



# CITIES FOR US COMMUNIQUE

DENSITY, LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND LIVEABILITY

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DOLTONE HOUSE, HYDE PARK



SUPPORTED BY:



IN COLLABORATION WITH:





The Cities for Us Summit was organised by the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) and Shelter NSW, supported by the Committee for Sydney and Planning Institute Australia. It was delivered in collaboration with UNSW City Futures with sponsorship from Mirvac, SGCH and City West Housing.

Presenters and participants were from the State and Local Governments sectors, community housing providers, non-government organisations, the development industry, research, and planning professionals. This communique highlights the key points emerging from the Summit.

## BACKGROUND

SSROC's interest in the Summit originated from it growing increasingly concerned that rapid development was not delivering any benefit to local communities. The missing element was essentially "liveability", this intangible quality was articulated as a series of benchmarks, mapped spatially and analysed in *Liveability Indicator Mapping*<sup>1</sup>. The work highlighted that some suburbs lack key characteristics of liveability, and some are at risk of losing them.

Shelter NSW's interest in the summit stemmed from concern that, even in an environment of fast-tracked housing supply intended to relieve affordability pressures, increasing the density of housing can have adverse impacts on already disadvantaged households. Researchers considering *Equitable Density*<sup>2</sup> found that when density is not done well, vulnerable and low income households are disproportionately affected by a range of factors that other households may be better equipped to adapt to. These include a changing neighbourhood composition, loss of accessible and affordable services, and displacement.

## THEME 1 – Implementation: integration, collaboration, governance

### RAPID CHANGE

- Major emphasis on the need for collaboration, and commitment to collaboration in the future – State agencies, Greater Sydney Commission, Commonwealth and Local Governments, as well as local communities and those typically not heard.
- Dramatic and fast changes are occurring to strategic planning approaches in urban areas, with increasing neighbourhood density driving the need to accommodate this change – we need to reverse this so that the desired change drives the development.
- The shared vision of a place must be central to planning – jobs close to home, strengthening local communities, participation that engenders enthusiasm for change – our statutory controls need to implement the vision.
- Local agencies & authorities should take on more leading roles in strategic planning as well as in the delivery of change – local agencies and local communities want to realise their own shared vision, within an agreed city-wide framework.

### A FRAGILE OPPORTUNITY

- We have a great opportunity to develop our community: with housing affordability concerns driving new supply at increasing levels of density we have the chance to catch up; to create liveable, place-based cities with good amenity. Local community infrastructure – parks, libraries, playgrounds – are essential to good places, particularly in higher density neighbourhoods.
- But our community is under stress: extensive rejection of development is an expression of pain, a clear sign that the process is not working for everyone. Existing infrastructure faces increased pressure.
- Social outcomes are as important as economic ones, and we now have a starting point for achieving them with the Greater Sydney Commission and larger Local Government Areas. As well as investment, we need active participation in genuine processes, consensus and long-term partnerships built on trust; and champions for this approach to change, to help maintain its focus and impetus.

1 Liveability Indicator Mapping, Final Report, SGS Economics and Planning, February 2017.

Available: [www.ssroc.nsw.gov.au/publications](http://www.ssroc.nsw.gov.au/publications)

2 Shelter Brief 61: Equitable Density – the place for lower income and disadvantaged households in a dense city at the Building, Neighbourhood and Metropolitan Scales, July 2017. Available: <https://shelternsw.org.au/publications/urban-policy-%26-planning>



## THEME 2 – Who pays, who benefits?

### FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE IS ESSENTIAL

- We need a way to fund local community infrastructure, so that we can balance economic and social outcomes with commercial outcomes, without negatively affecting housing supply.
- Local Government's fiscal power is severely limited, with capped rates, a restricted and opaque local contributions regime, and ad hoc Voluntary Planning Agreements. There is no clear path for using these to implement the District Plans, and they send no clear price signal to investors. The current approach is complicated and lacks consistency, falling far short of what is needed.
- To successfully fund necessary community infrastructure, we need good place-based strategic planning to develop a justification that is costed, and the financial feasibility demonstrated. Local communities need to benefit from growth through improved amenity.
- Councils are critical to local development. We need robust local structures and authorities. Councils could lead Local Renewal Agencies, and work with a Sydney Metropolitan Authority.

