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# Centre for Humanities

URBAN CONTEXT REPORT

May, 2023



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Urban Context Report

May 2023

Prepared by Wardle for Melbourne Grammar School



Wardle AECOM ARUP



We acknowledge the Bunurong and Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nations as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which Melbourne Grammar School lies. We pay respect to their Elders past and present.

We commit to creating inclusive and meaningful outcomes alongside the Melbourne Grammar School project team and the local community.

# 1. Project Overview

## Executive Summary

### Project Overview

The Centre for Humanities is an ambitious project to create a world class space for teaching and learning that will support the school’s vision that “teachers at Melbourne Grammar lead, design, inspire and support.” It is envisaged to:

- » Provide inspirational facilities for students to learn, take lessons, research and collaborate.
- » Be emblematic of Melbourne Grammar School and integrate meaningfully with the enduring campus character
- » Use display spaces and landscape to support informal education
- » Develop a building that is considerate of environmental and cultural sustainability

The project will provide space for a range of teaching and learning to occur - from academic work, student collaboration and private study. It will primarily host learning programs across VCE English, Literature, EALD, History, Geography, Politics, Classics, Philosophy and Media. Year 9 & 10 EALD, English, Geography and History.

The proposed project will accommodate:

- » General Classrooms
- » Larger Classrooms that serve as pastoral care House Rooms
- » Media Specialist Classrooms
- » Staff Spaces
- » Independent/Informal Learning Zones
- » An informal gathering space
- » Student sports change facilities
- » Grounds facility space
- » Sports storage

It will also involve new landscaping to the Chapel Quadrangle and Main Oval interface.

### School Briefing and Engagement Process

Wardle and the sub-consultant team were selected based on a two stage competitive design process. A key criteria in the selection for the design and architectural team was the way that the building could sensitively integrate with the existing campus and better enhance the connection between the campus and the Domain Road frontage. The brief for the project was detailed over the course of several years with input from the school masterplanner, Peter Elliot, and key academic staff.

Since the appointment of project the Wardle team have been engaging in an extensive stakeholder engagement process to refine and confirm the briefing requirements for the project. This has been overseen by a strong school governance framework and reporting structure to ensure the project aligns with the school’s expectations for the future of the campus.

### Town Planning Engagement Process

The design team has been working closely with Urbis and Bryce Raworth to address town planning and heritage items that impact the proposal site.

The team has undertaken four preliminary pre-app meetings with Heritage Victoria, City of Melbourne and DTP during the course of Concept and Schematic Design. Heritage Victoria and City of Melbourne also undertook site tours of the campus prior to their feedback. Key dates:

- » 22nd November 2022: Pre-app with Heritage Victoria
- » 23rd November 2022: Pre-app with City of Melbourne
- » 1st December 2022: Heritage Victoria Site Visit to MGS
- » 25th January 2023: Pre-app with DTP + City of Melbourne
- » 14th March 2023: Prep-app with DTP + Heritage Victoria

At the March pre-app meeting the design team provided responses to the preliminary formal Heritage Victoria feedback.

Both HV and DTP expressed a positive response to the changes proposed by the design team in response to the feedback received.

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Image: Melbourne Grammar School Campus + Subject Site

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# Site Context

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## 2. Site Context

### Site Location

The site is located on the northern perimeter of the South Yarra campus of Melbourne Grammar School along Domain Road.

The existing buildings on the site, the Rhoden and Neill buildings are proposed to be demolished and the new building constructed in their place. The brief for the project has been framed around the careful consideration of the adjacent heritage buildings, the street frontage to Domain Road and minimising overshadowing to the Main Oval.

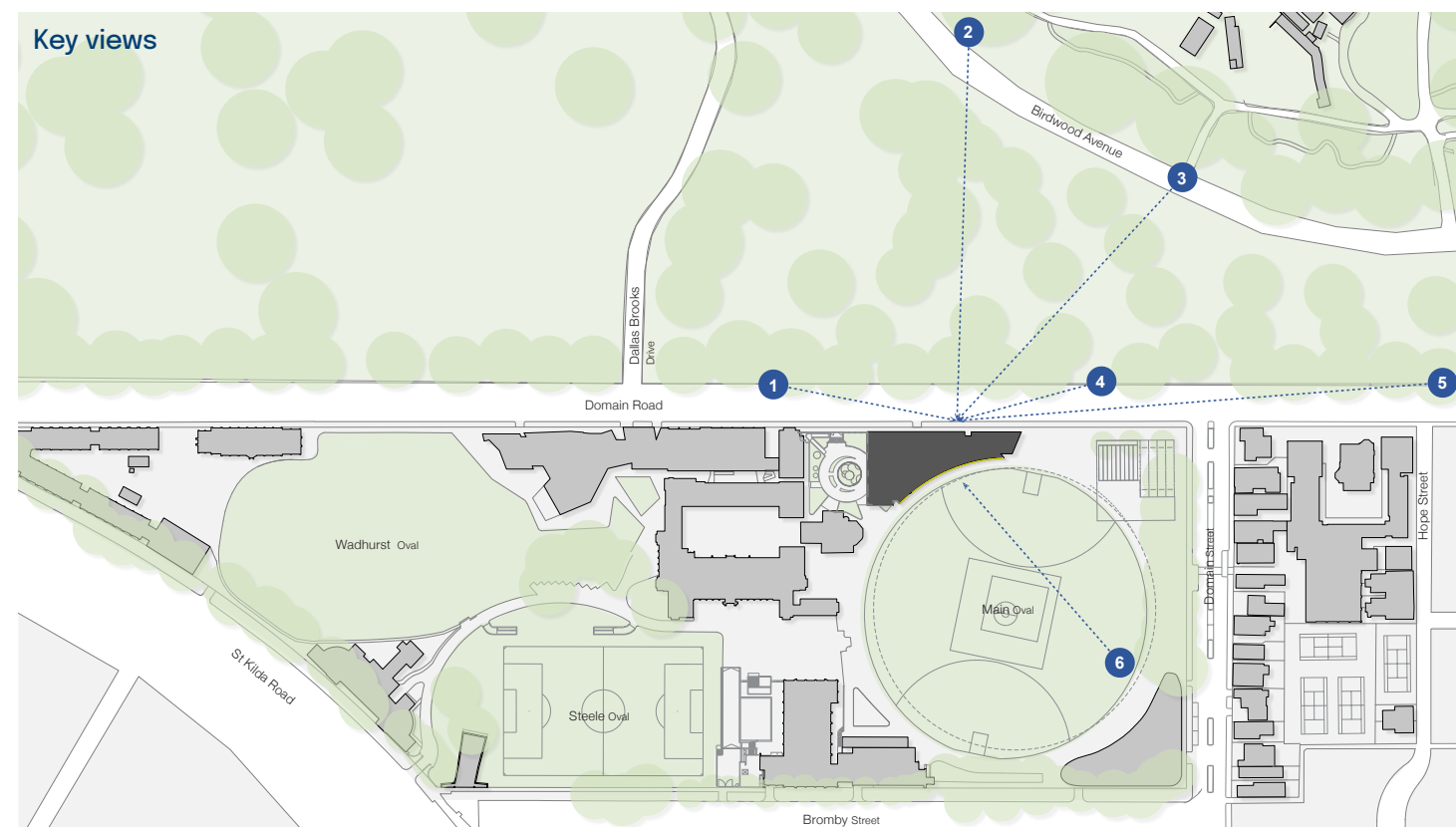
Key items of note within the site include: the Chapel of St Peter, Cuming & Jubilee Wings, remnant gymnasium toilet block wall, Ross Gates, Chapel Quad and Main Oval.

### Key Views

The predominant streetscape presentation is along Domain Road, with views of the building from the eastern edge of the campus across the Main Oval. Due to the significant foliage across the King's Domain gardens and along Birdwood Avenue there is limited visibility of the campus from the northern side of Domain Road.

Key views of the existing conditions are shown adjacent:

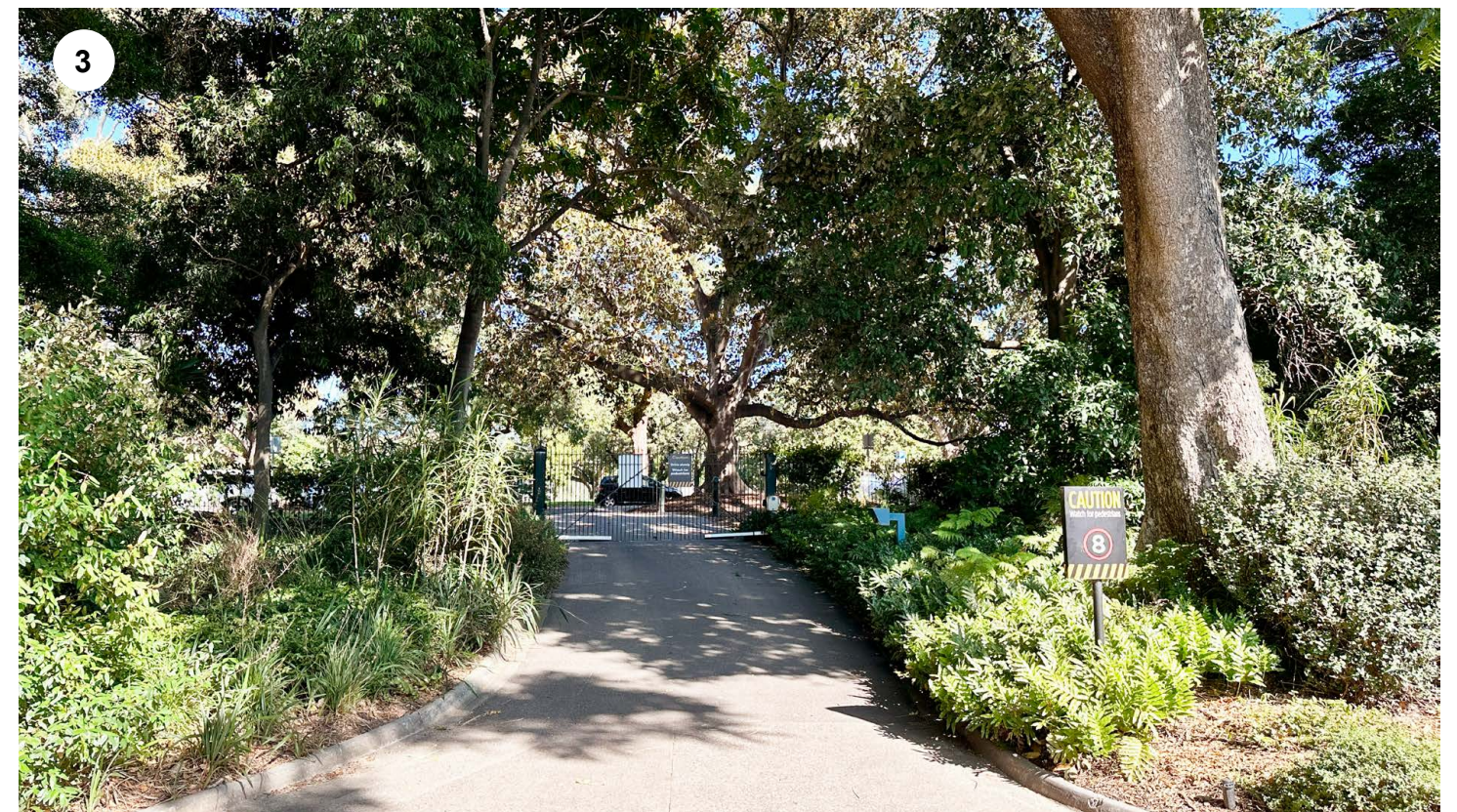
1. View looking at the site from the west, along Domain Road
2. View from Birdwood Avenue looking south at the site
3. View from the Botanic Gardens looking south at the site
4. View showing the appearance of the east elevation of the building, from Domain Road
5. View looking at the site from the east, along Domain Road (between Domain St and Hope St)
6. View from the Main Oval looking north at the building





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## 2. Site Context

### Rhoden and Neill Buildings

The Rhoden and Neill buildings are currently located on the subject site with a total Gross Floor Area (GFA) of 2130m2, excluding balconies.

They are set across 3 storeys above ground plus half basement in the Rhoden Building and currently provide the following facilities:

- › x10 classrooms (including a number of house rooms) + staff offices
- › Student change rooms, toilets, lockers and stores.

The Neill building was opened in 1969 and the Rhoden building in 1984. Both were designed by Mockridge Stahle & Mitchell. This site also overlapped an earlier site which had contained a gymnasium (from 1904-1953). A remnant of the external cladding of the old remnant gymnasium toilet block wall along Domain Road still exists.

### Proposed Demolition

Both the Rhoden and Neill buildings are proposed to be demolished to accommodate the new Centre for Humanities. The existing remnant gymnasium blue stone wall is proposed to be integrated as a part of the new building.

### Heritage Advice

Bryce Raworth has provided initial heritage advice for this project as a part of the competition design process.

In his heritage advice he notes that *“whilst various other areas of the campus are included in the heritage overlay for the campus the listing does not identify the Rhoden Neill buildings within the extent of registration. Furthermore, these buildings are identified as being of only minor contributory significance in the Master plan (and the 1999 Conservation Plan for Melbourne Grammar School prepared by Robert Sands that preceded the Master plan). As such, these buildings are identified as a portion of the campus that may be redeveloped or removed in both the Conservation Plan and the Master plan.”*

Refer to the Heritage Impact Statement for further discussion.



View from Chapel Quadrangle



View of Rhoden Neill buildings from Main Oval



View of Rhoden Neill buildings from Main Oval

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## 2. Existing Conditions

### Chapel Square/Quadrangle

The Chapel area to the north of the Chapel of St Peter is a significant entry to the school. The Heritage Impact Statement identifies that the raised planters and landscaping were constructed recently in 1978. The proposal looks to remove the existing landscaping and planters in order to construct an inviting space that can be well used by the students, staff and visitors. This has been supported in the HIS given the relatively new construction of the landscaping and original configuration of the square as a “simple rectangular area of lawn without tree plantings”.

### Ross Gates + Steps

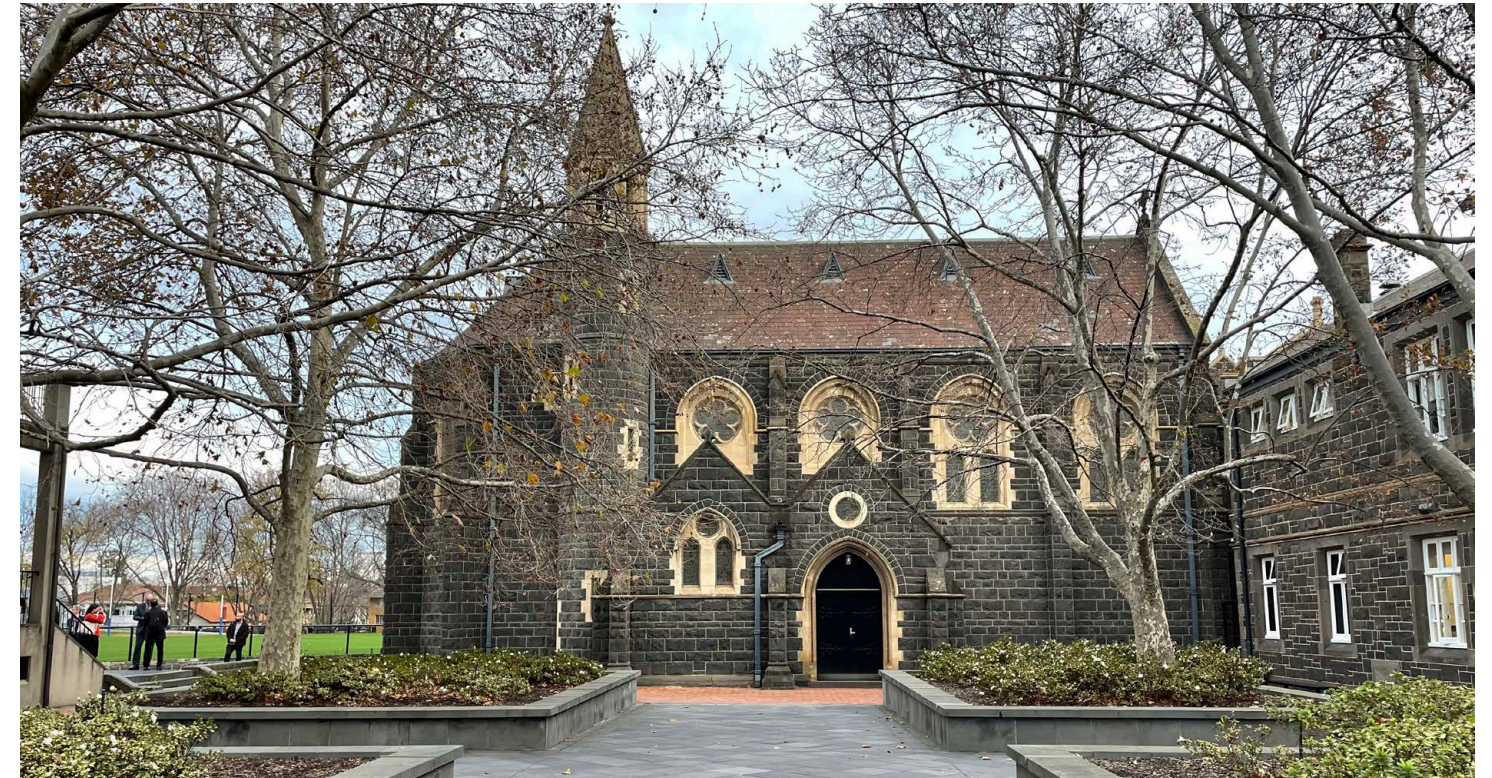
The Domain Road frontage includes heritage elements such as the Ross Gates, fence and steps. These are intended to be protected and retained in the revised design for this area. Upgrades are proposed which will allow for DDA compliance.

### Remnant Blue stone Wall

The remnant gymnasium toilet block wall along Domain Road is proposed to be integrated within the architectural design, it will be dismantled and reconstructed/restored and will frame the base of the new building. This has been supported in the HIS as it is “only a fragment of a building [...] and was introduced as a refacing of the original toilet block” which it is understood was red brick.



Current interface to remnant gymnasium toilet block wall



Chapel Square/Quad - View towards Chapel of St Peter



Chapel Square/Quad - View towards Jubilee Wing



Chapel Square/Quad - View towards Ross Gates and Domain Road



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# Architectural Design Response

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View from Domain Gardens along Domain Road





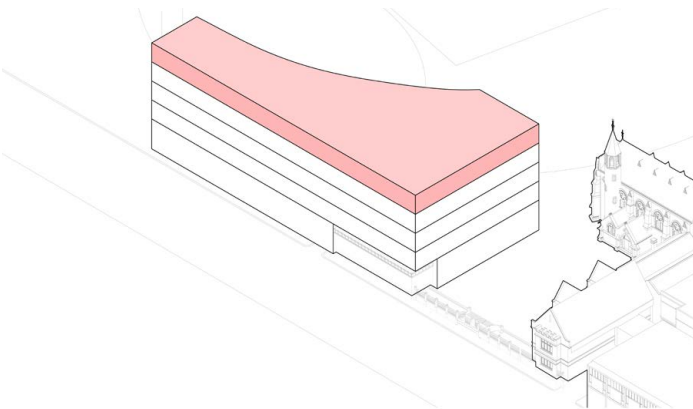
# 3. Architectural Design Response

## ADVERTISED PLAN

### Scale and Context

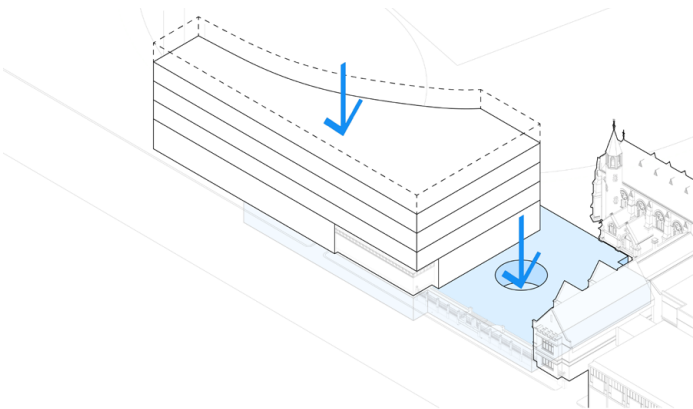
Our endeavour has been to explore a series of strategies to shape the substantial form of this building to provide a scaling appropriate for this important setting. Although the brief calls for a 5 storey building above ground, the design intentionally utilises the area below the Chapel Quadrangle to submerge the light sensitive Media classrooms.

Brief



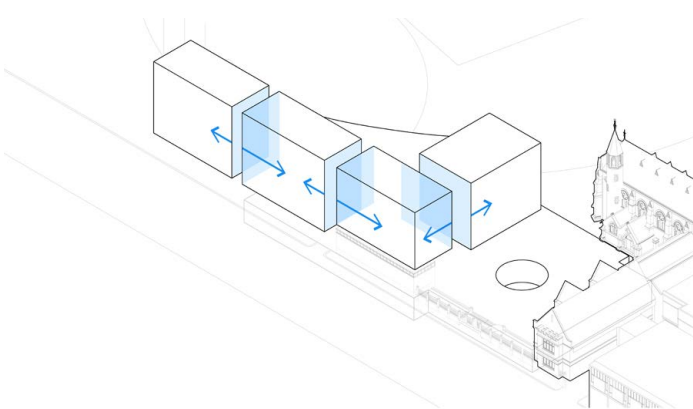
The proposed brief would require a building set across 5 storeys above ground.

Submerge



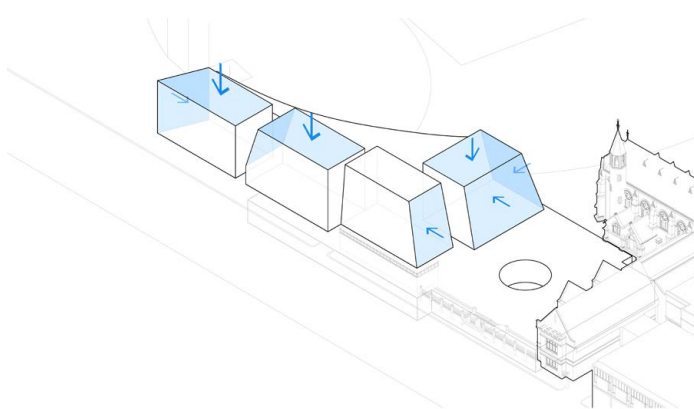
Through the incorporation of the sunken basement level under the Chapel Quad, the overall form of the building has been minimised to three and a half levels from the Domain Road street level.

Separate



Our proposal for this substantial elevation considers views into and from the building. The three distinct volumes are separated by glass sleeves that mark the vertical circulation and provide clear views to the activity within.

Shape



The programmatic elements have been separated into four primary volumes more reflective of the scale of many of the other buildings on campus. A series of steps and inclined walls shape the interface with immediate context.

Tree planting indicative only -  
subject to review

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Domain Road Frontage - East





# 3. Architectural Design Response

## An Outward Expression of Learning

Bookending with the Nigel Peck Centre for Learning and Leadership, the Centre for Humanities continues the outward expression of the importance of learning. Placing learning on show the building frames views within the campus, with the Ross Gates at the centre and contributes to the process of connecting the campus to Domain Road.

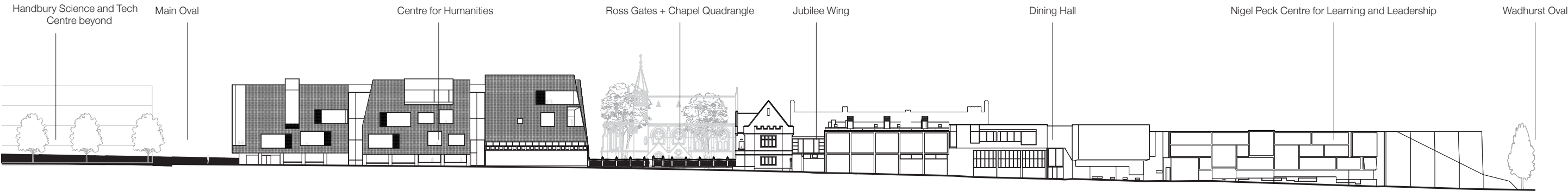
Outwardly focused and inviting, the building balances the singular concentration required of students with opportunities for expansive views across to the Royal Botanic Gardens. There is considerable research that has been done on the benefits of biophilic design and views to landscape as a way of managing stress and encouraging creativity. Large floor to ceiling windows to classrooms offer views out and also activate the Domain Road streetscape experience by placing learning on show.

Along Domain Road views through the building to the Main Oval and campus are created through the glazed circulation zones that break the solid masonry volumes. At footpath level select views into the ground level are provided where appropriate for the school's brief.

Furniture is integrated into the facade at street level to provide spots for students waiting for the tram or school pick ups/drop offs.

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Domain Road Elevation - NTS

Tree planting indicative only - subject to review



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## Domain Road Frontage - Ross Gates Entry





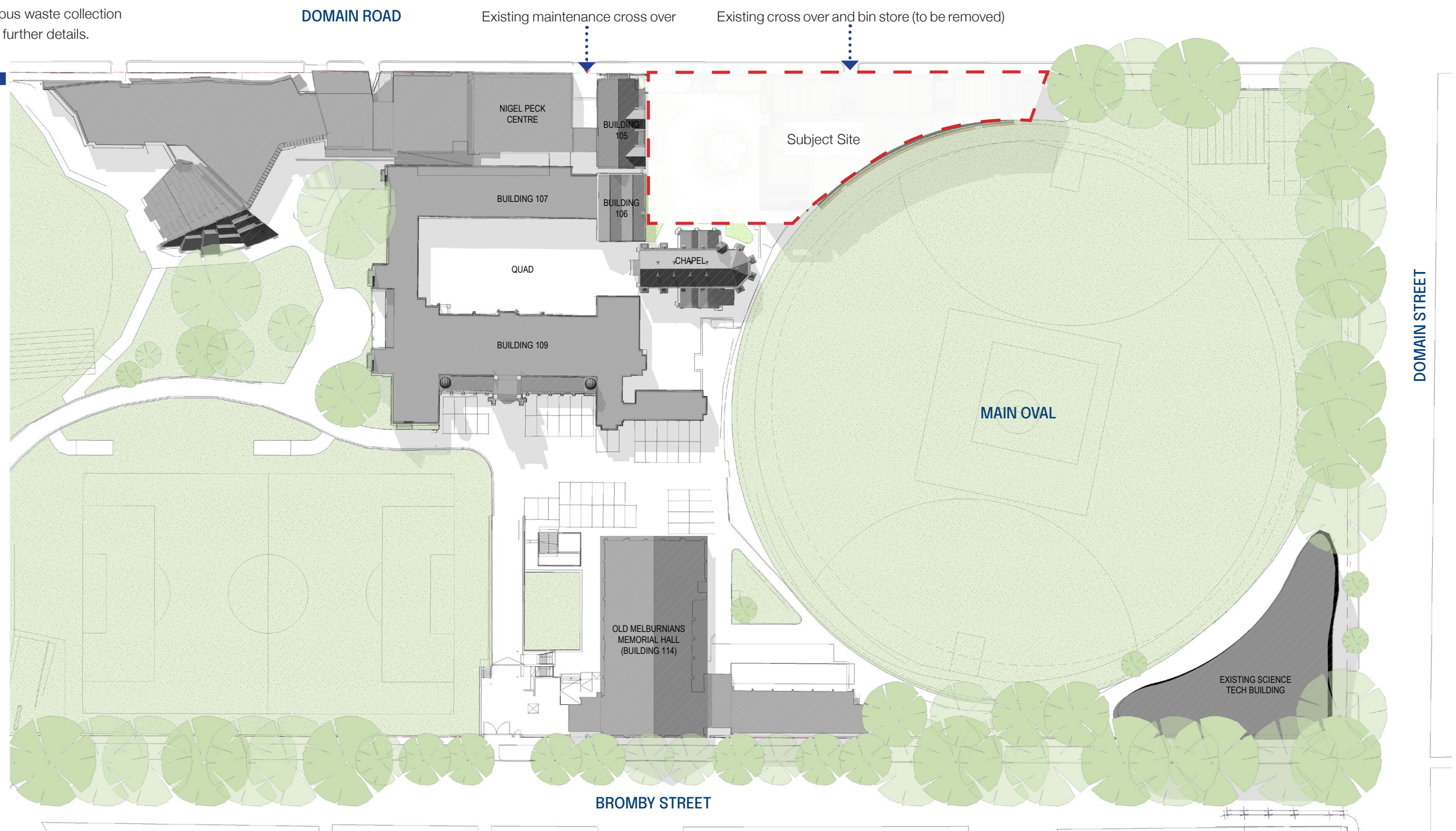
### 3. Architectural Design Response

### ADVERTISED PLAN

#### Site Plan

The subject site sits within the school campus and is bounded by the Chapel Square/Quad to the west, the Domain Road and Ross Gates fence to the north, and the Main Oval to the south/east. It is proposed to remove an existing cross over and bin store on Domain rd in order to consolidate the campus waste collection points. Refer the Waste Management Plan for further details.

Utilise existing alternate bin store



Tree planting indicative only - subject to review

Scale 1:1000 @A3

Wardle



# 3. Architectural Design Response

## Campus Connections

### Reconsidering the Campus Arrival Experience

The starting point for this project is the campus arrival experience. There was a clear aspiration to recast the Chapel Quadrangle and Ross Gate Entry as an inviting portal for visitors and students to the school - a gathering space, a place to pause and a space for reflection.

The existing heritage fence and Ross Gates are retained and sensitively integrated into the design response. The former gymnasium remnant blue stone wall will be carefully deconstructed and reconstructed to form a base for the western volume along Domain Road. In an effort to integrate the building with the predominantly blue stone character of the campus the dark language of blue stone carried across in the materiality of the lower portion of the building along Domain road.

### A New Chapel Square/Quadrangle

The design incorporates a re-imagined landscape forecourt that places the experience of learning at its core. Structured around the submerged garden this forecourt becomes a lively place to appreciate both history and contemporary experience.

The sunken courtyard offers the potential for solar access to the Lower Ground level and a unique landscape environment on the campus.

The existing six trees and raised planters will be removed and replaced with a landscape that will be selected through careful stakeholder engagement with the school grounds team and through the Designing with Country engagement strategy.

Refer to the landscape architecture report for further details.

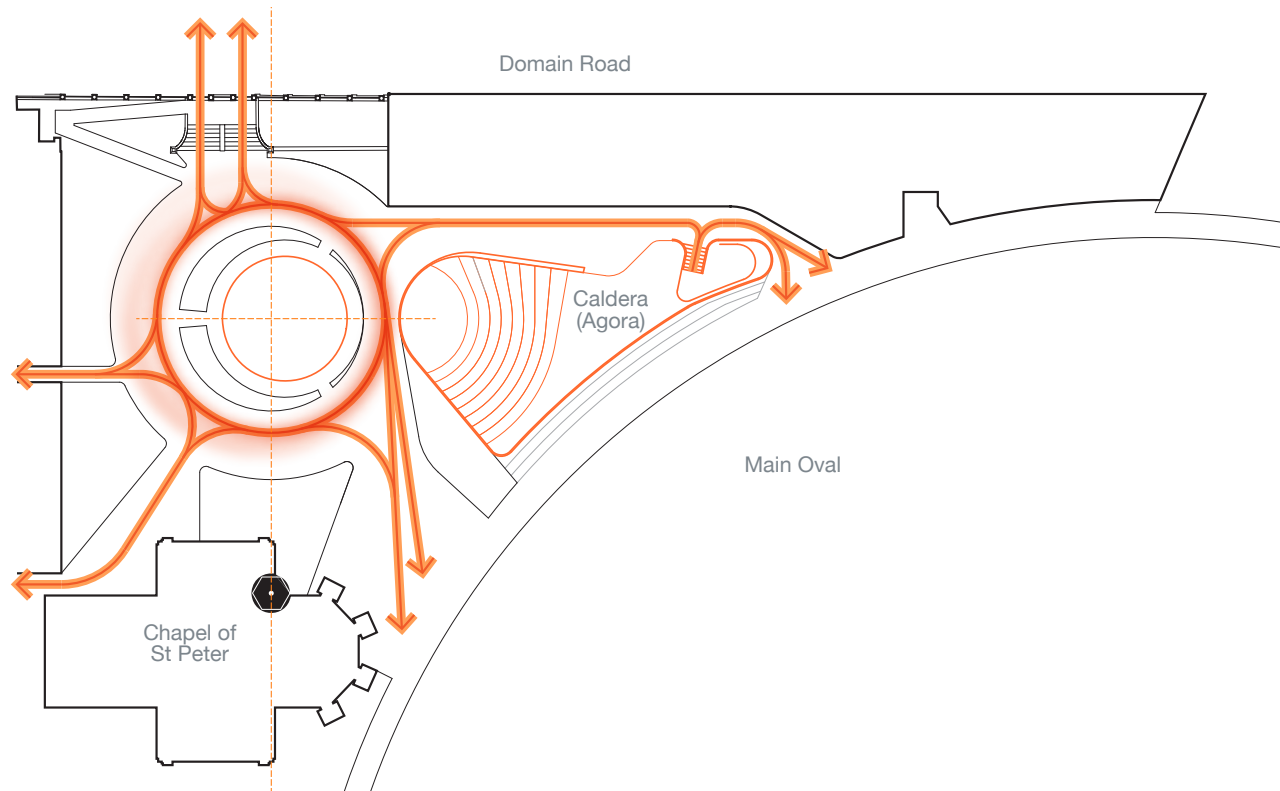


Diagram - Ground plane connectivity

## ADVERTISED PLAN



View - Chapel Quadrangle

### Connecting with the Main Oval

The northern interface to the Main Oval has been considered through shadow studies to provide maximum solar access to the sports field.

The patterns within this campus of buildings set tightly around a sequence of sporting ovals is to be celebrated. The link between sportsmanship and scholarship is profoundly stated in the setting for this building.

An outer inflection of our radial 'oval' elevation forms tiered seating for spectators then continues as a place for players and coaching staff flanking the changing rooms.

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# 3. Architectural Design Response

## Culture and Community

### Designing with Country

Melbourne Grammar School has a commitment to the empowerment of First Nations people through their Indigenous Strategy. To support this vision and align with the brief for a Centre for Humanities the project team has committed to meaningful engagement with First Nations people throughout the development of the project. MGS has engaged Josh Lloyd from AECOM as First Nation's consultant and the team has commenced a process of engagement with Bunurong and Boon Wurrung knowledge holders.

Opportunities for Designing with Country and the potential to meaningfully share cultural stories are being considered holistically across the project.

*We are also interested in contributing to a national conversation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians through activities including Reconciliation Week, participation in the Garma Festival in North East Arnhem Land, and the inclusion of Indigenous emblems and artwork across our campuses.*

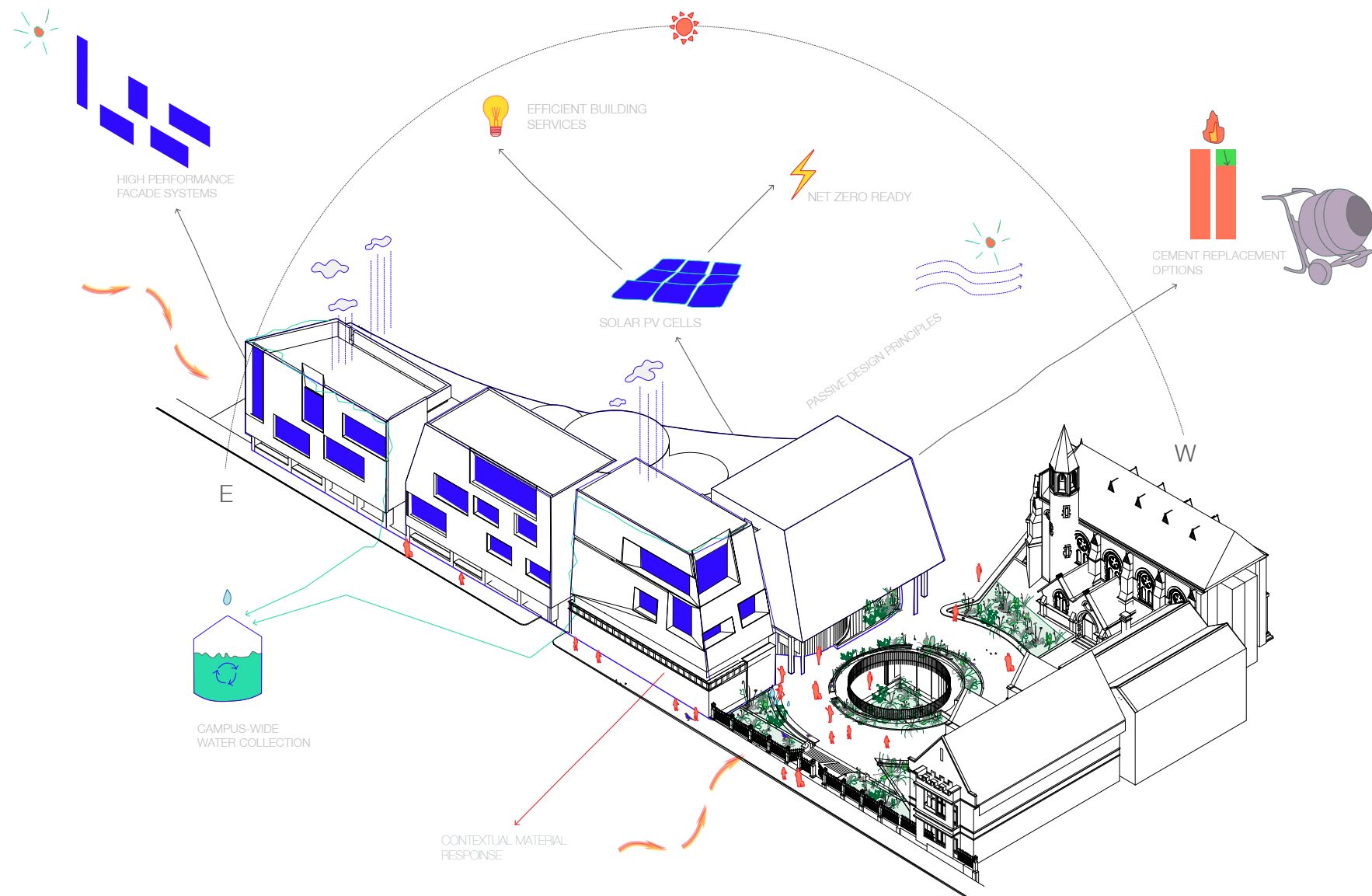
- MGS Indigenous Strategy



Tree planting indicative only - subject to review

### Sustainability

MGS has a commitment to sustainable design in the project. A 5 Star Green Star (uncertified) approach has been adopted by the school and project team. Sustainable design, construction and operations initiatives that prioritise the health and wellness for building occupants and the whole campus have been emphasised. Refer to the Sustainability Management Plan and Water Sensitive Urban Design report for further details.



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3. Architectural Design Response

Urban Realm

The overall massing of the building is kept as minimal as possible to sit carefully within the campus elevation along Domain Road. The facade materiality has been selected to visually integrate with the campus character and adjacent heritage buildings. The remnant blue stone wall and the Ross Gates have been integrated into the base of the Domain Road elevation.

From the eastern edge of the campus and towards Hope Street there is a considerable breathing space to the surrounding residential buildings due to the expansive Main Oval. The massing of the building is has also been kept as low as possible to minimise the visual impact on the streetscape from this perspective.

Due to the extensive foliage and drop in topography across the King's Domain and Birdwood Avenue there is very limited visibility (if any) of the building from the Botanic Gardens as noted in the diagrams opposite.

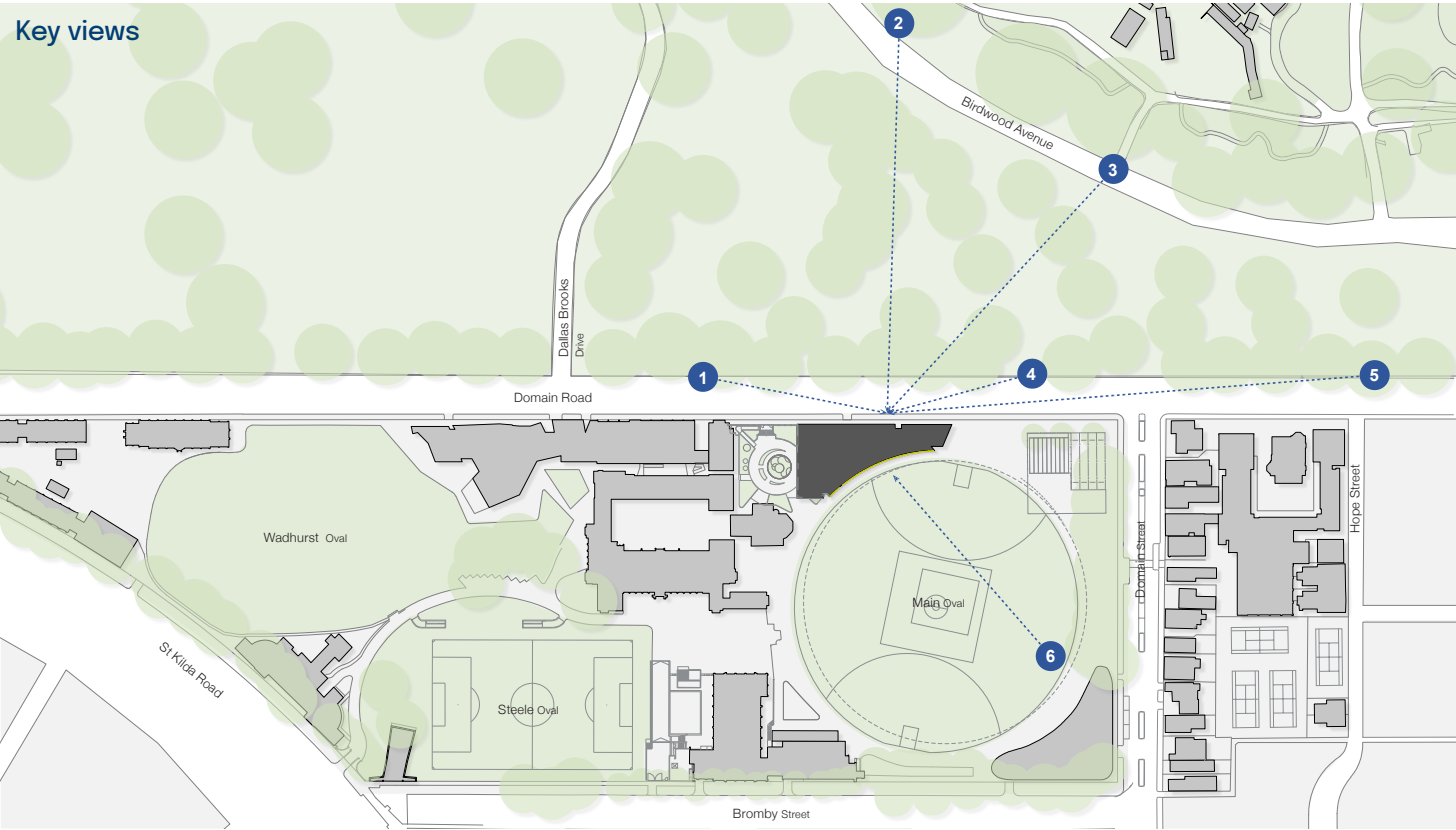
Key Views

Key views of the proposal are shown adjacent:

