

**Submission to the
Parliamentary Inquiry into Children, Young People and the Built Environment
conducted by the Children and Young People Committee**

January 2006

1. Introduction

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) is the peak professional body representing professions involved in planning Australia's cities, towns, regions and places. PIA is a not-for-profit association delivering benefits to over 4,500 members nationally. Our members are drawn from a range of planning professions – urban and regional planning, social planning, urban design, environmental planning, economic development planning, transport planning and planning law. A large proportion of our membership is employed in local government.

The shared core interest of PIA, as stated in its Constitution is:

“the community, and the education, research and practices relating to the planned use of land, its associated systems, and of the natural and built environmental, social and economic impacts and implications of the use of land”.

It is understood that the Committee will inquire into:

1. Trends, changes and issues for children and young people in the development, implementation and coordination of policy, design and planning for the built environment;
2. The mechanisms available for monitoring and reporting on planning processes and decisions concerning the built environment, as they relate to and impact upon children and young people;
3. Strategies to ensure that built environment issues affecting children and young people are readily identified and receive coordinated attention across portfolios and different levels of government;
4. The role of the Commission for Children and Young People in giving input to the Government and non-Government sectors on inclusive and integrated planning and policy-making for children and young people in the built environment;
5. Any other matter considered relevant to the inquiry by the Committee;

The following submission is lodged on behalf of the NSW Division of the PIA and addresses the issues identified in the Terms of Reference.

2. Trends, changes and issues for children and young people in the development, implementation and coordination of policy, design and planning for the built environment

Children and young people are still not actively involved in the development, implementation and coordination of policy, design and planning for the built environment. In particular, children and young people are rarely involved in the master planning stage, where a real difference can be made. For example, ensuring that facilities and public spaces are safe and visible, ensuring that surfaces are built with durable materials to withstand popular physical activities such as skateboarding, and ensuring that buildings and public spaces are built in a form that will be used by children and young people, and not in a form that adults think young people or children would like.

Children's needs are often ignored as they have no voice other than through parents. Simple (but essential) things such as toilets (including children's toilets), pram parking spaces, and safe open spaces are needed in our built environment. Increasingly, public toilets are having to close at night or there is a cost factor being imposed – often in the name of public safety and cleanliness, both of which are important.

Whereas many Councils have a Youth Council, few have really worked, particularly in relation to building and design matters where it is very unusual to see young people invited to a Master Planning meeting about an urban space that young people will ultimately use. Youth Councils take an enormous amount of resourcing by Council staff. If they are fortunate enough, or have the financial resources, some employ a Youth Development Officer. However, many now do not.

Consultation on the needs of young people and children rarely involves participation by these groups. Young people do not attend public meetings and tend not to write submissions on design and development. Other mechanisms such as focus groups with young people, children, planners (social, town, urban design) should be used – at all stages of the planning process. There is no real participation by young people in the planning process.

In Australia, high density living is fast becoming the norm in many communities, and many children and young people do not have the space at home to be physically active. They are looking for places in the public domain in their community that are safe, visible and open and allow them to be creative, independent, and to comfortably be children and young people without getting “stopped” by adults.

Some specific design and planning issues and trends include:

- Young people are not involved in proposed developments that are relevant to them, let alone those that aren't specifically relevant to them. For example, street skating – if young people are involved in design then there will be benefits for many.
- Need informal surveillance for all things – young people get frightened also.
- There was a trend of building residential areas without footpaths. This presents problems for young people. Designs/plans need to include space for cycleway, footpath, skating, and scooting – not just as a means of transport, but as a means of physical activity – in a time where childhood obesity is increasingly an issue.
- There are increasingly less public toilets or not at all. This makes it difficult with parents who do take their young children out.
- There are not enough parks for young children. For example, play equipment. This is due to rising insurance/litigation issues.
- There is a trend for parents to accompany their children, rather than allow them to go to parks on their own. This is out of concern for perceived crime.
- Planning actively discourages young people to be in public places. For example, in one local government area, under cover, public seating in the CBD was removed because of people

sleeping on it. The seats were replaced with single seats separated from each other and not under cover. They are very anti-social. There is little encouragement of informal public spaces that are multi-use.

- There is a tendency to separate youth space away from other uses making them seem scary to other community members and making young people somehow different from the rest of us. It is better to integrate youth spaces with other community facilities. For example, in the USA, skate plazas are being built which replicate a mall type plaza that have stairs, public art, and looks attractive when young people are not using these spaces.
- Many communities believe that there is a need to develop skate facilities, but many in the past have not consulted with young people about the location, which tends to be in an isolated section of a park, away from other people, making them unsafe and invisible, and ultimately unused, particularly by young women and young girls. This trend has been changing with many recent skate parks being built in consultation with young people (eg. City of Melbourne, City of Geelong).

3. The mechanisms available for monitoring and reporting on planning processes and decisions concerning the built environment, as they relate to and impact upon children and young people

There are few, if any, existing mechanisms available for monitoring and reporting on planning processes and decisions concerning the built environment as they relate to and impact upon children and young people. Generally, nothing happens until someone complains.

There is a requirement for all NSW Councils to develop Social & Community Plans, and one of the target groups is young people. In this Plan, Councils are required to identify issues, develop actions to deal with the issues and report to the council on an annual basis on the progress of the plan. Council is also required to report on the plan to the Department of Local Government.

However, this monitoring and reporting generally relates to the social issues, not necessarily to the built environment. The only cross over tends to be if there is an action for the Council to have a Youth Council as part of the Social Plan, and the Youth Council is given the ability/charter to review plans that come into council.

Monitoring and reporting on built environment issues facing children and young people could be strengthened by including a requirement in the Social and Community planning process.

4. Strategies to ensure that built environment issues affecting children and young people are readily identified and receive coordinated attention across portfolios and different levels of government

Recommended strategies to ensure that built environment issues affecting children and young people are readily identified and receive coordinated attention across portfolios and different levels of government include:

- Consultation with young people has to be real, targeted, and youth friendly. If the consultation is to be a meeting, the meeting has to be at a place that children and young people enjoy being at.
- Whether or not there is consultation with children and young people, Social Planners should be included in planning and focus groups.
- Mechanisms by which planning for the needs of children and young people are taken into at the master planning stage of developments. Most councils have development control plans for different development types. These could be amended to specifically include requirements and development criteria relating to children and young people.

- State Government is often accused of making decisions and implementing policy without involving Local Government. It is imperative to ensure that Local Government is actively involved, as it works closest with young people and often is subject to the criticism. Any policies developed by State Government need to be readily adopted at the Local Government level, and there needs to be incentive for these policies to be adopted.
- Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs) could play a role in facilitating the different levels of government to co-operate in ensuring that built environment issues are co-ordinated. In NSW there is a position of a co-ordinating role in regional areas (it used to be within the Premier's Department) to bring the Managers of relevant State Government agencies together to discuss and find solutions to issues. The built environment has not been part of their brief but it could be expanded to include it.
- Inclusion of strategies in Local Government's Social Plans – strategies in their for co-ordination. This may require changing of the Social Plan regulations.

5. Any other matter considered relevant to the inquiry by the Committee

All levels of government – local, state and federal need to work together on planning and delivering the built environment. Increasingly, the provision of infrastructure provided by the various levels is intertwined, eg. the building of new roads, and one decision by one level of government impacts on the built environment.

The definition of young people is relevant. The inquiry is considering the impact of the built environment on those persons aged between 0-18. The Issues Paper 1 notes that different definitions operate across existing NSW policy and law. The State Government defines young people/ youth at age between 12-24 and this is the age group required to be looked at by local councils in their Social Plans. There are a number of sub-groups that need to be identified from this. Those aged 15-17 years have particular needs, as do those under the age of 12, eg. still in primary school. We recommend that consideration be given to the different age groups within the Inquiry's definition as they have very different needs in terms of the built environment.