



Australian  
Institute of  
Architects

# Carter Street, Lidcombe Urban Activation Precinct proposal

**Submission to Planning &  
Infrastructure NSW**

**24 April 2014**

## **SUBMISSION BY**

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## **PURPOSE**

This submission is made by the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) to Planning & Infrastructure NSW in response to the *Carter Street, Lidcombe Urban Activation Precinct* proposal.

At the time of the submission the office bearers of the NSW Chapter are: Joe Agius (President), Matthew Pullinger (Immediate Past-President), Sarah Aldridge, Nigel Bell, Shaun Carter, Jacqui Connor, Angus Hardwick, David Holm, Esteban Insausti, Chris Jenkins, Alex Kibble, Stuart Landigan, Joe Loh, Andrew Nimmo, Anthony Nolan, Kirsten Orr, Peter Sarlos, Shahe Simonian, Howard Smith, David Springett.

The Office Manager of the NSW Chapter is Roslyn Irons. This paper was prepared by Murray Brown, Policy Advisor, and the NSW Chapter Built Environment Committee for Chapter Council.

## **INFORMATION**

### ***Who is making this submission?***

- The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) is an independent voluntary subscription-based member organization with approximately 10,153 members who are bound by a Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.
- The Institute, incorporated in 1929, is one of the 96 member associations of the International Union of Architects (UIA) and is represented on the International Practice Commission.
- The Institute's New South Wales Chapter has 2,959 members, of which 1,700 are registrable architect members – representing 56% of all registered architects in NSW.

***Where does the Institute rank as a professional association?***

- At 10,153 members, the RAIA represents the largest group of non-engineer design professionals in Australia.
- Other related organisations by membership size include: The Design Institute of Australia (DIA) - 1,500 members; the Building Designers Association of Australia (BDAA) - 2,200 members; the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) 1,435 members; and the Australian Academy of Design (AAD) - 150 members.



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This submission is presented in two sections. The first looks at the strategic and urban design issues relating to urban activation precincts in general; the second examines specific characteristics of the Carter Street precinct proposal.

## **A Strategic Issues**

The Institute supports the renewal of appropriate precincts through intensification coupled with improvement and activation of the public domain. Consistent with the objectives of the new planning system, such renewal should be developed with the participation of the community and local authorities. This should be done within the context and strategic framework of the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy so that broader objectives are achieved, as well as local ones.

Public investment is a vital ingredient in precinct planning, financing and development. Our analysis shows that all successful precinct schemes – including Pyrmont, Australian Technology Park and, to a lesser extent, Green Square - have required public funding.

The urban activation precincts program should acknowledge and counteract the current tendencies towards inequity between Sydney's north and south. The Global Arc stretching from Parramatta to the airport connects the wealthier parts of the city and therefore reinforces the current equity divide between western and eastern Sydney.

The Institute proposes a Global Ring to complete the arc by encompassing Sydney's southwest. The impending construction of a new airport at Badgery's Creek will provide the economic stimulus to kick-start this process. The design and delivery of new activation precincts near the airport, or integrated into the existing centres such as Liverpool, would be another step towards the creation of the ring.

As in any other urban intensification program, the Institute considers that quality is the key. We cannot continue to intensify the city without improving it. If the intensification program is to have popular support it must be done in partnership with the community. This has already been demonstrated by the negative community reaction to the proposed new planning legislation, which was broadly supported by the Institute. We need to improve Sydney, not just intensify it, and we need to do that in areas that are in need of economic and social uplift. Our competitor cities – including Melbourne – are doing this. A bigger, better – and fairer – Sydney must be delivered.

## **Urban Design**

The principles, criteria and procedures for urban activation precincts described in the publication *DRAFT NSW Urban Activation Precincts Guideline* are sensible and appropriate. It is important therefore that these principles as well as the objectives noted above are carried across to the specific plans for each of the precincts proposed by the Department.

We understand the Department's role is to produce a structure plan, rezoning and infrastructure proposal for each precinct.

The Institute regards the public domain framework of street and block pattern to be the single most important aspect of a master plan, as it will be permanent. The street pattern must be contiguous in order that the broader precinct can be activated in all places.

The public domain should:

- include all streets;
- extend the existing street pattern and be embedded in it;
- form a fully permeable connected fine grain public street and open space system;
- extend existing long streets through the precinct, thereby increasing global, as well as local, connectivity;
- relate both the carriage way and the pavement in width and section to the height, form and typology of the proposed buildings [tall buildings require a generous carriage-way and footpath with room for awnings and trees]; and
- locate public streets between development and parks, waterfront etc.

Street blocks in denser areas should be small approximately in the range of 80 meters square up to 120 metres as a maximum length.

All urban activation precincts should form part of an existing urban area, have adequate public transport and access to shops, education and cultural facilities

There are a number of additional issues that plans for the new precincts should deliver:

- test FSR and building form so that the FSR is no more than 75% of the proposed envelopes [This will allow variety in built form];
- include "build to" lines relating to building alignment;
- create public streets adjacent to all parks and development on the water's edge in precincts such as Wentworth Point;
- deliver a component of water's edge land without parks;
- provide transport infrastructure that will underpin the precinct's development;
- achieve a reasonable amount of affordable housing; and
- propose a clear definition of the public domain - and how it relates to and supports private development.

At a macro level, plans for the activation precincts need to consider the relationship with, and connections to, neighbouring precincts and existing transport infrastructure to ensure that the overall area is big enough to provide for the variety and range of facilities to be truly urban. Knitting together existing and proposed infrastructure and facilities may help to achieve this outcome.

It is critical that the assessment process delivers design quality at the master planning and building design stages, as poor design is one of the significant factors in the community's rejection of urban intensification. A design review panel appointed to assess plans and major developments for a minimum ten year period is recommended.

Planning for the new precincts provides an opportunity to learn from the successes and mistakes of previous precinct planning exercises in areas as diverse as Kogarah, Harold Park, Pyrmont, Macquarie Park and Rhodes. The Institute recommends an 'audit' that properly assesses the lessons learnt from recently developed precincts. The new precincts should aim to improve on previous work.

In addition, planning needs to acknowledge the existing social infrastructure and provide opportunities for continuous community participation, particularly through workshops, as well as online software and social media.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

- audit previous urban activation precincts continuously to learn from and improve them [this could start with asking people that worked on them to supply a simple list of what worked, what didn't and what they would like to have done differently];
- develop urban activation precincts in areas of greatest need;
- invest in the public domain of urban activation precincts, especially public transport and connections to existing places;
- require a design excellence process to deliver quality that the community appreciates; and
- deliver affordable housing

### **B Carter Street, Lidcombe proposal**

The Institute generally supports this proposal. The most attractive feature of the precinct is its proximity to the facilities and open space of Sydney Olympic Park, particularly for residents living east of John Ian Wing Parade. This helps to mitigate the undeniable reality that the precinct occupies a wedge of land between the Park and the M4 freeway.

The urban design of the precinct is based on density and zonings; it does not take its cue from either the only natural landform of interest – Haslams Creek – or from an integrated network of public open spaces other than the streets themselves. The opportunity to enhance and complement the bush and water frontage of the Newington estate on the other side of the creek has not been explored in this proposal.

The proposal makes no attempt to acknowledge the fine grain street pattern of the rest of Lidcombe across the motorway.

The following appraisal assesses the precinct against the urban activation precinct principles:

1. *Is the precinct consistent with State, regional and/or local strategies, particularly relating to housing and employment?*

The precinct plan proposes 5,500 dwellings in the 52 hectare precinct, averaging 106 dwellings per hectare; this is a healthy step towards the Potts Point average density of 150 per hectare. The 11.4 ha area zoned for employment amounts to 22% of the total precinct land; employment in this area will be supplemented by educational, health and retail jobs in the residential areas of the precinct.

2. *Does the precinct support or maximise the use of existing and planned infrastructure, especially transport?*

Road access to the precinct is from Parramatta Road; studies will be needed to determine the likely impact of additional traffic movements generated by the new precinct. Public transport is a key problem of the new precinct, particularly its reliance on the anomalous Olympic Park Station, which lacks a fully functioning connection with the mainstream heavy rail system.

The precinct fails the 800 metre test in this regard; only the properties on the precinct's north-eastern boundary meet it, others are up to twice that distance; Lidcombe station is three times further away than Olympic Park station.

This means buses will be the only reliable means of providing a frequent public transport service.

This highlights the problem of the failure to integrate new areas into the existing street network. Sydney Olympic Park is similar to Macquarie Park in having very few access streets compared with urban areas of a similar size that were developed using a traditional integrated street system, such as the City of Sydney and Surry Hills

The M4 failed to provide 'at grade' links across the system into the fine grain of Lidcombe on the south and through to the Parramatta River on the north. It could have easily been designed to accommodate cross connections by using the existing ground levels more effectively, as proposed in Auburn Council's Urban Design Framework Study, 2004. This would have provided bus connections to Lidcombe station and the Sydney Olympic Park ferry wharf.

3. *Is the precinct important to more than one local government area and/or has support from the local council?*

The precinct is within the Auburn Council local government area; the urban activation proposal appears to have the support of the council, which has assisted the community consultation process.

4. *Is the precinct environmentally, socially and economically sustainable and viable?*

The precinct's projected density will complement the urban intensification of Sydney Olympic Park. While the M4 is a barrier separating it from the Lidcombe suburban area the increased population in the two precincts, combined with the recent development of Newington Village, will in time develop a distinctive new urban area north of the motorway with ready access to sporting facilities and the Sydney Olympic Parkland.

5. *Is the development of the precinct financially viable and consistent with market demand?*

The residential density of the precinct and its employment opportunities are likely to generate the residents and jobs needed for its future viability.