

Submission

Cobar Shire Draft Local Strategic Planning Statement



Introduction

Shelter NSW appreciates the opportunity to comment on Cobar Shire Draft Local Strategic Planning Statement (February 2020). We congratulate Council on its draft plan and support many of Actions listed for Council to meet the Far West Regional Plan direction and to achieve its vision.

As the peak body for housing policy in NSW, Shelter NSW is making submissions on all draft statements in regional councils expecting significant residential growth. The LSPS will build a bridge between state and local government plans for land use which makes it a key opportunity to promote dialogue about creating a better housing system. The purpose of this submission is to ensure that the LSPS process helps to create a secure home for all.

We have identified a number of practical policy and planning mechanisms that could be used to either support or strengthen the final LSPS in its aim to deliver both affordable and more diverse housing options.

Our submission is structured in four parts. We have provided an overview of Shelter NSW's role as the state's peak body for housing policy advocacy; a summary of the key messages we heard throughout our recent consultation sessions across NSW to develop a new vision for the future of our housing system; an overview of the critical housing Actions in the draft LSPS with comments; and finally, we make several recommendations seeking endorsement from the council to be included as Actions for the final LSPS.

About Shelter NSW

Shelter NSW is the state peak body for housing policy advocacy. Established in 1975, we represent broad interests across the housing system instead of a specific industry or sector view. Our diverse network of partners includes organisations and individuals that share our vision of a secure home for all. We pursue this vision through critical engagement with policy and by providing thought leadership.

As an independent non-profit organisation, we advocate for systemic housing policy reform and provide advice on policy and legislation. In doing so, we research the causes of inequity within the NSW housing system and promote solutions that ensure better housing outcomes for households on lower incomes. We then leverage this expertise to engage and collaborate with the sector to work towards an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable housing system.

Key messages from Shelter NSW's visioning sessions

In 2019, Shelter NSW held seven workshops across regional NSW and Greater Sydney to develop a shared vision for a better housing system. Close to 200 community members spoke at these sessions about the problems they see as facing the housing system and the actions they want to see to address them. Here is a summary of their insights that are relevant to all levels of Government.

1. Make plans that emphasise housing as a home, not just an investment

The concept of 'home' should be at the core of the housing policy. It underpins health, social connections and participation in work and society. However, speculative investment in housing and the standard model of development is not delivering housing people need or can afford. The Government needs to talk with communities about these problems and discuss solutions. Once they do, they should make a plan for specific regions that addresses the issues they can control and work with other levels of Government on ones they cannot.

2. Build places and communities, not just houses and towers

New housing should be located close to jobs and services and improve the quality of existing neighbourhoods. Well-connected and well-designed homes make it easy for people to get around and transition between various stages of life. However, developers seem to be delivering either car-dependent sprawl or low-quality density. Both result in different kinds of congestion and unpleasant environments. They need to find a middle ground to win community support. Government authorities can help them do so through its planning, support for innovative designs and investment in infrastructure.

3. Provide diverse housing that everyone can afford, not just high-income earners

The housing system should be as diverse as the community to give people the options they need. Ageing households can then downsize, and young people can become independent. Women can then leave abusive relationships, and First Nations people can live on Country. Students can then focus on their education, and key workers can live in their communities. Most important, people experiencing homelessness can find a secure home. To provide these options, governments need to invest in social and affordable housing as well as create more diversity in the housing market.

4. Make renting a genuine alternative to ownership, not just a transition phase

Tenants should be able to expect security and a high level of service when they rent their home. This protection is especially true now that homeownership is in decline. However, the possibility of no-grounds evictions makes it hard for tenants to put down roots or request repairs. Equally, social housing has become seen as a temporary safety net which is increasingly rationed and run-down. Governments need to ensure rental housing is both secure and high quality. It can do so by amending laws and policies that support long-term renters and providers of suitable housing options.

5. Use housing policy to address climate change, not exacerbate it

Our built environment should help us transition to a zero-carbon economy. Housing design and construction techniques can reduce our energy consumption and extraction of new resources. So too can planning and subdivision protect our homes from natural hazards and limit our reliance on cars and lifts. Trees can cool our streets and infrastructure can make them walkable. All of this improves our health and saves us money. Governments need to use all of these tools to prevent and avoid the worst effects of climate change which we are just starting to see and feel.

