

Submission
No 152

INQUIRY INTO DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRANSPORT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Organisation: Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Inc.

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**Submission on NSW Government's proposed changes
to create low and mid-rise housing by
Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Inc. (28th March , 2024)**

Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society is based in the Georges River Council Local Government area (GRC LGA) so, although our mission statement takes us far and wide, we will focus the following comments on the GRC LGA.

These NSW Government proposed reforms for increasing housing density go far beyond what we have seen in decades. The use of a blanket 'one size fits all' top-down approach, the number of dwellings to be allowed on smaller and smaller block sizes, and the speed of implementation without the complementary consultation is breathtaking. We have significant concerns with these proposed reforms – particularly with the Low and Mid-rise Housing Reform proposals. Deferral of its implementation is absolutely essential. The State Government is planning to override existing Council planning controls such as those protecting heritage and environment. These will be non-refusal standards - no appeals allowed.

Planning

We understand Georges River Council has met its required housing targets - but there are no exemptions in the proposed reforms.

400m from any railway station - up to 8 storey units may be built.

Up to 800m from any railway station or shopping area, 3-6 storey units and other multi dwellings will be allowed. Terraces, townhouses and 2 storey apartment blocks near transport hubs and town centres will be allowed in R2 low density residential zones.

We share many of the Georges River Council's concerns including:

- (i) Overriding the master planning work that has been completed by Council in conjunction with the community for the Mortdale and Beverly Hills Local Centres,
- (ii) Providing uplift to centres that fall within the definition of "station and town centre precincts" without the appropriate master planning being in place to address community concerns of public domain and infrastructure provision,
- (iii) Providing capacity for up to 150,000 additional dwellings within the Georges River LGA without considerations of the availability of infrastructure to support this growth,
- (iv) Increasing housing capacity by permitting development on smaller allotments with greater height and floor space ratio (FSR). This will result in changes to the low-density character of the LGA's suburbs,

loss of trees and canopy cover on private land, replacement of on street parking with driveways, loss of street trees and increased traffic impacts due to additional density,

(v) Permitting manor housing and multi-unit housing in the R2 Low Density Residential Zone and residential flat buildings (up to 6 storeys) in the R3 Medium Density Residential Zones in “station and town centre precincts” undermines the existing LSPS 2040 and the criteria for growth that was developed with the Georges River community,

(vi) Permitting manor houses and multi dwelling housing in the R2 Zone and residential flat buildings (of 3 to 6 storeys) in the R3 Zone in “station and town centre precincts” undermines the hierarchy of residential zones developed with the community through the Georges River Local Strategic Planning Statement 2040 (LSPS 2040) and implemented through the Georges River Local Environmental Plan (GRLEP),

(vii) Applying the Low- and Mid-Rise Housing Reforms to Heritage Conservation Areas will compromise the social, built and cultural significance of these areas by permanently altering the historical subdivision pattern and character of the built form,

(viii) Applying the minimum lot width of 12m and minimum site area of 450sqm for dual occupancy development across the LGA is a significant reduction from the existing GRLEP requirements of minimum 15m lot with and minimum site area of 650sqm and 1,000sqm outside and within the Foreshore Scenic Protection Area (FSPA) respectively.

(ix) The proposed reforms do not address the infrastructure shortage that currently exists including insufficient open space, community centres, sports courts and libraries, which will put more pressure on Council to address both existing and future populations. Local character is not taken into account. Landscaping and tree canopy requirements and floor space ratios are far below council specifications. Dual occupancies will be able to be built everywhere on lots as small as 450sqm including the Foreshore Scenic Protection Area (FSPA).

Environmental and Climate Emergency

In the midst of a climate emergency and increasing global temperatures, increasing housing density should not be done at the expense of losing green canopy and green corridors. Increasing density should not be an excuse to eliminate gardens and street trees from urban developments or remove trees from existing urban areas.

