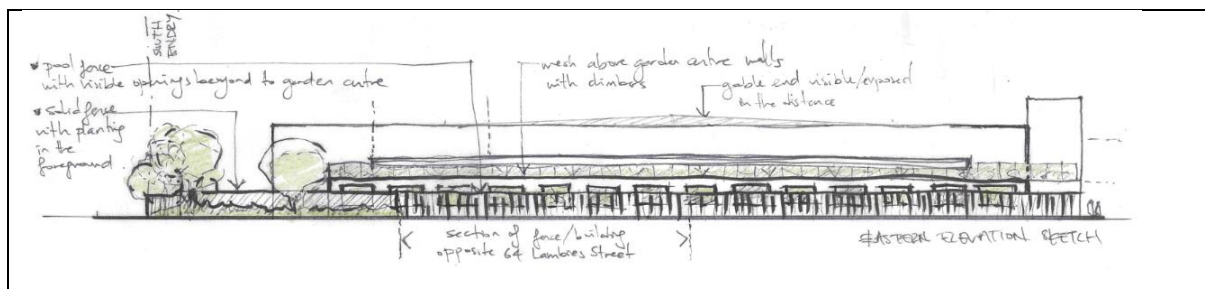
The next height that would be observed from the east is the parapet of the retail function of the Mitre10 building, approximately 38m away from the eastern boundary. The height of this parapet is 8.5m, increasing to 11m at about 67m away from the eastern boundary.

The roof ridge beyond the parapet is approximately 10m high, centrally located (30m away from the north and south edges) on the retail building. A very shallow triangle (the peak of the gable end) above the 8.5m parapet could be visible from the east. I calculate this triangular area to be about 30m² across 41m and believe that it would be almost imperceptible for the human eye level on the ground from most angles due to its large distance from the building's edges.

I expect the visual effect of the location of the lower garden centre to the east and the stepping of the parapet to be one of gradual increasing of heights which is an acceptable method to moderate the impact of larger scale buildings.

East - residential 64 Lambies Street

The boundary of the residential dwelling at 64 Lambies Street is approximately 26m away from the boundary eastern boundary of the Mitre10 complex. The bulk of the Mitre10 building is unlikely to be visible from there although the garden centre elevation would be, across the north-south walking link in the reserve. I consider the garden centre scale and visual appearance to be able to just adequately integrate into this partly residential context.



Proposed sketch of the east elevation showing the lower parapet height at 8.5m and the exposed but unlikely to be perceivable part of the gable end. At the time of writing this elevation was not updated, hence the sketch is drawn by the author based on the updated north elevation. If perceivable at all from eye level on the Domain, this exposed area of the gable end is likely to have a negligible visual effect due to the distance and the very shallow angle of the triangular area.



Google streetview image of a Mitre10 Garden centre wall

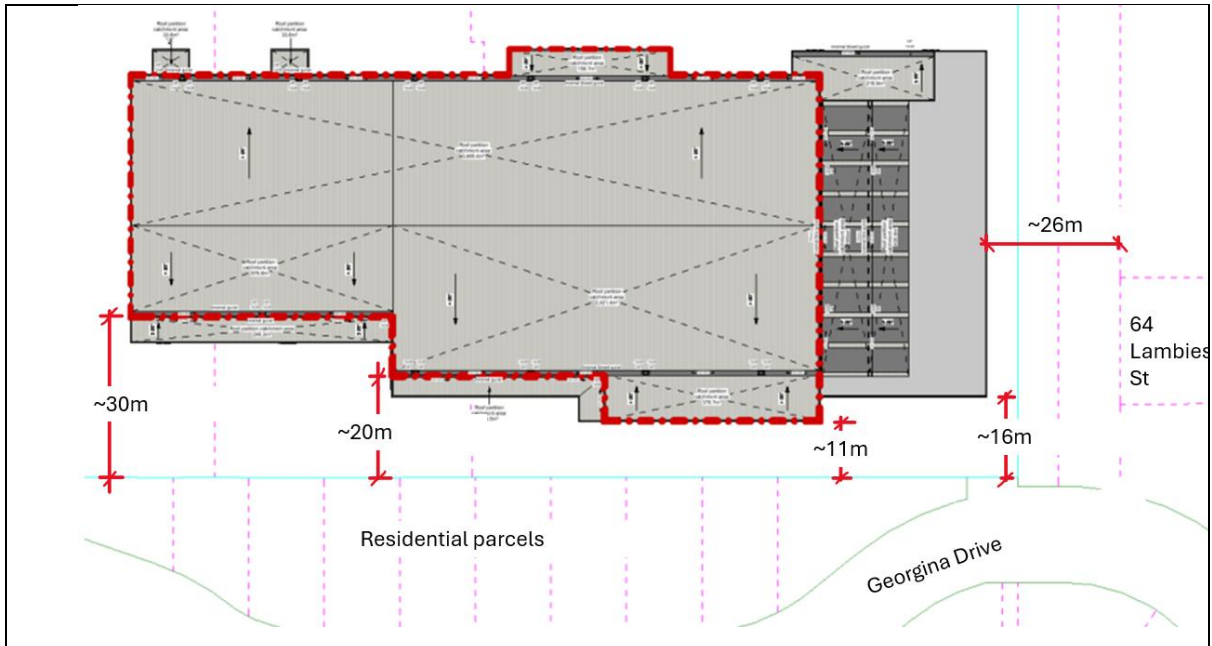


Proposed site plan

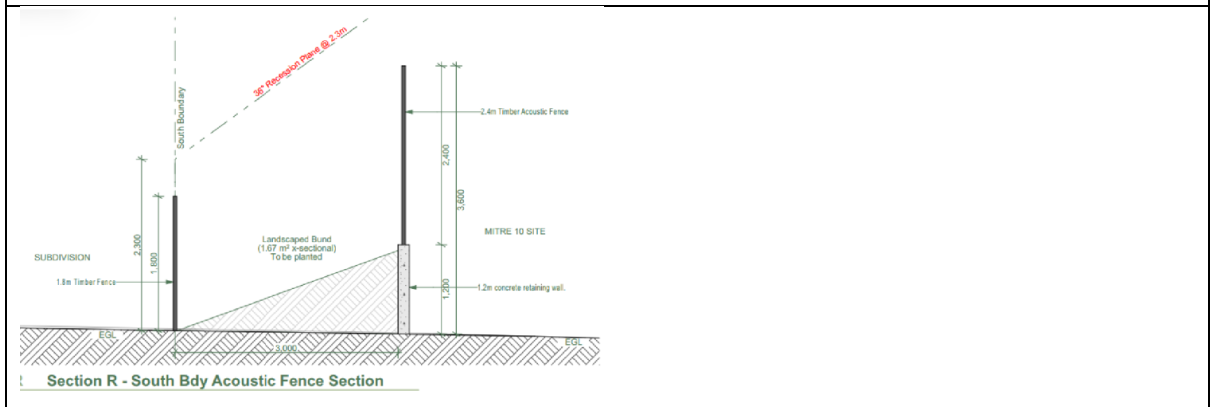
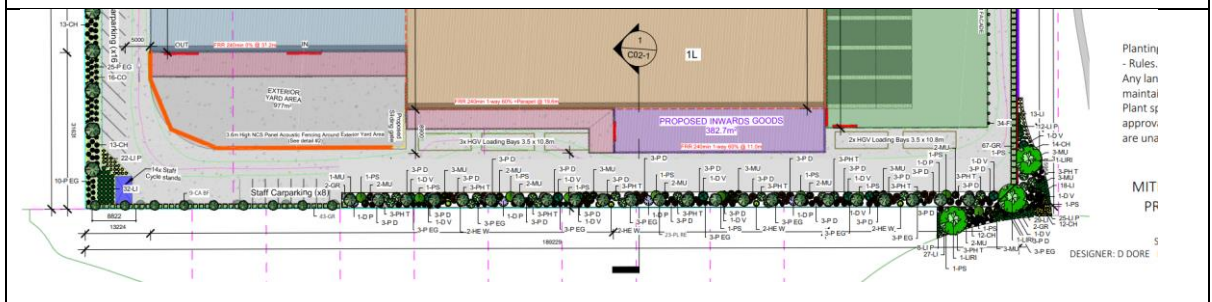
Southern views- Residential boundary

The proposed methods for moderation of the scale and integration at the southern boundary are:

- 3m wide densely planted buffer including an acoustic fence on the Mitre10 side. See Section R below.
- Building set-backs from the residential boundary at approximately (dimensions from the drawings rounded to the nearest metre) 30m for the western most four residential parcels, 20m for the three middle parcels, 11m for two eastern parcels and 16m for the easternmost parcel.



Above: Building/parapet setbacks from the south boundary
 Below: Planting plan at the south boundary



Policy assessment discussion on scale and height, 'small, moderate, large' & 'low, mid-rise, tall'

The most common large buildings we observe in local commercial centres are supermarkets. The most recent supermarket consented (2024) in North Halswell ODP had a footprint of just over 6000m² with another relatively recently consented (2021) New World supermarket in the same centre footprint is just under 4000m².

In terms of the massing, the proposed Mitre10 building reads as having two components, the retail portion at 4900m² and the trade drive-in at 2500m² appearing together under the same parapet height and the garden centre at 2000m² with its lower wall and mostly open to weather arrangement (apart from the café and playground area) appearing as another component. Total footprint is approximately 9,500 m².

The retail component of Mitre 10 is on a par with Pak'n'Save supermarkets (which appear to be typically just under 6000m²) and larger than New World supermarkets (which appear to be typically just under 4000m²). The retail and trade components together are much larger than typical supermarket footprints, between 25% to 50% greater in footprint.

Hence, I conclude that Mitre 10 building is a large-scale building, with some moderation afforded by the moderately sized buildings in the same campus.

I note that other than small footprint most often corresponding to low-rise, 'Tall', 'Mid-rise' and 'Low-rise' heights don't necessarily map one to one to 'Large', 'Medium' and 'Small' footprints and resulting scale. Depending on how they're combined, 'Tall' may not lead to 'large' and 'low' might not lead to 'small' scale.

For example, central city is placed at the peak of the centres hierarchy in the District Plan. However central city form is not typically tall with large footprints. Where we see "tall", footprint would typically be in the small to medium range.

Apart from a small number of key civic buildings such as a convention centre, it is unusual to see very low buildings with large footprints in central cities, due to land value being highest (under typical market conditions). It is generally unusual to see very large and very tall buildings, due to the capital access it would require and the size of risk it would carry, although if they occurred, they'd be expected to be in central city.

In Christchurch, the typical commercial form in central city is mid-rise, medium scale, including pre-earthquake where 40m height was permitted but there was a grant total of just over 50 buildings that were above 28m.

In smaller centres, low rise is predominant, typically comprising a small number of low buildings with medium footprints alongside low buildings with small footprints.

Where we see large footprint in Christchurch, it is typically low rise, possibly reflecting the capital access levels and risk appetite of developers together with lower land values. However, as discussed above, low rise does not automatically mean low or moderate scale.

Matter of discretion

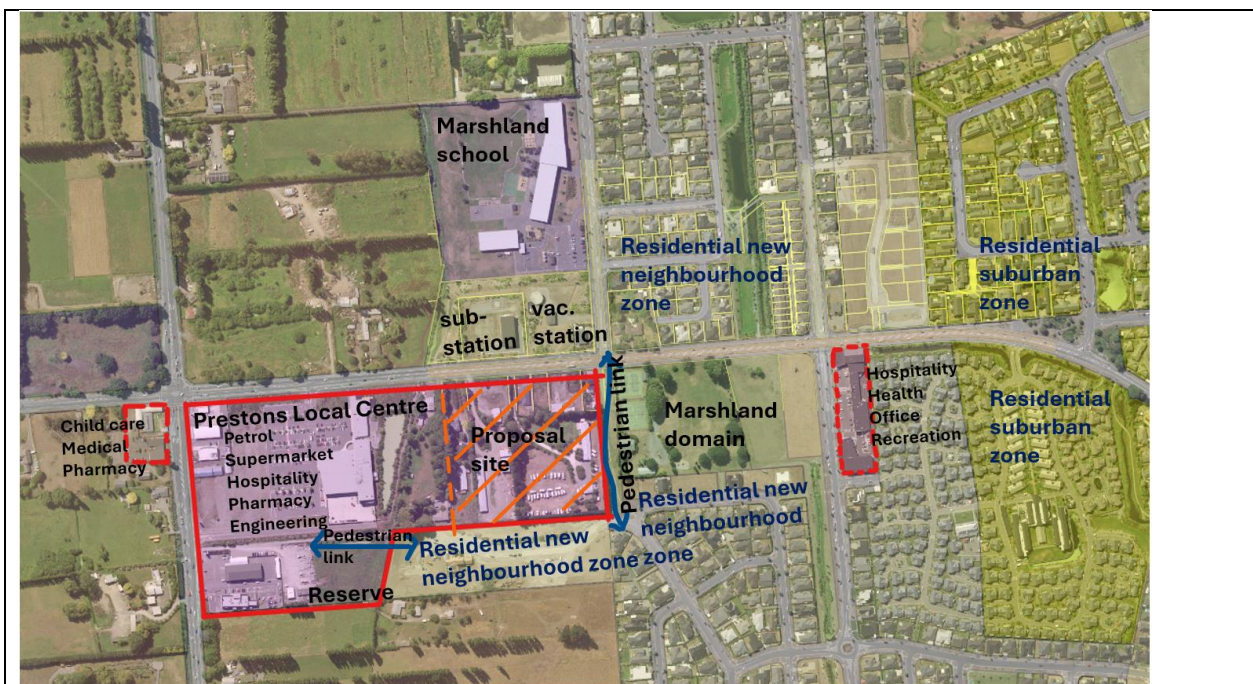
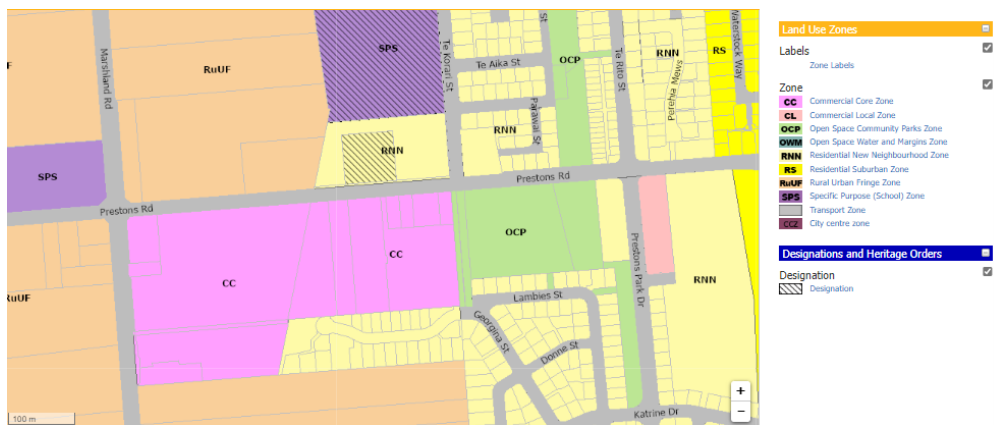
- a. *Development does not recognise the centre's role, context, and character including any natural heritage or cultural assets.*

I consider that the proposed development recognises the context and character of the centre, through the inclusion of a large, stormwater retention area to the west, a wide strip of dense planting along the southern residential boundary, provision of physical and visual pedestrian connections to the existing pedestrian link along the east boundary with Marshland Domain as well as the development fronting Prestons Road.

