



JUSTICE +
PEACE OFFICE
CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF SYDNEY

Justice and Peace Office,
Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney
Polding Centre,
133 Liverpool St Sydney NSW 2000
T 02 9307 8465
E jpinfo@sydneycatholic.org

February 17 2017

Greater Sydney Commission
Draft District Plans
PO Box 257
Parramatta NSW 2124

Dear Commissioner Hughes Turnbull,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Draft District Plans and *Towards Our Greater Sydney 2056*. I would like to congratulate you, and the NSW Government, for your leadership and initiative in creating a future vision for our city, particularly in the area of affordable housing.

The Justice and Peace Office is an agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney. We promote justice, peace, ecology and development through projects and activities based on the social teachings of the Catholic Church. At our most recent census in 2011 over 27.5% of the population of Sydney was Catholic. We work with and represent that community of approximately 600 000 people.¹

The Church is deeply troubled by the growing homelessness in our city and region (28 000 in NSW in the 2011 Census) and in the deepening inequality that the housing crisis epitomises.² With that in mind I would like to recommend the following revisions for consideration in the final version of the District Plans.

An Increase of the inclusion targets to 15-30% applied on whole development

While I am gladdened by the Commission's proposed mandatory requirement of a 5-10% affordable inclusion target on new developments, I am concerned that the target is too low. To have a long-term and significant effect on the housing crisis in this city the target needs to be lifted to 15% of all new developments on private land, and 30% on government land.³

Further, it is unacceptable for the inclusionary targets to be only applied to the 'new floor space' of a development. A 5-10% inclusion rate for the uplift is so small as to become negligible. We can do better than this. The people of Sydney deserve to have inclusionary targets applied to the *whole development* so that we all share more equitably in the abundance of our city.

¹ *National Catholic Census Project 2011*,

<http://pro.catholic.org.au/pdf/Australian%20population%20by%20diocese%20and%20religion%202011.pdf>

² Homelessness Australia: <http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/index.php/about-homelessness/homeless-statistics>

³ This is the most commonly accepted best practice target range across the sector

Expanded income thresholds to include moderate incomes and take account of families

The Plans rightly acknowledge that it is our most vulnerable people, especially those experiencing homelessness and on very low-low incomes, who have the greatest need for affordable housing. Without shifting that focus I would ask that the Plans' income assessment thresholds be revised to include moderate income earners and take account of the realities of family life.

I am concerned that using simple income thresholds as the qualifying assessment tool is inflexible and unfair because it makes no allowances for the effects of dependents on an income. A household income threshold does not recognise the reality that a higher income household with more dependents may be in just as much, if not more, housing stress than a qualifying income household with fewer dependents. Previous targets recognised and supported family life and caring responsibilities and adjusted incomes accordingly. This should continue. People should not be penalised for taking care of their families and loved ones.

Including moderate income earners and more family oriented qualifying income ranges is necessary because the housing market in Sydney is such that private rental and certainly home ownership are increasingly out of reach for this group. Accessing affordable housing with a family and/or on a moderate income also usually comes with the added burden of being long distances from workplaces which is putting enormous pressure on communities, families and relationships.

Between 2006 and 2011 median rents in Greater Sydney increased by more than 47%, making Sydney the least affordable city in the country.⁴ In January 2017 an international survey of housing affordability concluded that Sydney was the second least affordable in the world.⁵ And while the Plans' focus on increasing supply and in more diversity may go some way towards alleviating this, allowing access to affordable rental housing for moderate income earners and families is an essential part of alleviating overall housing stress in Sydney.

As Catholics we believe in the principle of solidarity which gives preferential treatment to the poor in decision making. Present housing and planning policies do not do this – they instead preference an increasing few while harming an increasing number of our poor, low-middle income earners as well as our families, young and elderly people. Our commitment to solidarity means we must speak up for these people; it means we must be clear about the unacceptability of an unbalanced housing system that denies the dignity and worth of too many of us.

The possibilities created by the Commission's Plans are a once in a generation opportunity to create a fairer and sustainable city that supports resilient, healthy and connected communities and families. I accept that the housing situation in Sydney is complex and there is no one solution, either Federal or State, which will immediately fix it. But we know NSW is in a position, with the strongest budget in the country and already established leadership in this area, to do more. The Catholic Church, both locally and globally, endeavours to stand with the poor and voiceless and to work collaboratively with others for the common good. So I do not seek simply to criticise, but to be a part of the solution and work with you for positive change.

⁴ *Rental Affordability Index*, 2016 Release, p. 20-21:

https://www.sgsep.com.au/application/files/9414/6597/3210/Rental_affordability_Index_June_2016_single_page.pdf

⁵ Demographia Australia, January 2017, <http://www.demographia.com.au/MediaRelease2017.pdf>

Once again, I commend the Commission and the NSW Government for the leadership being shown and the efforts towards finding long-term and sustainable housing solutions for our city. I look forward to working together to make housing in Sydney more fair and just for us all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fr Peter Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "F" and "S".

Rev Peter Smith
Promoter of Justice and Peace
Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney