

State design policy must balance quality with affordability

Monday, 21 August 2017

The announcement by the NSW Government of a new integrated design policy must balance well-meaning aspirations towards high quality with the impact on affordability, says the Urban Taskforce.

"The NSW Government's 'Better Placed - Integrated design policy' is an important commitment to making sure clever thinking is involved in how the built environment is designed and steered by government at state and local levels," says Urban Taskforce CEO, Chris Johnson. "As a general policy these aspirations are important but in the hands of tick the box council planners the creativity of quality architects could be overly regulated."

"The development industry is keen to produce buildings of design quality but we believe this should involve a variety of approaches to design that reflect the diversity of the NSW community. The state's design policy and its implementation process must ensure that it does not become focused on a narrow style guide but encourages a variety of design approaches."

"Affordability must be a key consideration in a design process but the final Better Placed document has removed the 'cost effective' component that was included in the draft version under principle six. Good design must focus on cost effectiveness particularly at a time when Sydney's housing is unaffordable for many younger people."

"The Better Placed policy stresses the importance of Design Review Panels particularly for apartment projects but this needs to be balanced with the government's recent announcement about mandatory Independent Hearing and Assessment Panels (IHAPs) for all projects between \$5 million and \$30 million in value. It may be better to ensure that the IHAPs have design skills involved rather than have two panels assessing each project."

"The Urban Taskforce is concerned that the NSW Government will be producing 'detailed design guides, manuals and case studies' by the end of 2018 which are likely to add further detailed planning assessment criteria that the development industry and its architect consultants will need to comply with. We all want to produce quality projects that fit the economic parameters that ensure consumers can access new housing and work places but New South Wales needs to get the balance right between quality and affordability."

The Urban Taskforce is a property development industry group, representing Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers.

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