



Review of the NSW Planning System Issues Paper *The way ahead for planning in NSW*

March 2012

Never Stand Still

Faculty of Built Environment

Healthy Built Environments Program



THE HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS PROGRAM

Summary

The Healthy Built Environments Program (HBEP) at the University of NSW appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the second phase of the NSW Planning System Review. This builds on and augments our submission to the first phase of the NSW Planning System Review. Details about the HBEP can be found in that submission as well as on our web site: <http://www.be.unsw.edu.au/programmes/healthy-built-environments-program/about>

In summary, our submission makes the following key points:

1. Health and wellbeing must be a key objective of the new NSW Planning System. Health underpins the State's economic productivity, the liveability of its neighbourhoods, suburbs, regional towns and cities, as well as the future sustainability of our environment.
2. The new NSW Planning System must respond to the complexity and inter-related nature of the challenges that face planners working in the 21st Century. Out-dated silo thinking and acting must shift. The new Planning System must recognise the pivotal role that the planning legislation plays in addressing inter-relationships with other commonwealth, state and local legislation.
3. Evidence based policy making must underpin the new Planning System at every level of strategic and statutory plan making. The research evidence for embracing health in the new Planning System is compelling.
4. A hierarchy of instruments elaborating on the principles and qualities that support health and wellbeing should be prepared under the new planning system.
5. Communities must have confidence in the planning system – arguably, this is more important than ever given the complex and inter-related challenges that face us in the 21st Century.

An economically productive state with liveable neighbourhoods, suburbs, regional towns and cities, situated within a sustainable environment, can only be achieved if health is an underpinning foundation of the NSW Planning System. Given our knowledge base, ongoing research and governance structures, NSW can establish and realise this vision for the State and its community. A new NSW Planning System gives us this opportunity.

The HBEP is happy to expand on the issues in this submission. Contact Associate Professor Susan Thompson, Director, Healthy Built Environments Program, for any clarification or further information. Email: s.thompson@unsw.edu.au; Phone: 9385 4395.

This submission was informed by a joint forum hosted by the NSW Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL) and the HBEP on 31 January 2012. See Appendix One for the agencies who attended this forum. The HBEP submission was further informed by the PCAL submission to the NSW Planning Review as an outcome of that forum.

Responses to Specific Questions in the Issues Paper

Question A1: *What should the objectives of new planning legislation be?*

(Related questions: A2; B2; B3; B4; B5)

Health and wellbeing must be a key objective of the new NSW Planning System. This is consistent with the Commonwealth of Australia's key planning objectives. Infrastructure Australia in its 'State of Australian Cities Report'¹ highlights that 'the design of urban environments can contribute to the health and wellbeing of communities by supporting active living, physical activity through walking, cycling and using public transport and opportunities for social interaction'. COAG's National Criteria for capital city strategic planning systems includes addressing health, liveability and community wellbeing².

At the NSW State level there is acknowledgement of public health priorities and support for an enhanced role for the Planning System in the NSW Government's State Plan 'NSW 2021'. This includes targets such as reducing population obesity levels and increased active travel. The NSW State Plan is further supported by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure's Active Living Position Paper, acknowledging the role of supportive environments³.

The HBEP has undertaken a systematic and comprehensive review of the literature on health and the built environment⁴. This review highlights the growing body of evidence showing how the Planning System is crucial in facilitating supportive physical and social environments for health and wellbeing.

Health underpins the State's economic productivity, the liveability of its neighbourhoods, suburbs, regional towns and cities, as well as the future sustainability of our environment. The new Planning System must have a specific objective related to health.

¹ Major Cities Unit (2010), *State of Australian Cities*, Major Cities Unit, Infrastructure Australia, Commonwealth of Australia. Available at: www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/mcu.aspx

² *Council of Australian Governments Communiqué from meeting 7 December 2009*

³ NSW Department of Planning Position Statement – Planning for Active Living, 2010

⁴ Kent J; Thompson SM and Jalaludin B (2011) *Healthy Built Environments: A review of the literature*, Sydney: Healthy Built Environments Program, City Futures Research Centre, UNSW

Question A8. How should implementation of strategic plans be facilitated?

(Related questions: A7; C14; C15; C16; C34)

Strategic planning needs to be facilitated through the hierarchy of plans already enabled by the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. This is a strong aspect of the existing legislation and needs to be strengthened. Health must be incorporated in each plan – from the State through regional, local and precinct levels – so that the strategic detail is appropriately and clearly translated into practice. The interconnections between the different levels of plans needs to be better incorporated throughout the plans that constitute the Planning System:

- An overarching State Plan
- State level policies, such as State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs)
- Regional, metropolitan and sub-regional strategies that embrace complex cross-border issues
- Local environmental plans (LEPs)
- Locality based development control plans (DCPs).

Existing coverage of health related matters should be reinforced as appropriate for each level of plan. For example, provisions for environments that support walking and active transport; protection of prime agricultural land; provision of quality green open space in sufficient amounts; edible urban landscapes. It is also important to note that a new Planning System has to better integrate and interconnect different levels of plans so that the complexities of contemporary environments and communities are properly managed. This is of particular importance for health given the integrated and interconnected nature of the built environment, healthy communities and environmentally sustainable places. Strategic plans in one locality or at different levels of plan making, have implications for multiple areas of planning, which in turn have significant health and environmental impacts. A new Planning System for NSW has to grapple with the complex integrated and interconnected realities of the 21st Century for the health and wellbeing of future generations.

Question B6: *Are the current definitions in the Act still relevant or do they need updating?*

(Related questions: B9; C5; C4)

Definitions are an essential element of a planning system. They need to be universally accepted and clearly articulated. The following definitions are recommended to support the inclusion of health as an objective of the new NSW Planning System:

- Health: a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity⁵
- Healthy Design: the aesthetic, physical and functional qualities of the built environment (relating to both land use patterns and the transportation system) that are supportive of human health as part of everyday living⁶
- Healthy Planning: the systematic integration of healthy design into the planning system: legislation, controls, policies, guidelines and assessment of development proposals
- Public interest: refers to when the wellbeing of the general population is at stake. Any definition of public interest needs to include the health and wellbeing of the general population.

Question C9: *What information and data should be used when preparing plans?*

(Related question: F8)

Evidence based policy making must underpin the new Planning System at every level of strategic and statutory plan making. The research evidence for embracing health in the new Planning System is compelling. As a research and education centre working in the area of the built environment and health, the HBEP is gathering and generating this evidence for an Australian audience.

⁵ WHO, 1946

⁶ Kent J; Thompson SM and Jalaludin B (2011) *Healthy Built Environments: A review of the literature*, Sydney: Healthy Built Environments Program, City Futures Research Centre, UNSW

The HBEP Literature Review is our most recent and comprehensive publication on the evidence that links the built environment and health⁷. This document presents the key research evidence for policy makers that demonstrates how the built environment supports human health as part of everyday living. Three key built environment domains that support human health are proposed:

1. The Built Environment and Getting People Active
2. The Built Environment and Connecting and Strengthening Communities
3. The Built Environment and Providing Healthy Food Options.

These built environment domains address three of the major risk factors for contemporary chronic disease - physical inactivity, social isolation and obesity.

While academically rigorous and meticulously referenced, the Review is written in plain English and has different examples of policy throughout. These policy examples directly relate to the research evidence. The Review is presented with illustrative images and includes a comprehensive glossary of key terms and an annotated bibliography to assist planning professionals understand the evidence and translate it into policy. The HBEP Literature Review is endorsed by Commonwealth, State and local planning agencies as an invaluable resource for planners involved in evidence based strategic policy and plan making to create healthy, liveable and sustainable environments. Download the HBEP Literature Review from: <http://www.be.unsw.edu.au/programs/healthy-built-environments-program/literature-review>

Question D38. *What changes or additions should be made to the present assessment criteria in the Planning Act?*

(Related questions: D49; D69)

The new Planning Act should continue to list statutory matters for consideration (applicable to all DAs - State and local; council or other planning bodies). While it is acknowledged that 'social impacts in the locality' is currently a required consideration, in order to adequately

⁷ Kent J; Thompson SM and Jalaludin B (2011) *Healthy Built Environments: A review of the literature*, Sydney: Healthy Built Environments Program, City Futures Research Centre, UNSW

deal with the challenges of the 21st Century, the list should be extended to ‘social *and health* impacts’. Guidance on the scope of matters for consideration should include health-related issues, which are all supported by the evidence in the Healthy Built Environments Program Literature Review. Examples of health-related issues include:

- Walkable and connected environments
- Active transport alternatives such as walking, cycling and reliable public transport
- Quality public domain, especially the provision of green open space involving deep planting
- Environments that facilitate meaningful social interaction and cultural inclusion, and
- Access to healthy food.

Conclusion

The research evidence linking the built environment and health is compelling. The built environment plays a key role in determining opportunities to be healthy (physically active, eating healthy foods and socially connected) as part of everyday life. A Planning System for the 21st Century needs to embrace health as an underpinning objective that is translated into the accompanying legislation for strategic and statutory planning.

An economically productive state with liveable neighbourhoods, suburbs, regional towns and cities, situated within a sustainable environment, can only be achieved if health is an underpinning foundation of the NSW Planning System. Given our knowledge base, ongoing research and governance structures, NSW can establish and realise this vision for the State and its community. A new NSW Planning System gives us this opportunity.

Appendix One



PCAL and HBEP EP&A Act Review

Supportive Environments Forum

31 January 2012



Australian Institute of Architects
Australian Institute of Landscape Architects
Centre for Health Equity Training Research and Evaluation, University of New South Wales
Council on the Ageing
Danny Wiggins Planning, Facilitation and Education Services
Healthy Built Environments Program, University of New South Wales
Heart Foundation
Hunter New England Local Health District
Local Government and Shires Association of NSW
South Western Sydney and Sydney Local Health Districts
Northern Sydney Local Health District
NSW Premier's Council for Active Living
Office of Environment and Heritage
Planning Institute of Australia
Transport for NSW



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City Futures Research Centre
Faculty of Built Environment
The University of New South Wales
Sydney NSW 2052 Australia
e: hbep@unsw.edu.au
w: <http://www.fbe.unsw.edu.au/cf/hbep/>

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