Matter of discretion - discussion

Context

The application site is at the eastern most edge of the Local Centre Zone on Prestons Road (effective from 12 December 2024), previously called Commercial Core zone, shown as CC in the below map extract. It adjoins an open space zone, Marshland Domain.



High level land use context

The Local Centre in Prestons is located at the south-east corner of Prestons Road and Marshland Road intersection. It is approximately 10ha.

At the north-west corner of the zone, there is a car wash and a BP petrol station with associated convenience store and café. Some 200m to the south there is a liquor sale building and a fast-food building. These are separated from the petrol station by a vacant building, a large vacant site and vehicle access to a supermarket.

The New World supermarket is separated from the petrol station by a vacant site and supermarket car parking. The supermarket entry is at least 350m away from the other businesses apart from those that are on the same site which are a pharmacy, real estate office and a restaurant.

At the northeast corner of the zone, about 280m away from the nearest business on the same zone, there is a preschool where the zone adjoins Marshland Domain. The rest of the zone is largely undeveloped with a small number of activities on large areas of land such as a heating engineering business, a few stand-alone houses and what appears to be (on aerial imagery) storage of vehicles and vessels.

While outside the Local centre, there are two other clusters of commercial uses which I consider to be part of the context of this zone.

The first complex is on Rural Urban Fringe immediately to the west of Prestons Local Centre and comprises a child-care facility, general practice clinic, pharmacy and physiotherapy at the south-west corner of Prestons Road and Marshland Road intersection, opposite the petrol station.

The second cluster is a small commercial complex to the east of the Local Centre, separated from the Local Centre by Marshland Domain and a currently vacant strip of residential land. This complex comprises businesses related to hospitality, health, travel, real estate services and liquor sale. It occupies all of the approximately 0.6 ha of land that was zoned Local Centre (equivalent to a Neighbourhood Centre in the national standards) prior to PC14.

While this complex is separated from the Local centre, due to the vacant land and the open space in between, it currently reads as being contiguous with the Local centre. If/when the residential strip is developed, it could look more separate to the local centre.

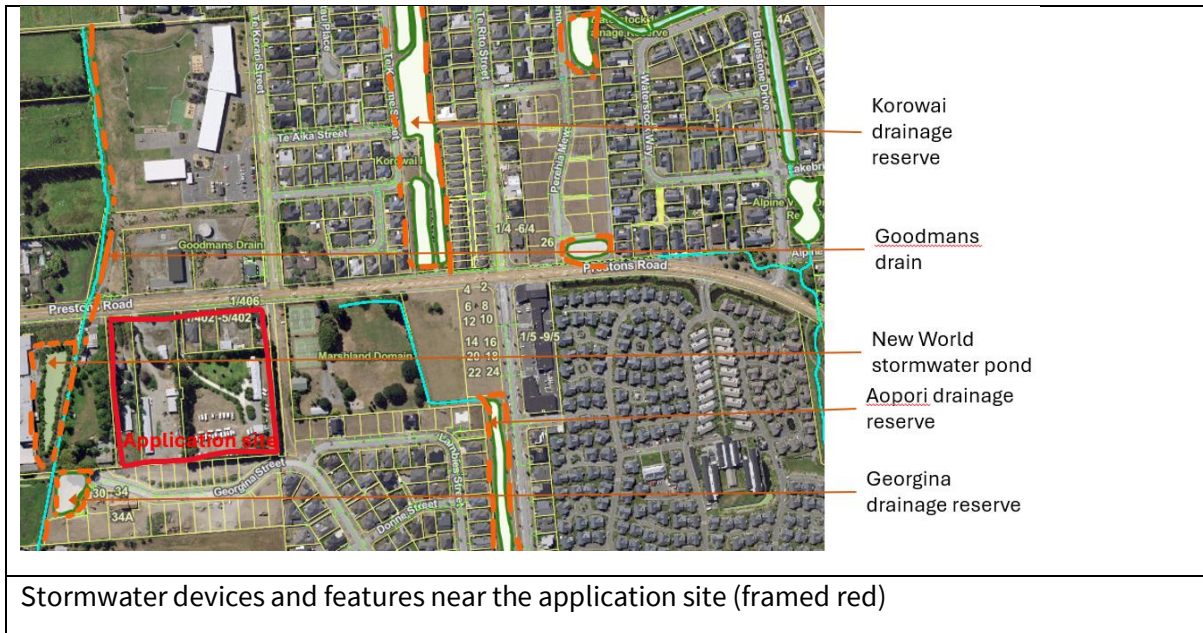
Existing character

The existing character of the area is one of transition between rural and industrial uses to commercial uses and is heavily vehicle dominated. All existing small clusters of businesses are separately accessed with no convenient pedestrian connections between them. While the distances between businesses are no greater than 400m, considered to be a 5min walking distance, the non-direct routes, the vacant spaces and the large car parking make distances appear greater and unattractive.

The physical character is one of large areas of land with sparsely distributed buildings. The area is stormwater constrained, perhaps implicit in the name Marshlands. Therefore, the more recent developments have been accompanied by largely open and visible stormwater features with associated planting alongside public stormwater infrastructure.

Stormwater devices and features

These include wetland style stormwater ponds (at New World site), naturalised drainage reserves (Aopori 1 Drainage reserve along Prestons Park Drive, Korowai Park and Korowai 1 Drainage reserve), stormwater drainage reserves (Georgina Drainage Reserve) and existing stormwater drains (Goodmans Drain). These stormwater features form part of the character of the greater area and the commercial centre.



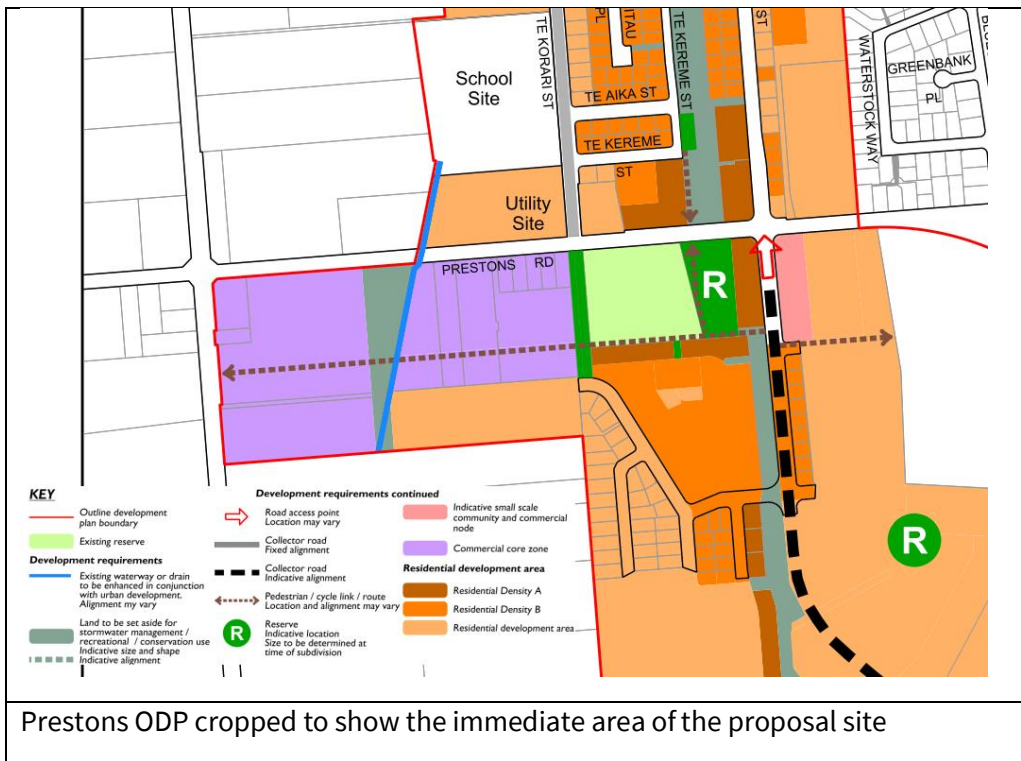
Boundary treatment

A common boundary treatment between different parcels of land is rows of large trees and wide strips of dense vegetation. Therefore, these two human-composed natural elements are also key elements of the existing character.

Existing and planned connections

Despite existing commercial activities being oriented for motor vehicle visibility, access and parking, there are opportunities to connect with the residential development that is existing as well as under construction, particularly to the east and south of the zone and the application site. There are two formed pedestrian paths which align with the Outline Development Plan for the greater area: one along the eastern edge of the Local Centre, which is also the eastern boundary of the application site and the and one through the narrow strip of residential development at the south east corner of the Local Centre Zone, to the south of the application site, separated from the application site by a single row of detached houses.

The proposed development responds to the pedestrian link at the eastern boundary of the application site by providing physical and visual connections.



b. Undermines or provides insufficient engagement with adjacent streets, lanes or public spaces.

The proposed development site interfaces with Prestons Road to the north and Marshland Domain to the east.

Provided that the full campus of buildings is completed as proposed with associated visual and physical engagement with Prestons Road and the Marshland Domain, the engagement with adjacent streets and public spaces would not be insufficient.

Matter of discretion - discussion

Prestons Road

The development is proposed to be realised in stages with Mitre 10 construction being the first stage at the southern end of the site. In this first stage, engagement with Prestons Road would be insufficient as it would be dominated by many rows of car parking for about 90m.

The five buildings proposed at the Prestons Road edge are all located close to the road, include generous glazing and have formalised pedestrian paths relating to them.

Marshland Domain

Direct access to the garden centre and café located centrally on the domain and visual engagement through the garden centre plant visibility provide engagement with Marshland Domain for the southern half of the eastern boundary.

For the northern half of the boundary, the engagement with the Domain is provided through three of the seven bays continuing a large area of glazing on building E. Provided this edge retains, as a minimum, the level of glazing shown on drawings and these remain unobstructed, the engagement would not be insufficient.

c. Undermines or provides insufficient vibrancy and attractiveness of adjacent streets, lanes or public spaces.

The proposed development site interfaces with Prestons Road to the north and Marshland Domain to the east.

The potential for the development to undermine the vibrancy and attractiveness of these could be reduced to an acceptable level provided that canopies are added to the Building E east elevation, signage facing Marshland Domain is reduced to the size requested by David Hattam, the garden centre eastern wall openings are retained see through with views of plants every two-three openings being retained unobstructed and the landscape plan and planting is realised as requested by William Field and by reserve asset owner, the Council's Parks unit.

Prestons road vibrancy and attractiveness

The uses of the five moderately sized buildings at the Prestons Road edge are not known at the time of the application although they are referred to as retail and the drawings indicate three to seven different tenancies in each building.

With only the short edges of these buildings are oriented to the road, the majority of the tenancies are not accessed directly from the road. However, the spaces between buildings are large hence the tenancies that are perpendicular to the road, have good visibility and well-formed pedestrian paths that directly lead to them from the road. This set up would not undermine the vibrancy and attractiveness of Prestons Road, noting that the existing attractiveness and vibrancy of Prestons Road in this section is low.

The Mitre 10 building in its very large singular form and abundant use of orange, a colour ordinarily used for attracting attention to hazards such as in the road cones or personal protection equipment, would not be considered attractive for the adjacent street or the public space. In this case this large building and the orange surface are about 90m away from the road and is partially blocked by the smaller retail buildings, hence it should have a fleeting effect on pedestrians and vehicles, noting that there are unoccupied infrastructure buildings and associated landscape on the other side of the road as opposed to activities where people could linger and be exposed to the visual impact from the other side of the road.

Marshland domain vibrancy and attractiveness

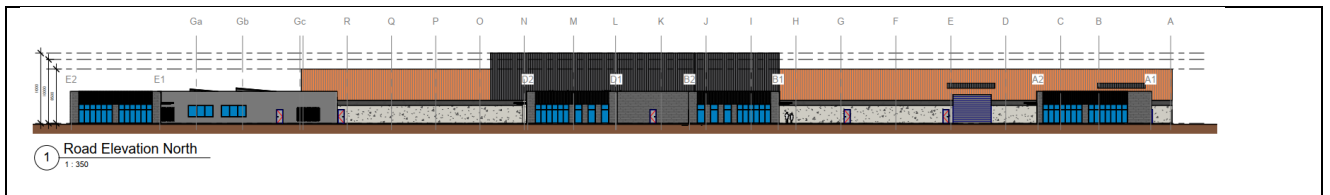
Building E Building E is located on the northern half of the Domain boundary. It is greater than 50m length along this boundary and is designed in seven bays. Three out of these seven bays are provided with glazing. These bays if left without canopies, would detract from attractiveness of the Domain as the building would be turning its back to the domain. Providing canopies associated with the glazing as it is proposed for the other buildings on the site, would help reduce this effect to a just acceptable level.

Mitre10 Garden centre and beyond Between the main Mitre10 building and the Marshland Domain, to the east there is an approximately 30m deep garden centre which is a lighter structure with mostly open to air edges and roofing. This side of the building does not contain the signature orange colour which reduces risk of unattractiveness. While a high level of vibrancy is not provided to this edge, the pedestrian access would be an improvement on the level of vibrancy to the existing state which comprises a continuous solid fence.

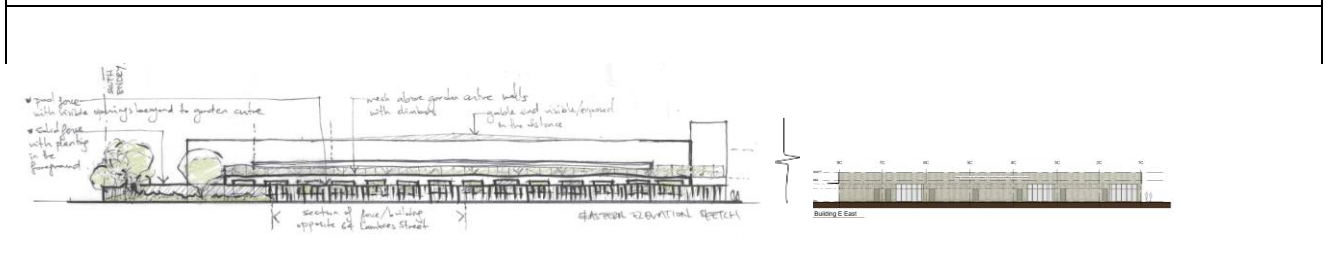
To the east, the main Mitre10 building in the background includes the very large size of the word “mega” which would undermine the attractiveness of Marshland Domain, particularly in long views. The smaller commercial complex on the other side of Marshland Domain is visible from the tennis court edge which means the higher part of the Mitre 10 building and the very large text would also be visible in long views from near Prestons Park drive.

The conclusion of whether the Marshland Domain edge attractiveness is not undermined, is critically reliant on a minimum of one in every two to three open bays of the garden centre remaining see-through with plants visible (as distinct from other stock or blocking of views by other means) and the word ‘mega’ being removed or significantly reduced in size.

I note that specific signage comments are made by David Hattam who addresses this elevation with respect to the appropriateness of signage.



North elevation from Prestons Road- the Mitre10 building is approximately 90m away from the road (elevation collage by author)



East elevation to Marsland domain

Mitre 10 East elevation with Garden Centre in the foreground- Pool fencing is proposed at the boundary with a section of solid fencing for the southern-most 16m.



Photo of the eastern boundary of the proposal site 2 November 2024.
The height of the trees relative to the fence would suggest they were about 12 m high.



Photo from the pedestrian link at the corner of 44 Lambies St and Marshland Domain.

The tip of the trees visible in the background are about 12m (see previous photo). These trees have since been cut down (see photo below), hence the 10m high Mitre10 building would remain visible from this south edge of the Domain and as one moves north-south on the Domain.



Photo of the eastern boundary on 13 December 2024



Low rise commercial buildings on Prestons Park Drive with small signage. Photo taken from near the playground on Marshland domain, approximately 200m away from the commercial buildings

d. Insufficient recognition of nearby buildings in respect of their exterior design, architectural form, scale and detailing in subject building design.

The existing centre is largely undeveloped, hence there are not many commercial buildings that can be referenced in terms of architectural design.

I consider this matter is largely irrelevant for this centre, due to the lack of an established built edge, form continuity or presence of a cluster of commercial buildings nearby that could be experienced together with the application site.

The development in the existing environment is largely small scale residential. Commercial buildings in a local centre zone would not be expected to appear like houses with respect to exterior design, general form and detailing. However, the scale of commercial buildings can recognise the smaller residential scale into account and provide a layered or moderated approach in building form when reaching the greater scale needed for commercial activities. I consider a moderated approach is proposed at campus level in this application but not at individual building level, particularly not for the Mitre10 building.

The building E also has the risk of insufficient recognition of nearby buildings, including those on the same site if it doesn't include canopies above glazing where it faces east.

e. Proposed buildings do not have a human scale or bulk appropriate to its context having regard to the functional requirements of the activity for which the building is designed.

In this respect, the proposal is in two parts, the five buildings to the north do not lack human scale as they are of moderate dimensions, include multiple tenancies in them which introduce smaller grain for the pedestrian experience, are of low height and include glazing and entries which are elements with dimensions that relate to human scale.

The exception to the above is the over 50m long elevation of Building E to the east which would need to include some of the typical detailing similar to that shown on the other proposed buildings, specifically canopies above glazing to introduce human scale to the very long elevation with a low level of glazing.

It is hard to conclude that the Mitre10 building has human scale on its own with its very large dimensions where human scale elements such as doors and canopies disappear in context of the

very large mass of the overall building and the orange parapet. This seems to be sought by the activity proposed with the large indoor retail environment being the focus rather than the building shape or design. It could be considered that the Mitre10 building reflects its function that it is designed for and is very similar in the above aspects to its existing branches in the city.

I consider that the lack of human scale and presence of large bulk is moderated to a just an acceptable level due to:

- Location of the largest building, Mitre10 away from public boundaries
- Moderation impact of the smaller buildings on the same campus, including the lower height and partly see-through garden centre location to the east
- 3m wide densely planted buffer to the residential boundary
- Generous building set-backs from the residential boundary together with 6-8m high trees providing screening

Landscape plan and planting on the site must be realised as requested by William Field and by reserve asset owner, the Council's Parks unit.

f. The overall design is not safe in terms of creating opportunities for criminal activity.

The proposal appears to have adopted Cpted principles with respect to retaining clear sight lines and opportunities for passive surveillance during hours of operation, including clear access definition with pleasant planting opportunities and access control for sensitive areas such as the service yard for after-hours security and safety.

The most challenging part of the site for risk of criminal activity are the southern completely unobserved boundary to the residential area to the south and the large area of surface car parking which can attract anti-social activity after hours, due to the ease of access by cars to an unobserved area. I understand that the vehicle access to the site will be controlled after hours.

A specific CPTED memo addressing the measures to reduce the risks relating to the southern boundary is provided. Expert advice in the applicant's expert memo with any changes or additions recommended by William Field should be implemented.

g. Insufficient landscaping or 'other means' are provided for shade or weather protection.

The elevations indicate that the proposal includes pedestrian shelter along the long edges of the five buildings on the Prestons Road edge. These are good shading and weather protection devices as well as having benefits in achieving human scale as discussed above.

However, the large car parking areas and the pedestrian routes do not have sufficient shade or weather protection. Commercial developments with associated large car parking areas typically achieve this by providing trees at every interval of five or so car parks, especially along pedestrian routes across the car park.

The main pedestrian axis on the car parking area that runs east west has planting areas adjacent however only some of these areas appear to include canopy trees and these are located to the south which may not be as effective for shading purposes.