### CONFIDENCE AND FAIRNESS IN FUNDING MECHANISMS

- Inclusionary zoning for affordable housing is mandatory in some places – why not for all development? Why limit SEPP 70 to just a few Councils? Alternatives are beneficiary pays, impact mitigation, value sharing and licensing fees.
- Current arrangements are not transparent, consistent or comprehensive: this needs to change. Whichever mechanism is used, it must be transparent, consistent and applied to all development, not limited to particular precincts. Industry and the community need certainty.
- Like affordable housing, funding for local infrastructure to make great and liveable places will fall through the gaps without such funding mechanisms being made available to council for a broader range of purposes.

## THEME 3 – who wins, who loses?

### A NEW NARRATIVE TO REPLACE THE OLD WAYS

- The new challenge of growing our city quickly and fairly requires a new narrative, listening to all different voices, as everyone has different needs and expectations of amenity. This means a two-way narrative, not the “tick-the-consultation-box” approach that so many communities have experienced.
- Build trust. Seek a social licence. Build confidence that the result has not been decided, that voices will be heard, and the planning process will respond. Make decisions locally wherever possible, with the community's active participation.
- Recognise and manage displacement and its flow-on effects that can destroy an existing community. Our current approach is transferring the risks of urban development to the most vulnerable, and this must stop. Offer existing residents the opportunity to rent or buy into lower cost housing in new development, and ensure affordable rental housing is always produced as part of an urban renewal project.

### ENGAGEMENT REQUIRES TRUST AND RESPECT ON ALL SIDES

- Poor engagement is currently rife. Communities want to, and should, set agendas for change. Urban redevelopment without a community's support risks destroying that community and all the social benefits that go with it.
- Confidence is destroyed when promises are not delivered: we are not always seeing the design excellence that should be delivered. Community confidence needs to be restored before there will be trust and respect.
- There will be winners and losers. All views are valid and tell us a great deal about expectations and pain. All concerns must be respected.
- Plans that will create a good city must combine liveability and productivity while actively working to reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience.



## THE FUTURE

All levels of government work together with real participation and influence from local communities to achieve development that delivers a shared vision, and that benefits existing and well as new residents. The whole process is governed by an enabling set of statutory controls.

Local community infrastructure is funded through a new, universal and transparent mechanism that shares the increase in value created through changes in zoning and density controls. Developer risk continues to be rewarded, but it also delivers for all. Councils lead Local Renewal Agencies, and Sydney Metropolitan Authority enables them to deliver.

Affordable rental housing is treated as a component of community infrastructure as part of good place – based planning and managing the inevitable displacement of vulnerable households that arise from rapid redevelopment processes. Along with other essential community infrastructure – parks, libraries and playgrounds – it will help restore trust and keep our communities as inclusive, welcoming places to live.

Plans are collaboratively developed between trusted partners in government, community and industry. They are delivered to a high standard of design excellence, with housing to meet multiple different needs, a strong local economy, community identity and healthy environment.

## THE PATH

- Move to establish a Growth Infrastructure Compact by District and key Precincts between the Greater Sydney Commission, Infrastructure NSW, Department of Planning and Environment and Sydney councils. This long-term partnership would assure councils access to a dedicated funding mechanism geared to their housing supply targets to make sure local community infrastructure keeps pace with growth. With understanding across all parties of the elements needed to make communities liveable, funding mechanisms could be tailored to ensure the necessary investment is in fact delivered.
- Seek transparent, holistic reform to local and state development contributions and VPA regimes – to both ensure that contributions for a place are predictable and that they reflect the different purposes that they serve (i.e. value capture, inclusionary requirements, meeting demands for infrastructure and impact mitigation).
- Strategically extend SEPP 70 to all Sydney councils to consistently and more fairly meet Sydney's pressing problem of housing unaffordability. A comprehensive, transparent and streamlined approach will ensure that value sharing includes renters, mitigates risks to the most vulnerable residents and provides consistency and certainty to investors, development proponents and assessment bodies.
- Pilot Local Renewal Agencies in neighbourhoods undergoing intensive redevelopment, not currently being led by a State agency. These council led pilots would endeavour to deliver place sensitive models characterised by grassroots collaboration and strong community engagement.



# CITIES FOR US

INCLUSIVENESS. AFFORDABILITY. ENGAGEMENT. SUBSIDIARITY. VALUE-SHARING.