- 1. View looking at the site from the west, along Domain Road
- 2. View from Birdwood Avenue looking south at the site
- 3. View from the Botanic Gardens looking south at the site
- 4. View showing the appearance of the east elevation of the building, from Domain Road
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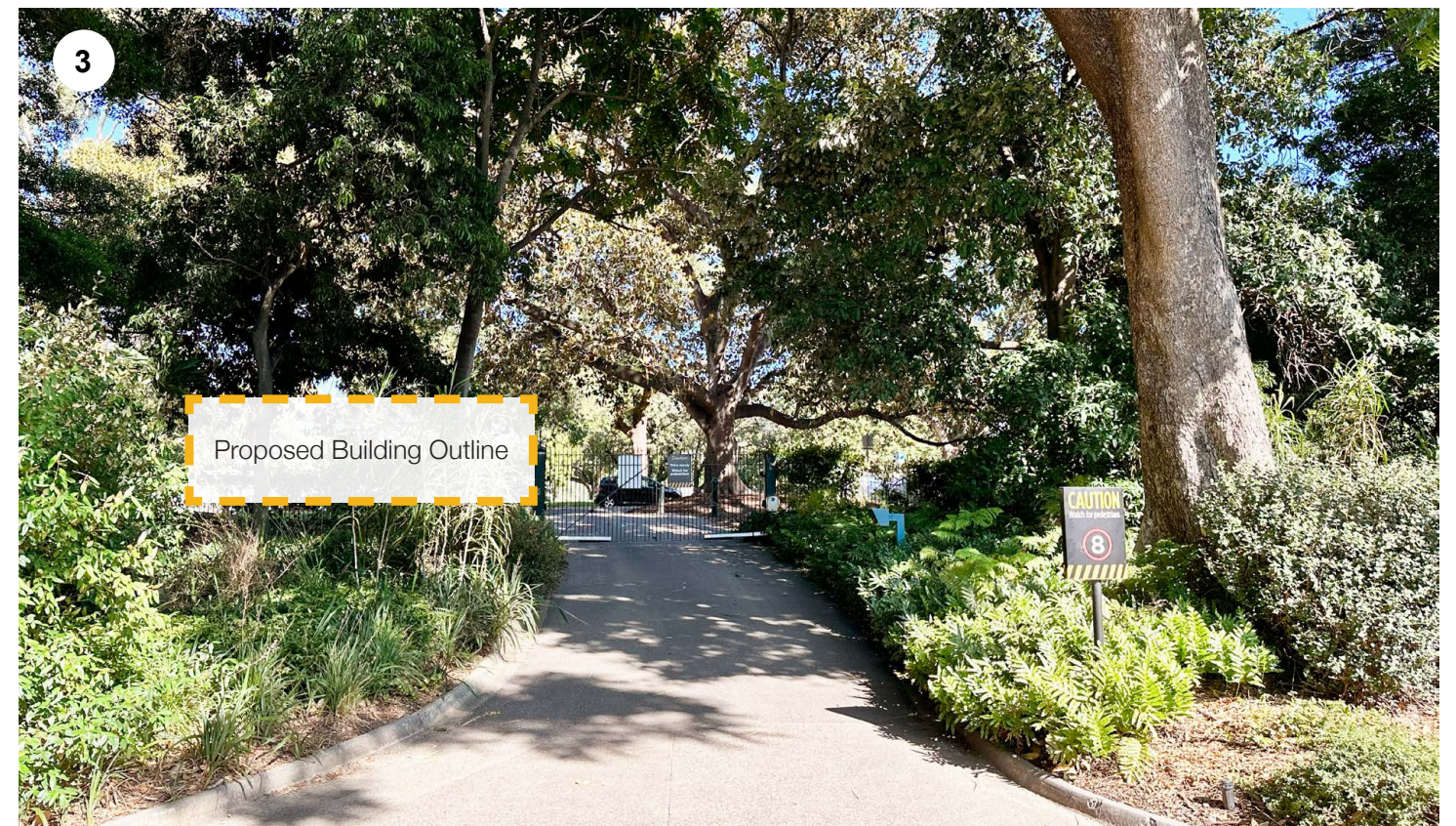
Key views





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# 3. Architectural Design Response

## External Materials Palette

The remarkable bluestone structure of the original school buildings represents the fine craftsmanship of the nineteenth century. Now two centuries later we wish to propose systems of materials more representative of the technologies and craft of our time.

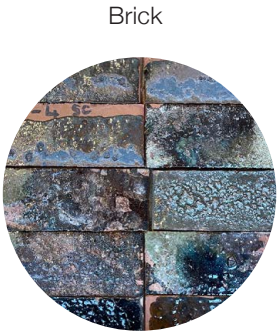
The intense firing of clay to form masonry systems is an ancient process that continues to evolve. The facade of the building takes cues from the established bluestone material palette of the historic centre of the campus. Proposed at this conceptual phase as a custom made brick with varying tones the facade blends with the tonality of the heritage Chapel Quadrangle. Its consistency and tonality applies a contemporary medium to celebrate this historic context.

These explorations suggest a shared tonality with the schools bluestone and subtle colour inspired by the lichen that is evident across many of the roofs.

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## Domain Road



Brick

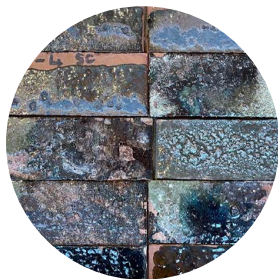


Architectural Precast



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Brick



Metal cladding



Chapel Quadrangle



Main Oval



Existing Bluestone remnant wall



Brick Herringbone Tiling  
to Match the Existing Campus

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Architectural Precast



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