

Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) Best Practice Project

COUNCIL NAME

North Sydney
Council

WEB ADDRESS

northsydney.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

10.9 square
kilometres

POPULATION

62,289

Overview

The Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) Best Practice Project has seen a comprehensive green audit test the effectiveness of Council's planning provisions. The intention was to improve the sustainability performance of new development by identifying and implementing best practice planning provisions, the very means by which Local Government can have direct effect on the long term structure and performance of the built environment.

The project adopted a whole-of-Council approach to assist in dealing with complex sustainability issues and has policy and work plan implications that extend right across the organisation beyond typical planning and assessment functions. The process and its outcomes can be used by other councils to assist in their drive towards sustainability, making the project significant on a regional and state-wide scale.

Background

North Sydney Council, via its Community Strategic Plan, places a high degree of importance on environmental sustainability in all of its roles and functions. Consistent with this commitment, Council was determined that its new Local Environmental Plan and new Development Control Plan would represent best practice regulation of private development from an Ecologically Sustainable Development (or ESD) perspective. This project is a significant piece of work because it uniquely:

- provides an in-depth and detailed green audit of council's planning provisions;
- benchmarks best practice across a range of local jurisdictions, both in Australia and overseas; and
- provides a road map, through a detailed implementation plan, that will ensure the achievement of best practice.

The project focused on 5 key areas to ensure new development:

- is as energy efficient as possible and produces renewable energy;
- minimises the use of potable water and improves stormwater outcomes for receiving waters;
- minimises waste streams to the fullest extent possible;
- protects and enhances local biodiversity; and
- promotes the use of sustainable transport.

Implementation

Research and review of current planning framework

The five areas of research (energy, water, waste, biodiversity and transport) were scrutinised in a three stage process:



1. Review of the existing Commonwealth, State and local regulatory environment – to establish the legal powers available to Council to influence outcomes through new or amended planning provisions.
2. Review of relevant provisions contained in planning documents from other local authorities – to identify how other jurisdictions have incorporated sustainability objectives into planning documents and to identify ‘best practice’ provisions and processes.
3. Review of North Sydney LEP and DCP provisions against ‘best practice’ – to establish recommendations that will ensure best practice ESD regulation is applied to the assessment of new development in North Sydney.

Active interdepartmental and stakeholder involvement

The project spanned two years of research, evaluation and consultation involving a broad range of stakeholders, both within Council and from the community, with an interest or expertise in sustainability. Transport planners, stormwater engineers, planning staff (strategic/assessment), sustainability officers, finance officers, bushland managers, and waste officers all contributed to the project.

Amendments to planning provisions

The project resulted in planning amendments which came into force after adoption of the project in September 2013. The amendments:

- Utilise a broad range of mechanisms, applying them in such a way that is commensurate with the scale and likely impact of the development;
- Set ambitious, although not unreasonable, performance criteria where appropriate; and
- Incorporate provisions that are clear and easy to understand.

Implementation

- Development application submission requirements and Council’s development application form were amended to ensure applicants are aware of the information they need to provide in order to demonstrate their proposal represents ‘best practice’;
- ESD commitment tables were included as a key submission requirement on which applicants must indicate whether the proposed development complies with relevant ESD related planning provisions;
- Training of assessment staff in ESD to ensure best practice planning provisions are given appropriate attention in the assessment process.

Outcomes

Energy and water provisions are now linked to the scale of development

Research regarding energy and water use resulted in the introduction of thresholds based on development type and size that will ensure the targeted application of planning provisions. Developments with larger energy and water needs and greater stormwater management implications are subject to more onerous submission and performance requirements relative to smaller developments. Ambitious performance requirements have been adopted for large scale energy and water users consistent with best practice.

A bushland buffer zone has been established to protect biodiversity

Given that the vast majority of biodiversity values in North Sydney are contained within Council’s bushland reserve system, the project resulted in the introduction of a bushland buffer. Planning provisions are now targeted so that developments with a greater potential to impact on biodiversity values are required to landscape their property and select vegetation

REFERENCE

www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/Building_Development/Strategic_Planning/Ecologically_Sustainable_Development_ESD_Best_Practice_Project

types that complement bushland areas and allow for an expansion of biodiversity values.

Green roofs are now a major consideration in the assessment process

The project has also resulted in the adoption of planning provisions that encourage the uptake of green roofs, building on the desire to improve the energy performance of buildings, improve local biodiversity and improve stormwater flows and quality. Applicants are now required to demonstrate how any generally flat roof area meets particular sustainability objectives. Applicants are directed to a new North Sydney Green Roof and Green Wall Resource Manual to assist them in meeting the objectives of the provision.

Developments must promote sustainable transport

Research regarding sustainable transport has resulted in the adoption of end-of-trip planning provisions that requires best practice bicycle facilities in new developments. The project has also resulted in an amendment to off-street parking provisions to encourage the use of sustainable transport by allowing reduced parking supply in areas with good access to public transport.

Key Learnings

The project found that many local jurisdictions, both in Australia and overseas, seek to achieve greenhouse gas reduction targets by moving beyond the regulation of individual buildings to developing district-scale energy, heating and cooling infrastructure. This infrastructure allows for energy to be produced and distributed locally from low- or no-emission technologies, thus reducing dependence on coal fired energy.

The project found that a number of regulatory initiatives regarding the sustainable management and re-use of stormwater are only achievable as part of a comprehensive stormwater strategy extending beyond the assessment of individual developments. As a result, Council is now in the early stages of preparing an integrated Council-wide stormwater strategy. A stormwater levy is being considered by Council as a means to fund improvements in stormwater management and technical studies and catchment modelling are now being undertaken to inform the development of the broader strategy.

The project found that best practice sustainable transport regulation involves the application of differential off-street parking rates based on access to public transport. Such an initiative must take into consideration flow-on impacts such as the impacts on on-street parking. As a result, Council is now preparing an integrated on-street and off-street parking strategy.

Contact

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This project was highly commended in the 2014 Local Sustainability category at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards.