

Submission to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment's Explorer St, Eveleigh rezoning proposal.

The Friends of Erskineville opposes the proposal to demolish and redevelop the public housing site at Explorer St Eveleigh.

Note: the definitions used for housing types are outlined in Annexure A to this submission.

Purpose:

The fundamental problem with this proposal is that the NSW government is trying to increase the supply of public housing by privatising the very land on which it sits. It is no different to that of the previous government and is based on a flawed model.

Housing Minister Rose Jackson admitted this problem at Budget Estimates on November 1 when she described the way public housing is funded as "a snake eating itself". [1]

Rather than demolish 46 homes that are only 31 years old, the urgent priority must be to build new public housing on vacant land. Local examples of this include North Eveleigh and 600 Elizabeth St, Redfern, which are already publicly owned.

In the middle of a housing crisis, the NSW and Commonwealth governments should also look to buy local brownfield sites marked for private residential development, such as at Ashmore Estate on Mitchell Rd and Brightwell Transport on Coulson St and develop these as public housing sites. Funding should also be allocated to the proper repair, maintenance and refurbishment of existing public housing.

The Explorer St proposal, which will see the whole site privatised, is in clear breach of NSW Labor election promises and binding policy. The 30% social housing is not public housing and will be privately managed. The 20% affordable housing is ill-defined, privately owned and managed - and likely to be only 'affordable' for a limited time, after which further profits will accrue to the developer.

Here are a few examples of the many promises:

Chris Minns: "We are immediately freezing the sale of all public and social housing. The sell-off stops now. Because privatising this public housing hurt our state and hurt the most vulnerable."

Ron Hoenig sent out mass SMS messages: "ONLY LABOR WILL STOP THE SELL-OFF & PRIVATISATION OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN NSW! VOTE [1] RON HOENIG ON SAT, 25 MARCH."

City of Sydney Councillor Linda Scott: "If you live in public housing, Labor will protect your home. Your home will not be sold, and you will not be relocated."

This came after a binding motion was passed at NSW Labor's 2022 conference to legislate a moratorium on the privatisation, sale and outsourcing of any public housing assets or services. [2] The motion also bound Labor to legislate to ensure that public housing in the inner city increased at a rate exceeding local private housing developments.

This proposal fails on both these counts and is against community expectations, and hence must be rejected.

Housing mix and current tenants:

The current housing at Explorer St provides family dwellings which will be replaced by one- and two-bedroom units unsuitable for many current residents. There is a significant shortfall of larger homes on the public housing wait list - with a minimum 10 year wait for local applicants who need more than one bedroom - and any demolition will take such homes out of the system for good.

The residents of Explorer St have been a valued part of the Alexandria-Erskineville community and have contributed greatly to it for the last 31 years. They were guaranteed long term tenancy when they moved in and are being treated very poorly in this proposal. Some have already experienced forced relocation from Millers Point. They have been offered no opportunities to provide meaningful input until now.

The Social Infrastructure and Impact Assessment makes it clear that residents are opposed to the proposal. Despite the promise of a right of return, they are unlikely to do so because the new housing will not suit their needs. Already the project has taken a severe toll on their health and wellbeing, and this will only deepen if redevelopment proceeds.

Height of buildings:

The proposed building height controls permit two tower blocks that will be 43 metres high. In context, the tallest building nearby is the Channel 7 building which has a permitted height of 35 metres - and that is within a fully commercial precinct.

Furthermore, as Explorer Street sits significantly higher than Henderson Road on the other side of South Sydney Rotary Park, the effective height of these towers from the point of view from the street, only 75 metres away, is over 50 metres. That makes them taller than the massive blocks at Redfern Station - also in an otherwise commercial precinct.

The nearest new development in the Erskineville/Alexandria area is the nearby Ashmore precinct, where building heights have been restricted to a maximum of 27 metres.

The eastern block in the state's proposals will tower above the neighbouring 49 Henderson Road development, just across Station Place. The DPE has failed even to consider the major adverse impacts (sunlight, daylight, privacy etc) on the units in 49 Henderson Road.

In summary, towers of this height are entirely inappropriate to the local neighbourhood. They are far more suited to centres such as Green Square, Mascot or Zetland, where such buildings are common, rather than situated among two and three-storey buildings less than a fifth of the size.

Overshadowing:

Shadowing by these buildings will greatly impact on the amenity of South Sydney Rotary Park, in an area which currently receives sunlight all day throughout the year.

Environmental destruction:

The outdated strategy of destroying perfectly good housing results in very poor environmental outcomes. Worldwide there are much better strategies for refurbishing and redeveloping existing homes that could also provide more housing but without the degradation and waste of demolishing existing sites and the poor environmental outcomes for surrounding residents. [3]

Infrastructure:

There are major issues already with water drainage, vibration from the underground trains, and contamination of the site which will need to be dealt with. With the completion of just Stage 1 of the Ashmore Estate introducing difficulties in public transport, that have only been partially addressed by the recent upgrades to Erskineville Station, a development of the Explorer Street proposal would appear to have the potential to overwhelm existing and future infrastructure of the local precinct. There are no known plans for the introduction of, or expansion of, essential public infrastructure like schools, day care etc.

Traffic and parking impacts:

Mitchell Rd, Park Street, Henderson Rd, and Railway Parade have already been adversely impacted by increased traffic rat runners as a result of the construction of WestConnex. The traffic studies referred to in the intended effects statement makes no reference to the comprehensive traffic studies recently completed by council. It appears that traffic counts along Park Street were taken when through traffic was severely limited due to the council's recent upgrades and the closure of Railway Pde to vehicles turning from Erskineville Rd.

Impacts on the local road network and parking during the construction phase are not known or accounted for in the proposal. However, it can be argued the existing network has little or no capacity for the level of demand and access that heavy vehicle and earthmoving traffic would require for the proposed construction. Proposed removal of parking in Henderson Road to accommodate construction traffic would introduce unsustainable pressures on local side streets and remove safety features for pedestrian crossings especially outside the Camelia Grove Hotel. A further influx of approximately 800 to 1000 new residents will inevitably increase demands for parking, which will not be available off-street under council policies and unlikely to be offset by the planned public transport solutions.

The movement of heavy vehicles, which will be required during the construction phase, will be problematic. There is a 4 tonne vehicle limit applicable on Park Street however this is frequently ignored by heavy vehicle traffic from Sydney Trains and other large vehicles.

Navigation Apps will default to Park Street as a more direct route and access point encouraging the movement of heavy vehicles required during the construction phase

putting unrealistic pressure on local road network and the recently repaired and upgraded drainage systems under Park Street.

[1] [https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/transcripts/3165/Transcript%20-%20PC2%20-%20Budget%20Estimates%20\(Jackson\)%20-%201%20November%202023%20-%20UNCORRECTED.pdf](https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/transcripts/3165/Transcript%20-%20PC2%20-%20Budget%20Estimates%20(Jackson)%20-%201%20November%202023%20-%20UNCORRECTED.pdf)

[2] <http://www.redwatch.org.au/issues/public-housing/221016alp>

[3] <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-french-solution-for-sydney-s-apartment-blocks-20230727-p5drqd.html>

Annexure A

[From The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) definitions, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/>]

SOCIAL HOUSING:

Social housing is government subsidised and made up of two types of housing:

- **public housing**, which is owned and managed by State and Territory Governments, and
- **community housing**, which is managed (and often owned) by not-for-profit organisations.

Social housing is allocated according to need, rather than competitive market conditions and provides longer term and secure rental housing. Social housing provides people with homes where they can live with dignity and as comfortably as possible, and, as an added benefit for the wider society, helps reduce people's use of expensive health and judicial services. For some people, social housing provides a place where they can rebuild their lives, acquire education skills, and access employment opportunities.

Rents:

- **public housing** – are calculated at 25 to 30 per cent of the household's income (depending on household income and composition). If, for larger households, the 25 to 30 per cent rent level exceeds the local market rent for that property, then the local market rent is applied.
- **community housing** - the 25 to 30 per cent of income rent rate (once again, depending on household income and composition) is applied only to very low-income tenants. As community housing tenants are also eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), that subsidy will be paid to the community housing provider, resulting in a rent that may approach local area market rents. The Australian Tax Office has ruled that, as charities, GST will not apply to not-for-profit community

housing providers that charge rents that are less than 75 per cent of local market rents. In such situations community housing providers charge rents at 74.9 per cent or below of market rents.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING:

Defining what is 'affordable housing' doesn't have a common meaning across jurisdictions and government programs.

NSW and Victorian Planning Departments frame affordable housing in relation to a household's income and consider that it is for very low to moderate income households. However, the NSW Department of Planning considers affordable housing to be 'rental housing for members of the community who may not be able to afford to rent in the general market'. The benchmark for affordability is 25 to 30 per cent of the income of these target groups.