It is not sufficient to have green areas relegated to parklands alone. A green matrix needs to be spread among the fabric of urban developments and protected in existing urban areas in order to provide relief from increasing temperatures driven by climate change, and to provide pleasant and livable spaces for communities.

The Government has set a tree canopy target of 40% for 'greater Sydney'. Recently published figures show that tree canopy in Georges River Council LGA has been reduced by 2.1% between 2019 and 2022. Council has acknowledged that the tree canopy target cannot be achieved by relying solely on public land. Canopy must be contributed to from private land.

So, a significant conflict has risen. These proposals for increased housing density encourage reduction in private land available for vegetation and tree planting. However, they work directly against the established Government strategy for increasing tree canopy cover, which we know is absolutely essential to our survival. Recent studies at Western Sydney University (WSU) have shown that more sustainable development and particularly urban greening are necessary to reduce the effect of urban heat and stress on mental health.

In terms of biodiversity, suburbs are a refuge for a surprising number of Australian native species. A 2020 Australian Conservation Foundation report found that "Around 25% of Australia's nationally listed threatened plants and 46% of threatened animals can be found in cities, towns and suburbs. While many of these species also have habitat outside cities and towns, for 39 threatened species, these urban areas are the last remaining places where they exist..."

The government's proposed reforms simply do not adequately account for endangered species and biodiversity within suburban areas. A local example of remnant native forest harbouring threatened and endangered species is the private property named Glenlee on the LGA's Lugarno foreshore of the Georges River. Pristine areas of land in urban areas like Glenlee must be exempted from development to protect the environmental integrity of Georges River. Remnant fauna need connectivity of bushland to move around the river. The Foreshore Scenic Protection Area must be preserved. If the State Government needs to find suitable space for more housing it can't remove existing tree canopy to do so. This will be robbing future generations of the opportunity to coexist with nature on our doorstep. A quality of life that encompasses human and nature alike.

A lot more thought needs to be put into these proposed reforms. Some suggestions are:

1. Dual occupancies should not be automatically allowed on any R2 zoning and should not be permitted where zoning or other mechanisms identify significant trees and vegetation or other items of environmental or cultural heritage value present that require protection. Building height in R2 Zones should be limited to two storeys.
2. Dual occupancies, terraces, townhouses and 2 storey apartment blocks should only be permitted close to transport hubs where they will not require the removal of significant vegetation or large trees or items of environmental or cultural heritage. Their construction should increase large tree canopy, not decrease it.

3. At least 40% of a lot should be set aside for green space, and new developments should be required to provide enough space to plant large trees along streets.

Fairness

We are deeply disappointed with the process and timing of these NSW Government proposed reforms for the following reasons:

- The DPFI has totally ignored the strong efforts of Council and the GRC community which have been carefully planning for the future, with Council steadfastly complying with its current targets through the expenditure of millions of dollars on studies, which, if the proposed reforms are adopted, will amount to a scandalous waste of both taxpayer and ratepayer funds.
- DPFI issued the proposed reforms just prior to Christmas, with most of the consultation period consumed by school holidays and family events, with the only real window for making comments being three weeks in February.
- DPFI has refused to extend the closing date and answer constituents' enquiries
- The glaring omission to launch these proposed reforms with a strong media release and much TV and radio coverage as is done with many other changes to Government policies.

Conclusion

Communities and Councils are very concerned about the loss of tree cover, and pressure on public amenities and transportation which will occur if these proposed reforms are implemented without proper consultation with Communities and Councils. We call on the NSW Government, in relation to the proposed housing reforms, to defer the timetable for rapid implementation and undertake a proper process of:

- Consulting directly with communities;
- Working with Councils to understand each community;
- Protecting natural and built heritage;
- Maintaining the tree canopy, wildlife and environment; and
- Investing in all necessary new and additional infrastructure.

Thank you for taking time to understand our serious concerns regarding the proposed housing reforms.

Kim Wagstaff / Adrian Polhill

President / Vice President

Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Inc.

<https://www.oatleyfloraf fauna.org.au/>