Comments on housing-related Actions

Shelter NSW appreciates that the council’s Draft LSPS aims to take into consideration long-term trends in the local housing system and identify what is essential in terms of future community needs. We also note the efforts made to identify and mitigate any negative trends concerning recreation, employment, housing, and goods and services provision.

It is clear that although Cobar Shire has a small population, it has many housing-related needs that are unmet: the LGA has a high percentage of renters despite higher than average rental costs for a rural area; people are living in overcrowded housing conditions; there is limited public housing stock for low-income residents; a lack of suitable affordable housing for young people; and a small percentage of the population identify as being homeless or needing housing assistance.¹

The following table outlines the proposed actions in the LSPS related to improving both the affordability and diversity of dwelling types in the LGA, and housing choice for local residents. It highlights any proposed housing-related Actions and provides additional feedback on ways to support or strengthen them. In the case that our suggestions go beyond the direct control of the council, we are happy to collaborate on any future work in our capacity as the state’s peak body for housing advocacy.

Table – Council Proposed Strategic Actions & Shelter NSW Comments
Proposed Strategic Outcome - Sustainably manage residential development
<p>Shelter NSW Comments for Consideration by the Council</p> <p>We believe the council should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. consider ways to deliver more housing diversity by replacing all R2 Low-Density Residential Zone with R1 General Residential zone across the whole LGA, as this would support opportunities for different housing options to be delivered more broadly. 2. consider measures to support older residents to age in place through the delivery of the SEPP - Housing for Seniors or People with a Disability (2004). Any such housing should be linked to town centres and essential services. 3. work with public, community, and Aboriginal housing providers to facilitate the delivery of new affordable housing options. 4. also work with public, community and Aboriginal housing providers to ensure dwellings are adequately maintained to improve the survivability of structures vulnerable to bushfires or drought. This work should seek to actively integrate the knowledge and experience of local Indigenous communities, in recognition of the need for sustainability and self-determination in any land management undertaken within the LGA.

¹ Note: Medium rent in Cobar is \$300 per week while the median sale price is only 220,000 (2020)

Sources:

Cobar Weekly. There’s more to homelessness than sleeping rough. 16th of August 2017.

<https://cobarweekly.com.au/theres-more-to-homelessness-than-sleeping-rough/>

Parliament of NSW Legislative Council Parliamentary Inquiry into Social, Public and Affordable Housing Submission by the Housing Alliance of NSW community housing providers Armidale, Deniliquin, Lismore and Orange. 28 February 2014

<http://static1.squarespace.com/static/56a56b4a05f8e21e9555eb4e/t/577e3a309f74568b965d866d/1467890240157/Alliance+2014.pdf>

5. consider a requirement in the council's DCP that every new residential dwelling includes a non-plastic water tank.
6. consider developing a local housing strategy that takes into consideration ways to address the current unmet housing needs outlined above.

Proposed Strategic Outcome - Deliver long-term water security

Shelter NSW Comments for Consideration by Council

Shelter NSW supports this Action and would encourage the council to consider the following initiatives:

1. undertaking a consultation with public, community, and Aboriginal housing providers to look at water efficiency initiatives aimed at mitigating intense weather events,
2. encouraging any new residential development to be 'clustered housing' with an open corridor design between houses, as opposed to a scattered model (as the clustering of dwellings provides better protection through consolidated vegetation management practices).
3. working with public, community and Aboriginal housing providers to ensure dwellings are adequately maintained to improve the survivability of structures in time in terms of bush fires or drought.
4. working to ensure that Indigenous communities have appropriate access to water, water systems, and other natural assets in respect of the community's traditional sovereignty and land-rights.

Proposed Strategic Outcome- Respect and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage assets

Shelter NSW Comments for Consideration by Council

- Shelter NSW would like to see a commitment by Council to work with the Local Aboriginal Land Council on the development of a strategic plan aimed at supporting the sustainable and self-determined delivery of additional housing opportunities for their landholders. We note that the development of LALC land should always be driven by the needs and priorities of the LALC and the community.

Thank you

Shelter NSW appreciates the opportunity to comment on Cobar Shire's Draft Local Strategic Planning Statement (2020). We hope that the comments and insights we have provided bring some value to the council's strategic planning work in the housing policy space. We are also happy to engage with the council on the issues raised in our submission. If you wish to discuss our submission in more detail, please contact Stacey Miers on 0410 633 272 or by email at stacey@shelternsw.org.au.

Sincerely Yours,

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