

HOW ONE WORD IN A PLANNING DOCUMENT NEARLY MADE SYDNEY'S THIRD CITY DEVOID OF HOMES

Sydney's District Plans must contain around 100,000 words of planning speak. They were issued in March this year after the draft versions, also 100,000 words, were exhibited in October last year. My task is to read these documents to assess what impact will occur on the development industry. This requires a detective like analysis of objectives, priorities and actions. So it was a miracle that in reading both sets of documents that we discovered on page 70 of the Western City District Plan under Action 28 that a new clause had been added to the ten draft clauses in the form of action 28 k. The new clause called for 'giving effect to' the National Airports Safeguarding Framework (NASF) which brought in a Federal Government approach to protecting airports. NASF includes measures for turbulence and wild life safety which do not affect development but clause 28 k also included the word 'noise' as a measure. And it is the NASF approach to measuring noise around airports that creates a massive problem. If this system was formalised as a land use tool then an extra 240 square kilometres of land around the Western Sydney Airport would not be allowed to have new housing. When I refer to the extra area impacted this is extra to the current noise controls that have been in place for 30 years. The new NASF system would leave the third city as a vast area of warehouses devoid of residential development. Around Sydney Airport an extra 60 square kilometres of land would be deemed to be unsuitable for new housing potentially stopping new residential projects.

So that one word 'noise' in clause 28 k that was not in the draft plans, could lead to a massive impact on land use planning across Sydney. We have been fighting the NASF system for the last 6 years as an unnecessary new planning tool compared to the existing ANEF system which is the Australian Standard but we have met the usual bureaucratic responses that it would never be implemented. Yet, like a virus, it has slipped back into the plans for Sydney's growth that now have legislative weight. The councils according to Action 28 are now responsible for giving effect to the NASF noise measures. Maybe it was a slip up or a typo that let the word 'noise' sneak into these important documents or maybe it was a federal government bureaucrat who instructed its inclusion. When the Minister for Planning, Anthony Roberts, was alerted to the mysterious clause in the district plan it quickly unfolded that it was a 'factual error' and that the plans would be corrected. The lesson from this story is that those involved in planning and developing for Sydney's future need to read every word of the plans and check the final plans against the draft versions. We also need the federal Minister for Urban Infrastructure and Cities, Paul Fletcher, to exert some influence over his diligent public servants who in their quest to safeguard airports are potentially stopping housing developments across large areas of Sydney.

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