

## Department of Planning

### REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – INQUIRY INTO BUILT ENVIRONMENT - PARLIAMENT OF NSW

#### PLANNING STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

##### BACKGROUND - COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Committee on Children and Young People is a joint statutory committee. It was formed in August 2000. Its primary responsibility is to monitor and review the work of the Commission for Children and Young People and report its findings and recommendations to Parliament. In particular, the Committee is required to examine and report on annual and other reports of the Commission for Children and Young People. The committee is holding an inquiry into children and young people and the built environment.

##### TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE INQUIRY

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 and inclusive and integrated planning and policy-making for children and young people in the built environment;
5. Any **other matters** considered relevant to the inquiry by the Committee

##### TRENDS, CHANGES AND ISSUES

**A. Liveable neighbourhoods** There is a continuing need to provide liveable neighbourhoods including meeting places for children and young people so that they feel connected to the community.

**B. Safety** There is an ongoing requirement for safe environments.

**C. Healthy lifestyles** There is a need to promote health and fitness. Levels of obesity are increasing. There is an emerging trend for children and young people to be driven to school rather than to use public transport, walk or cycle.

## PLANNING AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment for children and young people (as well as the whole community) can be improved through good planning combined with good design. This report focuses on planning strategies for developing liveable neighbourhoods, increasing safety and promoting healthy lifestyles for children and young people.

### A. Planning for liveable neighbourhoods including places to meet

Diversity of land use is vital in the creation of liveable places. It provides opportunities for a mix of development and for recreation. Village/neighbourhood centres which encourage a mix of uses ensure variety, liveliness and a choice of activities, particularly in public areas. They also reduce the need to travel outside the neighbourhood for day to day activities. The range of uses should include magnets for young people such as fast food outlets and cafes.

These centres assist in integrating rather than segregating young people from the wider community. Young people usually enjoy the liveliness of busy places and such centres contribute to

- a sense of place
- a reduced sense of isolation and alienation and
- increased surveillance, safety and security,

### Strategies for planning for liveable neighbourhoods

- Consider the widest possible variety of uses in the town centre and promote the vitality of existing centres. Encourage a mix of retail (including magnets for young people such as fast food outlets and cafés), commercial and entertainment activities as well as Government agencies and community services.
- Encourage residential uses within or in close proximity to the town centre to facilitate activity at a range of times. Residential uses within the centre should aim to include active, non-residential uses at the ground floor such as shopfronts to increase casual surveillance of the streets and to make the area less alienating.
- Increase residential densities and the range of housing types including shop-top housing to boost the ability of a suburb to support a broader range of activities, and thus reduce the need for residents to travel further in their daily lifestyles.
- Enhance the accessibility of the CBD by improving public transport and providing limited but well-designed, integrated parking facilities.
- Provide safe links between uses as young people will move between different magnets.
- Provide better management of traffic.
- Locate compatible activities together (co-location) which combined with good urban design support the retail uses, add vitality and safety (particularly at night) and create a sense of place. A good example of co-location is that of including a primary school as part of a small centre. This leads to benefits from proximity including
  - Increasing passing trade to shops by adding people to the area
  - Supporting cafes and takeaways
  - Enabling multi-use of school/community hall including evening use
  - The school grounds/green space providing excellent frontage for increased residential density.

### Strategies for planning for meeting places

- Design public spaces which are flexible and which are large enough to accommodate a wide range of activities. They can then be used for public performances, markets and other communal activities.

- Where possible provide wider paths for example, a four metre wide path can accommodate three people walking abreast as well as a wheeled item such as a stroller, wheelchair, cycle or skateboard.
- Provide seating in public for young people (and other people) to gather. The provision of seating areas helps legitimise “hanging out” as an activity rather than as an obstruction.
- In public streets, position seating at the edge of footpaths where through movement is not blocked, seats can be easily observed and there are opportunities for watching passers by while shop windows remain visible.
- In pedestrian malls and arcades, position seating centrally so as not to obstruct shoppers or to obscure shop windows, but still to provide opportunities for observing passing activity.
- Integrated facilities specific to young people, such as youth cafes, into the urban fabric and position them where there is passing life and activity, for example in street level shopfronts.
- Involve young people in planning initiatives for public space.
- Design formal and informal spaces for public entertainment. These provide a meeting point, focus for activity and outlet for expression.
- Design street furniture to be multi-functional, for example a flat bench may become an informal plinth for performance artists.
- Install street furniture which is easy to maintain and long lasting.
- Provide public notice boards or poster kiosks as a forum for young people to communicate with each other and the wider community, and to promote youth activities. They also assist in formalising and controlling bill posting.
- Exhibit art created by young people. This offers a medium for self-expression as well as a channelling outlet for graffiti. Such art works may be sculptural (three dimensional) or two dimensional (walls, murals, paving).
- Avoid cluttering public spaces - keep them simple and flexible.
- Prevent cars from parking in public spaces.
- Provide parks for their environmental, aesthetic and recreational value.
- Provide convenient and safe access to parkland.

## **B. Safety**

Village/neighbourhood development contributes to a person’s sense of belonging and reduced sense of isolation and alienation and adds to security through increased surveillance.

### **Strategies for planning for safety**

- Provide adequate street lighting, particularly around shopping areas and public transport stops. Brightly lit convenience stores add to the level of lighting. Ensure that rear lanes which offer short cuts, are well lit.
- Increase surveillance through having lively local centres which have pedestrians/ cyclists moving through them as well as though having people in the neighbourhood at restaurants and cafes, at late opening supermarkets and convenience stores.
- Maximise overlooking and casual surveillance opportunities by requiring that shopfronts and residences face the street.
- Avoid extensive blank walls at ground level by building shops at street frontages of shopping centres. This increases surveillance and provides more friendly, less alienating environments.
- Require that buildings face onto parks to provide passive surveillance.

- Allow traffic to regularly pass along streets to provide passive surveillance.
- Maximise the number of entries to buildings from the street to assist in enlivening public areas.
- Landscape public spaces so that pedestrian eye-level sight lines are not obscured.
- Provide services such as public phones and public toilets where they are easy to find and where surveillance opportunities exist.
- Continue to provide public phones in public areas, despite reduced usage due to mobile phones.
- Ensure that potentially conflict-generating activities, such as skateboarding, are physically separated from other uses, but remain visible. Such visibility reinforces the spectator value of exhibition activities and also provides informal surveillance opportunities.
- Ensure that walkways and cycleway crossings are safe eg by locating them along routes which are well lit and where surveillance opportunities exist.
- Provide an interconnected street network.

### **C. Healthy lifestyles**

The trend for children and young people to be driven to school contributes to increased levels of obesity. In addition to sport, walking, cycling and the use of public transport increase fitness, reduce obesity and contribute to independence, improved sense of well being and freedom. They also provide chances for social interaction.

#### **Strategies for planning for healthy lifestyles**

- Maximise provision of accessible and efficient public transport.
- Ensure that sufficient walkways and cycleways are provided and are well lit.
- Ensure that parkland and sporting fields are well distributed and accessible and that they are developed for the particular recreational and sporting needs of children and young people.
- Provide a number of smaller readily accessible open space areas (pocket parks) throughout a suburb for toddlers and young children. A toddler can only be expected to walk about 200 metres, a 2 1/2 minute walk.
- Promote lower dependence on private motor vehicles for everyday trips.
- Promote village development which contributes to people's sense of belonging and reduces their sense of isolation and alienation.

### **THE ROLE OF THE COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN GIVING INPUT TO THE GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SECTORS AND INCLUSIVE AND INTEGRATED PLANNING AND POLICY-MAKING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT;**

The commission has a role in promoting good planning and urban design for children and young people, in particular, in promoting provision of

- liveable neighbourhoods where they can meet and feel connected to the community,
- safe environments and
- adequate public transport, cycleways, walkways and sporting venues.

## References

*Child Friendly Environments* Department of Urban Affairs and Planning in collaboration with the NSW Play Alliance

Department of Urban Affairs and Planning *Crime Prevention and the Assessment of Development Applications Guidelines under Section 79C of the Environment Planning and Assessment Act 1979.*

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