

**Submission  
No 124**

## **INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**Organisation:** The Glebe Society

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The Hon Paul Green MLC  
Chair  
Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

## SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING INQUIRY

Housing policy in NSW has lacked clear direction for several decades. In this submission I will recite some of the well-known issues that afflict social and affordable housing and propose tactics. Your committee's duty is to stop *ad hoc* decisions by recommending that an all of government strategy policy with effective reporting processes is developed jointly with the community.

I will use Glebe as the focus of this submission for it provides significant opportunities as well as problems. As Forest Lodge and Glebe group said in its submission to you (FLAG 2014):

Glebe is home to some 14,000 people from a diverse range of backgrounds. Whilst it has pockets of wealth the suburb also has an estimated 1,424 public housing properties. This represents 18% of all public housing in the City of Sydney. Approximately 4000 people live in public housing properties in Glebe, comprising one-third of the entire population in this suburb. Housing type varies from terraces, units and townhouses.

It surprises many to find so much social housing in this inner city Victorian village, nearby three universities and the City. Most of the public housing is found in [\*The Glebe Estate\*](#), an internationally famous project, by which the National Government conserved this Victorian townscape for social housing. After bringing its hygiene and housing quality to standard and demonstrating that heritage stock could be refurbished for societal reasons, it handed ***The Glebe Estate*** to NSW in about 1984. Since then the Landlord, Housing NSW (in its various forms), has been incapable of maintaining minimum standards. Some properties have been sold and there are significant social and health issues.

Because Glebe as a community is committed to the Estate, which is fundamental to its built and social character:

- 1. The Glebe Society proposes The Glebe Project, whereby community, local and state government agencies jointly audit the housing stock, review social indicators and social services, consider governance and financing arrangement of The Glebe Estate and within six months report to the community and your***



**committee. Funds would be required but The Glebe Society will provide voluntary professional labour to make this work.**

The Glebe Society makes the following observations about social housing in Glebe (not just upon **The Glebe Estate**).

- The practice of selling existing stock to support operating costs must cease.
- The current arrangements for cleaning and maintenance are not working, with increasing delays in maintenance, cleaning standards not being met and poor workmanship in many works. The use of a head contractor who sub-contracts (frequently at several levels) means that there is no adequate supervision or quality control. The new cleaning and maintenance contract must require the contractor to directly employ and supervise staff to ensure contractual obligations are met.
- Housing NSW must accept responsibility for supporting tenants with special needs, whether these arise from mental health issues, previous homelessness, recent release from gaol or other circumstances. The [Common Ground](#) model for permanent supportive housing should be considered for wider adoption by Housing NSW.
- Relocation of tenants to more appropriately sized accommodation must be managed on a case-by-case basis, with individual tenants supported to downsize by offering them appropriate, refurbished accommodation in the same area as their current accommodation.
- The initial placement of tenants must be managed to avoid the problem of under-occupancy in the first place.
- In Glebe there are several services available to children and young people. Centipede at Glebe Public School, a before and after school and holiday service is utilized by families from The Glebe Estate whose children are students at the public school. However it is a pay- for-service organization, and although non-profit and supported by grants from the City of Sydney it is always in need of additional financial resources to maintain its level of service. It does cater for some children whose families cannot always cover the fees so it is constantly in need of supplementary funds.
- While Centipede is largely available to primary aged children, the Glebe Youth Service, which has just returned to its premises at 84 Glebe Point Road after safety and fire rectification works, supports youth in the suburb. It provides a wide range of services such as Drop in Centre, life skills, After-Dark program, individual assistance, case management and intervention, in concert with NSW Health and Juvenile Justice, and others. These services are largely directed towards high school aged people, and consequently there is a gap for the 8 to 12 years age group.
- A group of concerned parents from the Glebe Estate has approached the Council of the City of Sydney through the Deputy Lord Mayor Robyn Kemmis and others to try to gain support, assistance and a venue in which volunteers and parents of children in this age group could provide services in after-school hours. At this point in time it remains an unanswered need. While some of these children may be accommodated at Centipede there are limits imposed by financial constraints and parental preference which preclude many. Consequently up to 20 children, most from the public housing areas of Glebe, are in danger of being 'at risk' due to a lack of space and facilities to accommodate their needs.

**2. The Glebe Society proposes that The Glebe Project's investigation include all our observations made above.**

Communities are informed and capable. Glebe has a network of community groups that can work with Housing NSW and the Land and Housing Corporation to improve matters. But the government agencies have been



distrustful, opaque and non-communicative. Glebe will work with Government agencies but it will not be worked upon by Government agencies. The most recent example of this is the [lock out of the Glebe Youth Services](#) by Land and Housing Corporation. This occurred just prior to Christmas without any community consultation, at a time of high need for youth services. Proper consultation would have overcome this. So how do we bring the Glebe community in proper governance contact with government agencies? The proposed Glebe Project will contribute but there is an immediate action that will substantially improve matters.

Housing NSW and the University of Sydney have jointly funded the Glebe Community Development Project by which a Community Development Worker works part time to link the social network of Glebe and establish strategic approaches. It is a fine and [successful example of community, Housing and the University](#) working together to gain results. The Glebe Society has gained the University's long term commitment to this project and we are looking at other faculties' involvement. However the position is funded on annual grants from Housing which is clearly inadequate. In the MP, [Alex Greenwich's submission](#) he observes that when Surry Hills was without its "Community Development Worker position during much of 2012, there was a breakdown in projects, communication and relationships." Glebe's yearly lobbying and frantic influence has avoided such a crisis with the CDP worker project but it shows the *ad hoc* nature of housing policy that such a position should be on a yearly funding cycle.

**3. *The Glebe Society proposes that state funds are made available so that the Glebe Community Development Worker's position is permanent.***

The NSW Land and Housing Corporation owns the assets of housing (education, health etc.) and is an off-budget agency that must fund itself through its management of assets. This brings about some arcane and costly accounting with little social utility. For example it has provided buildings for peppercorn rent within social housing precincts, such as the Glebe Youth Service. These achieve good social outcomes which are attested to by other government agencies like NSW Police. But the Corporation's aim is return on asset so it seeks to raise the rent to market level. Housing NSW is the lessor but its regulated aim is to house people and no one is housed in GYS. However Community Services' aim is social welfare. So we will face the situation in Glebe whereby one agency, Land and Housing, will conduct an audit on the financial worth to NSW of GYS as an owned asset. Another, Community Services, will conduct an audit on the social worth of GYS. All the other agencies Health, Education, Police, Housing and the community will presumably make submissions and then wait. It will be like the build-up in Darwin, with similar results.

And if at the end Land and Housing Corporation say a market rent shall be paid? Well then Housing NSW will raise the rent of GYS. GYS will need more funds for its social purpose and will ask its funder, Community Services for these. And finally Community Services pays GYS a supplement for market rent which it pays to another arm of government, Land and Housing Corporation. Looks to me like a lot of accountants and consultants will be busy. A lot of NSW officials will be distracted from their real work. This would be comical if it was just once but it is planned to conduct such an exercise on every social purpose lease. Whilst Glebe has better things to do but let's make the most of it and use Glebe as a precedent case so that others are spared the opportunity cost. Do it once and do it properly.

**4. *The Glebe Society proposes that the community is involved in a financial and social audit of Glebe Youth Services which will form a precedent for statewide policy on market based rent or sale of social assets.***

The development of the inner city has increased demand and lessened supply. Nurses, Police, emergency workers, teachers, tourism and hospitality staff in the main cannot afford to live near where they work. This exacerbates



Sydney's horrific traffic problems, lessens workers' family time and imposes huge restraints in the economic life of Sydney. Glebe has a huge deficit of affordable housing but it also presents opportunity. The Land and Housing Corporation demolished social housing in Glebe to make way for a mixed development of market and affordable housing. The [block sits vacant 3 years later](#). Developers, including State agencies, need targets and incentives to produce affordable housing. In some instances this may require social bond financing, rental guarantees and the like but it must always protect the integrity of the renter and ensure that rent is affordable.

- 5. The Glebe Society proposes that NSW adopt statewide targets for affordable housing and provides incentives to developers.**
- 6. The Glebe Society proposes that the Elger and Cowper Streets site is urgently developed for affordable housing.**

It is pleasing that the Parliament is investigating social and affordable housing for as the [Auditor General](#) reported, "It is crunch time for public housing in New South Wales. The government must make difficult decisions about public housing priorities". In this submission I have realistically set out some of the problems and community frustrations in Glebe. But I have also said that Glebe is a strong, well organized community that is willing to work hard on making our village an example of what social and affordable housing can be. If you invest your influence on the state government, if it invests some funds and expertise, then we will get on with The Glebe Project.

Yours Truly

John Gray  
President  
28 February, 2014

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