

Shelter NSW submission to the Department of Planning, housing, and Infrastructure on the Bellambi Estate

A secure home for all

16 March 2026



1. About Shelter NSW

Shelter NSW has been operating since 1975 as the State’s peak housing policy and advocacy body. Our vision is to create a sustainable housing system that provides a secure home for all. We are especially concerned for low-income households who struggle to afford good quality and well-located housing. We provide systemic advocacy and advice on policy and legislation for the whole NSW housing system. We are a member-based organisation; representing organisations and individuals committed to housing justice, from community housing providers, specialist homelessness services and related peak bodies, to community groups, policy professionals, academics and social housing tenants.

2. Scope of our submission

This submission will address some specific elements of the proposed rezoning controls and also address broader issues to support the maximum social and economic benefit from the redevelopment of the public asset known as the Bellambi Estate.

3. Key findings

Estate Renewal: A Complex and Lengthy Process Impacted by a scarcity of affordable rental housing

Shelter NSW commissioned Dr Gary Cox to undertake research on best practice models on estate renewal: “One Move Only: Practice Lessons from Social and Public Housing Estate Renewal in the UK (February 2024)” . This looked at best practice guidelines primarily on large public housing estates in the UK. The Cox/Shelter report identified not just the needs of existing estate’s residents but the needs of future tenants in terms of unit size, accessibility requirements, permeability and sustainability. It points out that the process should start with a baseline

assessment, a clear understanding of what future properties will need to be re-provided. It also indicated that best practice is underpinned by a phased redevelopment system of one move only for existing tenants. In this situation, existing social housing tenants can be rehoused through staged redevelopment and local connections can be maintained.

Shelter NSW also undertook a joint research project with Dr Laura Wynne & Dr Alistair Sisson from the University of Wollongong on Public Housing Renewal in the Illawarra: Understanding the risks of tenant displacement (October 2021). Their research highlighted the impacts of relocations; the scarcity of affordable housing across the Illawarra.

This scarcity of affordable housing in the Illawarra was further validated in Shelter NSW, Regional Housing Need Report (Regional Australia Institute, February 2023) findings, which placed Wollongong Local Government Area (LGA) in the top ten high need housing areas with a high percentage of people on the social housing waitlist compared with other NSW LGAs.

Bellambi estate as a part of a major 20-year renewal plan

The Bellambi estate is as part of a major 20-year renewal plan. The State-Assessed Rezoning Proposal - Bellambi Renewal Project prepared by FPD Planning for Homes NSW (November 2025) report says the aim of the project is to replace ageing social housing stock with modern mix of homes. In terms of aging stock, the homes on the estate were built in the 70s and 80s. While the physical lifespan of housing stock ranges from 40 to 60 years, and can be significantly longer with proper care and maintenance, the existing dwelling are only 30 years old which raises question regarding an aging stock argument.

Currently, there are around 1,816 dwellings in the broader suburb of Bellambi, and around 645 dwellings in public ownership on the Bellambi Estate. This rezoning proposal aims to deliver 2,500 new homes with a 30% committed to be delivered as social housing (to replace the ageing stock). This should see around 750 new social

housing dwellings, not between 600 to 700 replacement dwellings as stated in the report. If the social housing component was a third it would be closer to 825 dwellings. We raise this matter because what we know from historical practise is that vague percentages on these social/public housing redevelopment projects have not always delivered any substantial new social homes, often struggling to even replace the lost publicly owned dwellings as part of the redevelopment. The other concern is that these developments result in a loss in bedroom number. Developers often replace existing 2- and 3-bedroom dwelling with studio and one-bedroom apartments. So, it looks like they have replaced the lost stock but this is not the case, resulting in a disproportional number of small units that no longer meet the needs of existing tenants in terms of future allocation opportunities.

We take the position that the redevelopment of public assets should at the very least deliver a fifty percent increase in the existing affordable dwellings. In addition, that the social and affordable housing stock should include a mix of dwellings and bedroom types.

The Wollongong Local Housing Strategy commits to working with Homes NSW on estate renewal with the aim of increasing social housing and maintaining at least 7.5% proportion of social housing across the LGA. The Council supports the delivery of well-designed social housing, connected to infrastructure and service that also support Wollongong's growing population. It's important to recognise that the Bellambi estate has strong connectivity to public Transport (trains and buses). This makes it a key location in the delivery of affordable housing for key workers on top of the 30% social housing reequipments .

Wollongong City Council, Affordable Housing Council Policy: (2024) and Wollongong City Council, Affordable Housing Procedure (2024) also states that any residential rezoning that increases density, should include a minimum 10% of the estimated dwellings to be dedicated for affordable rental housing in perpetuity. In line with this we take the position that the redevelopment of an existing public housing estate should support the delivery of at least 20% affordable housing for key workers on top of the 30% social housing reequipments.

We support the inclusions of an aim to deliver 20% affordable housing and 30% social housing as part of the rezoning proposal. This would in turn help reinforced access to funds through the 'Housing Australia Future Fund' program.

4. Recommended Actions

- The rezoning proposal commits to 30% social and 20% affordable as a principal aim in the redevelopment proposal
- That the affordable housing be in perpetuity and with rents based on household income as opposed to 20% below market
- That the precinct redesign considers housing diversity and adaptability needs
- That the precinct redesign ensures that new social and affordable dwellings can accommodate large family sizes and changing circumstances in terms of bedroom numbers
- That the redevelopment be underpinned by a phased redevelopment plan and a system of one move only for existing tenants, to ensure that existing tenants can be rehoused and maintain their local connections.

Thank you for reviewing our submission

Shelter NSW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Bellambi Estate. We hope that the comments and insights we have provided will bring application value.

If you wish to discuss our submission in more detail, please contact us at admin@shelternsw.org.au.