

Shelter NSW Submission

Walgett Shire Council Draft Local Strategic Planning Strategy



Introduction

Shelter NSW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Walgett Shire Council Draft Local Strategic Planning Strategy (LSPS). We congratulate Council on the high standard of its draft plan, and we support many of the proposed Actions outlined which aim to deliver both housing choice and affordability.

From Shelter NSW's perspective, we see the LSPS process as an opportunity to promote dialogue about ways to deliver better housing outcomes for all NSW residents. Having reviewed the Walgett Shire Council Draft LSPS, we have provided comments/recommendations and practical policy suggestions that we feel might support or strengthen the housing-related outcomes in your policy documents.

Our submission also provides an overview of Shelter NSW's role as a state peak body in the housing policy and advocacy space, and a summary of the key messages we heard during our recent consultation sessions across NSW about what communities see as a desirable housing system. From this, we worked with communities to develop a new vision for a future housing platform.

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 rather than those of a specific industry or sector. 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 wide 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 are not delivering housing that 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. Government authorities can help achieve this through 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. This system would support ageing households with the opportunity to downsize, and young people with the possibilities to 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 importantly, people experiencing or at risk of 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.

Shelter NSW Comments on Draft Walgett Shire Council Local Strategic Planning Strategy

Detached homes dominate the existing housing stock in many major regional centres across NSW. A significant percentage of these are occupied by ‘empty nesters’, many of whom have reached retirement age. As evident in the 2016 census data, Walgett LGA has around 3% of its population aged 64 and over, making this reality highly relevant.

Regional areas with significant Aboriginal communities’ experience overcrowding, as identified in the Murdi Paaki Regional Plan (2016-p80). It pointed out that 14.1% of Aboriginal persons aged 15 and over living in remote communities’ experience overcrowding at home, and its seen as a problematic stress factor. Overcrowding can have particular impacts on broader social and educational outcomes. It can make it challenging to ensure the home is, happy or safe for the primary tenants. All of the factors outlined above can lead to undesirable social and community outcomes, with the related housing issues potentially leading to population decline.

As evident in the data, there is often a mismatch between housing supply and need within the different population groups in many regional centres. Delivering homes that provide more choice is a key solution to mitigating the adverse effect associated with these longer-term population characteristics into the future.

The following Table outlines the proposed strategic actions in Walgett Shire Council’s LSPS related to sustainability, housing choice and affordability. It provides feedback on ways to support or strengthen some of the proposed Actions outlines in the LSPS from Shelter NSW. In the situation where Shelter NSW suggestions go beyond the direct control of Council, we are happy to collaborate with the Council in any future advocacy-based actions.



**Shelter NSW Comments on Housing Related Issues
in the Walgett Shire Council Draft Local Strategic Planning Strategy**

Shelter NSW Supports Council's Strategic Actions:

Encourage consolidation of development and growth to take place within the urban areas of Walgett, Lightning Ridge and Collarenebri,
 Ensure housing is in urban centres and does not extend into mining areas,
 Protect existing residential amenity and provision of housing choice,
 Ensure any rural residential development is located within close proximity to existing district centres in accordance with the Rural Residential Strategy (2019),
 Encourage alternative and/or additional use of vacant housing stock where residential amenity is not compromised.

Ways to Encourage the development of a variety of housing types near town centre locations to cater to different needs of households; particularly rural residential, medium-density housing and accommodation for older people.

Shelter NSW Recommendation:

The following recommendation is based on the capacity of the General Residential (R1) Zones and Medium Density Residential (R3) Zone to provide more housing choice in regional areas dominated by detached dwellings. It aims to support the delivery of sustainable regional communities into the future and to ensure that new residential developments are based on clustering dwelling patterns. This situation will provide better sustainability outcomes through consolidated vegetation, reduced bushfire impacts and delivery of better water management practices.

In addition to the sustainability benefits associated with the recommendation, it can support the delivery of different housing options in town centres, better support the economic base of a small town and address the needs of both younger and older single residents to live in smaller dwellings connected to town centres.

We suggest that the Council consider the following;

Replacing its Low-Density Residential (RU5) Village and Large Lot Residential (R5) zones with General Residential (R1), and Medium Density Residential (R3) zones, in locations connected to essential infrastructures such as town centres, education hubs, medical facilities and transport hubs.

That any new residential release area be based on the General Residential (R1) zones and not be dominated by Low-Density large lot land zones.



A local character assessment framework should also be undertaken so that residential developments reflect and are compatible with many of the established street characteristics and surrounding elements of existing villages or town centres.

Shelter NSW supports Council's proposed LSPS Action to analyse and update data related to housing choice and affordability. This system would provide precise data on what types of homes are being delivered and would enable the Council to respond proactively to the needs of its communities.

We would encourage the Council to support the recognition that affordable housing (including public and community housing) is classified as essential infrastructure in future planning documents (This definition is from the Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019).

Council's Strategic Actions:

Protect Aboriginal housing estates,
Support the delivery of social housing outcomes in the Murdi Paaki region,
Build a resilient community,
Collaborate with Aboriginal communities to respect, protect and celebrate Aboriginal communities.

Shelter NSW Recommendation - support the delivery of housing opportunities for Aboriginal communities that aim to address the problem of overcrowding and to improve housing design outcomes that better address the social and cultural aspects of a home for Aboriginal people

The ongoing problems with, and potential solutions to, overcrowding in Aboriginal housing were explored in a presentation; "Addressing the impacts of overcrowding through Design Solutions unexpected outcomes, and lessons learnt", by Angela Pitts, at the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Conference (September 2019). Pitts' case study found that a positive way to alleviate the impact of overcrowding was through culturally specific housing design based on the following recommendations:

Include ways to expand and close off the edges of houses to provide additional outdoor areas,
Consider housing design layouts that support both cooling and heating functions across the building layout,
Ensure that health-related hardware such as additional toilets, bathroom facilities and laundries are included,
Provide additional sleeping and storage areas in the outside areas.

Shelter NSW suggests that, as part of Council's partnership work with Murdi Paaki, they explore the delivery of alternative affordable housing options that address many of the design issues outlined above.



Shelter NSW would like to see Council commit to working with the Local Aboriginal Land Councils on the development of a strategic plan for their landholders, aimed at supporting the delivery of additional housing opportunities and appropriate design outcomes. This work can be based on the Aboriginal Land Framework (introduced by the NSW Planning System in 2019) to work cooperatively with Walgett LALC to 1) rezone LALC land so that it can be used for additional social housing 2) support building of granny flat accommodation on existing social housing lots and more broadly 3) encourage construction of additional Aboriginal social housing stock so that underutilisation of existing housing and essential service can be addressed.

For older Aboriginal people, particularly those living in smaller, more isolated communities, access to home modification services can enable them to stay at home and live independently. Shelter NSW would like Council to work with the Department of Communities and Justice and Aboriginal Housing Organisation to ensure dwellings are accessible and designed so that older residents can age in place.

Whilst keeping elders in their homes for longer is good for the individual Elder, they are often “empty nesters”, occupying large homes which could of course be better utilised. Support to relocate elders to smaller, better designed dwellings can free up larger homes for other families and take pressure off overcrowded dwellings. Shelter NSW strongly advocates for the support of these types of initiatives.

Thank you

Shelter NSW appreciates the opportunity to comment on Walgett Shire Council’s Draft Local Strategic Planning Strategy. We hope that the comments and insights we have provided bring some value to Councils strategic planning work in the housing policy space. We are also happy to engage with 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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