

Greener Places
Government Architect New South Wales
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Sydney NSW 2001

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Dear Sir/ Madam

Submission – Draft Greener Places Policy

Council would like to thank the Government Architect New South Wales for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft Greener Places policy. Following consideration of a detailed report on 13 February 2018, Council resolved to make this submission on the draft Greener Places policy.

Council supports the overall aim of the policy to create a healthier, liveable, more resilient and sustainable urban environment by improving community access to recreation and exercise, walking and cycling connections. The objectives of the draft policy are sound, and objectives that seek to create a strategic approach to planning for green infrastructure, encouraging early and integrated investment through statutory planning are welcomed.

Whilst the draft policy sets a framework for defining and achieving greener places for NSW, there is a need for further work to embed the principles into policy areas and decision making processes, ensuring practical implementation. The detailed actions listed under the four principles identifies work, which in most Council's cases, is or has already been undertaken. In some circumstances, Council's will have specific policies, which will contradict the draft Policy. For example, Council's Community Infrastructure Strategic Plan considers rationalising assets, which more generally will reduce the availability for public spaces that can be utilised for green infrastructure. As such further dialogue should occur with all end users, including local Councils.

The proposed statutory measures outlined in the document identify some important resources to assist local councils, including the development of manuals and toolkits, as well as model DCP clauses.

Whilst the draft policy references the draft manuals/toolkits, making them available for comment during the exhibition period would have assisted end users to understand how the policy will be implemented and managed once operational. Councils should be provided the opportunity to review and comment on the draft manuals before they are released. The draft manuals should incorporate instructions for practical inclusion of policy principles into planning documents, particularly at the local government level. They need to include the range of detail that Councils and other end users will require to interpret and implement the policy. This should include direction on:

- Bushland and waterways – riparian vegetation protection; stormwater filtration requirements/considerations; consideration of asset protection zones between green spaces and development.
- Urban Tree Canopy – consider the width of road reserves for green corridors and the need for them to be wide enough to contain trees/greenery but still be serviceable for installation/maintenance of services whether it be power, electricity, water, sewerage, or stormwater without damaging the trees or utilities.

The preparation of model DCP clauses needs to be malleable; enabling individual Councils to shape clauses to ensure they are applicable to individual LGA's. If this does not occur, we will see the same issue as currently occurs with standard instrument LEPs and model clause provisions. This has demonstrated that a one-size fits all approach can be impractical. Thus, detailed consultation with Councils and others in regard to any model DCP or DCP clauses is a necessity.

Principle 1 highlights the desire to encourage streets with a dense urban tree canopy, consisting a network of integrated parks that protect areas of environmental significance, are multi-functional (i.e. include riparian areas, stormwater infrastructure, and passive recreation opportunities) and are accessible and connected to the broader neighbourhood. It is important from Council's perspective to ensure that requirements for greening urban spaces is mandated, in some way. This is particularly important in planning for urban release areas, however, this should also consider major urban renewal areas, priority / regionally significant growth areas (as listed in Regional Plans). This will capture growth areas outside of the Sydney metro areas, such as the significant growth areas in Illawarra-Shoalhaven such as West Dapto, West Lake Illawarra, Nowra-Bomaderry URAs, etc. where it is just as important to ensure that the principles of this draft policy are being considered and achieved.

The way exempt and complying development is expanding is potentially increasing the difficult nature of achieving at least one tree in the front yard and backyard, particularly as lot sizes get smaller and smaller. Therefore improving green infrastructure in the public domain is strongly encouraged.

Furthermore, there is additional responsibility for Council in managing the increased risk from bushfire spreading into built environments through green ribbons/corridors. This is a significant issue for regional areas but additionally affects Sydney Metro areas, such as the Blue Mountains. Planting of vegetation can be a contentious topic and the additional risk of bushfire is often used to object to planting. This is something that will need to be accounted for within the draft policy.

There are concerns around future costs to regional Council's with regard to the requirements for monitoring and reporting, as well as the future ownership and ongoing maintenance costs of this green infrastructure. Unfortunately, this type of infrastructure is not cheap to deliver.

The Greater Sydney Commission is noted as having responsibility for monitoring and reporting on the Greater Sydney regional plan and district plans; however, who will be responsible for monitoring and reporting in regional areas outside Sydney. This requirement will potentially place additional costs associated with resourcing on local Councils. As such, it is suggested that the State Government provide funding for additional staffing resource. Joint Organisations may be another suitable alternative.

Additionally, there are concerns around the future ownership and ongoing maintenance of areas of green infrastructure. Often land is transferred/ dedicated to Council through the development process. Thus increasing the size and number of green spaces that Council must manage, without consideration of the impact on Council's operating budgets. This will potentially see further pressure placed on Council's resources. This includes prevention and maintenance of weeds, provision and maintenance of walking trails, maintenance of stream bank erosion and clean-up of flood prone lands.

In Shoalhaven, green spaces may also contain or include protected/threatened species, and in these circumstances, the management of these environmental values is often inherited by Council and requires specific management depending on the species. For example, reserves which include Green and Golden Bell Frog habitat cannot undergo simple maintenance without Council preparing a review of the environmental factors. Such costs are a further burden on Council's operating budget.

It is understood, the funding proposed as part of the draft policy will build on existing grant programs, Section 94 plans, and SIC. The problem is, these funding sources will only fund or contribute to the cost of delivering green infrastructure, which is where the lowest costs lie. As such, the final policy should also consider a funding model that provides some direction on the longer-term financing of both monitoring and reporting, and ongoing maintenance and management of green infrastructure, as well as initial planning and design stages.

Despite its intention to cover New South Wales, the document is currently very Sydney-centric in nature. Whilst the policy lists NSW priorities and makes mention of Illawarra Shoalhaven, the statutory reforms listed (page 46) specifically reference the Greater Sydney Region Plan, Priority Precincts, District Plans indicating that the strategy will have greater effect in metro areas, which would be a disappointing outcome for regional areas. As such, greater consideration of regional issues, challenges, needs etc. should be included in the final document.

Connected urban ecosystems of green space would clearly deliver worthwhile social, environmental and economic benefits. However, the draft policy still requires further detail in relation to the issues outlined in the above submission and how accommodate these through the planning system.

The opportunity for further dialogue on the proposed policy and its supporting documents would be beneficial and greatly appreciated to ensure that they are workable and also relevant to Regional NSW.

If you need further information about this matter, please contact Peta Brooks, Planning Environment & Development Group on (02) 4429 3228. Please quote Council's reference 31157E (D18/62379).

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gordon Clark." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gordon Clark
Strategic Planning Manager
26 February 2018