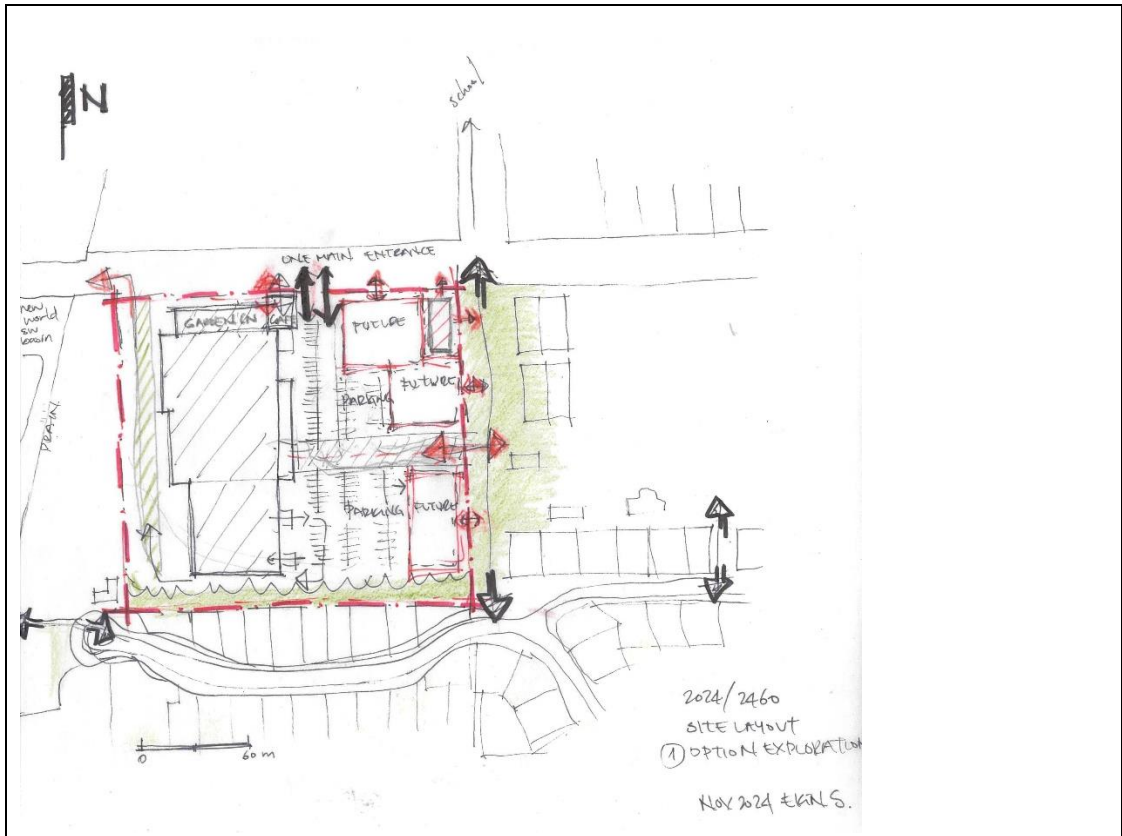
h. Insufficient provision has been made for legible and efficient access for all transport user

I consider that sufficient provision has been made for legible and efficient access for pedestrians and motor vehicle users. Paths are clear and direct and with comfortable width in the case of pedestrian paths. While not shown on the site plan, I expect line markings would give pedestrian paths further legibility where they intersect with vehicle paths.

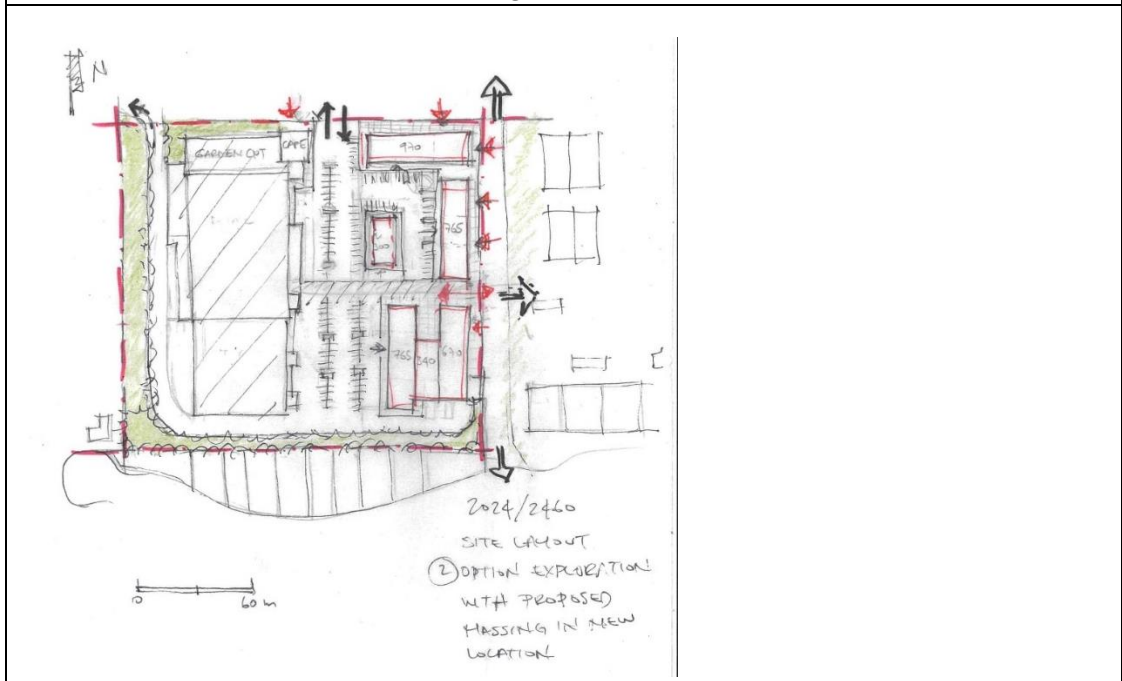
Cycle access paths are not indicated although with lower speed limits within the car parking area, they can be accommodated. Each building has a cycle parking area associated with it which further supports access by bikes.



Analysis of the December proposal



Options discussed in response to the August proposal



The applicant advised that the land ownership across the application site was a barrier to placement of the Mitre10 along the west boundary of the site, away from residential and open space boundaries.