



Ref: 19/128401

The Hon Gladys Berejiklian MP  
Premier  
GPO Box 5341  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Premier

On behalf of the Greater Sydney Commission (the Commission), we write to provide you with the findings from Stage 1 of the Assurance Review of planning in the Ryde Local Government Area (LGA).

In accordance with the Assurance Review's Terms of Reference, this letter outlines the matters identified through our research and stakeholder engagement undertaken to date<sup>1</sup>. It also proposes four preliminary actions for the NSW Government and City of Ryde to consider implementing immediately to help address the issues identified, without prejudice to the findings of our Stage 2 report which will be provided in May 2019.

As advised in our letter to you of 29 November 2018, the Review Panel comprises the Chief Commissioner and Deputy Chief Commissioner<sup>2</sup>.

Our Assurance Review identifies good quality planning and infrastructure within Ryde LGA as essential to improving Greater Sydney's liveability, productivity and sustainability. The LGA is a highly desirable location to live, contains regionally important education facilities, generates significant commercial activity and has highly valued environmental qualities that must be preserved and enhanced.

The Greater Sydney Region Plan (GSRP) categorises Macquarie Park as a Strategic Centre in recognition of its contribution to the health and education sector and its strategic location within the Eastern Economic Corridor. As detailed in the North District Plan, Macquarie Park is a key centre for job creation and economic activity, providing the largest non-CBD office market in Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> This Assurance Review has a strategic focus and does not relate to, or comment on, any individual development application or planning proposal.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Deborah Dearing stepped down from the Ryde Assurance Review Panel so that she could contribute to submissions and to avoid any perceived conflicts of interest in her capacity as North District Commissioner.



Nevertheless, our initial assessment finds that Ryde LGA is facing significant challenges owing to the current scale, rate and volume of residential development that is occurring. This has largely been the consequence of unprecedented housing market activity and an unanticipated level of take-up in recent years. By way of example, there have been over 4,500 dwelling completions in the Ryde LGA over the past three years (2015/16 to 2017/18). This compares with around 2,500 completions in the three years prior (2012/13 to 2014/15). As context, the twenty-year average for Ryde LGA has been approximately 600 dwelling completions per year<sup>3</sup>.

This significant scale and rapid rate of housing supply has led to a misalignment between the timing of development and the delivery of the infrastructure necessary to support it. Furthermore, stakeholders have identified the lack of effective collaboration between local and State Government, together with the development sector, as a contributing factor.

The preliminary findings of our Assurance Review reaffirm the Commission's advice of May 2018 to pause new residential planning proposals and defer the commencement of the *Low Rise Medium Density Housing Code*<sup>4</sup>. The intention of this advice remains relevant, that is to allow sufficient time for the Ryde Local Environmental Plan (LEP) to be reviewed to address the issues identified. I also note that the NSW Government has allocated \$2.5 million to the City of Ryde to ensure good quality evidence informs the work and to accelerate the LEP review process.

We would also like reiterate that good planning is a shared responsibility between local and State Government, the development industry and the community, with the best outcomes achieved through collaboration, co-ordination and partnership.

We, therefore, propose that the NSW Government, in partnership with the City of Ryde, immediately implement four preliminary actions to address the land use and infrastructure planning issues presently being experienced in the Ryde LGA and to restore community confidence in local planning. These preliminary actions are detailed on pages 5, 6 and 7.

We are also of the view that many of the observations of this Assurance Review, and our subsequent recommendations to be provided in our Stage 2 Report, will have application across Greater Sydney.

## **Panel process**

The Panel has undertaken four key activities to date to inform the Assurance Review:

1. A review of relevant planning documents, available data, recent decisions and public announcements regarding Ryde LGA and Macquarie Park;
2. A site visit across the Ryde LGA, including the Macquarie Park Investigation Area, to understand the local environment;

<sup>3</sup> Department of Planning and Environment, housing completions based on Sydney Water connections, 1998/99 to 2017/18.

<sup>4</sup> Currently to 1 July 2020



3. Consultation with eight relevant State Government agencies (see Attachment A), the City of Ryde and neighbouring City of Parramatta. The North District Commissioner also presented to the Panel on behalf of the North District; and
4. Two community listening sessions (on Tuesday 5 and Thursday 7 February 2019) at which community and industry stakeholders, and elected representatives, were able to address the Panel. Thirty-three people addressed the Panel, 49 attended the sessions as observers and 56 written comments were received for the Panel's consideration.

We are grateful for the positive engagement with stakeholders, and the constructive and collaborative approach by all to the Assurance Review. A full stakeholder engagement report summarising each submission will be provided with our Stage 2 report.

### **What we heard**

The Panel understands that the Ryde LGA is cherished by local community members and that care and attention, especially with planning and infrastructure decisions, are essential to protect and enhance what is unique about the area. Such decisions must, therefore, consider the existing and desired local character of the area, the provision of local services and employment opportunities, the value of the natural environment together with the quality of its road and transport connections to Greater Sydney.

These characteristics have made Ryde LGA a highly desirable location to live, work and invest as evidenced by the strong market conditions in recent years. These conditions have led to over 4,500 dwelling completions between 2015/16 and 2017/18<sup>5</sup> representing an unprecedented and unanticipated level of growth across the LGA within this comparatively short period<sup>6</sup>.

In this context, it is understood that Ryde is on track to not only achieve - but exceed - its 5-year housing target (2016-2021) of a minimum of 7,600 dwellings. The Department of Planning and Environment's (DPE) 5-year housing supply forecast estimates that 9,500 dwellings will be built between 2017/18 and 2021/22<sup>7</sup>.

In light of this significant supply, it will be critical for the City of Ryde to expedite its work on its LEP to ensure that it is appropriate for its local circumstances and protects and enhances the local character of the Ryde LGA.

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Planning and Environment, housing completions based on Sydney Water connections, 1998/99 to 2017/18

<sup>6</sup> The twenty-year average is approximately 600 dwelling completions per year

<sup>7</sup> The GSRP and District Plans did not set LGA-specific 6 to 10-year housing targets, with the Commission prioritising the importance of working with local councils to agree targets which could be supported by necessary local and state infrastructure. Targets will be agreed with councils with regard to their local housing strategies.



Ryde LGA also provides essential economic opportunities for its residents and businesses (and, more broadly, for people in Greater Sydney), due to the presence of key employment hubs, including Macquarie Park. As detailed in the North District Plan, Macquarie Park alone is estimated to generate approximately 58,500 jobs (2016) with a target to generate an additional 14,500 jobs by 2036.

The importance accorded to Ryde LGA is further reflected in the NSW Government's ongoing attention and investment decisions, including:

- Investment in major transport projects, such as the Sydney Metro, which, in addition to improving connectivity to the Ryde LGA and Macquarie Park, are of significance to mobility across Greater Sydney as a whole;
- The identification of precincts within Ryde LGA for growth, including the Macquarie University Station (Herring Road) Planned Precinct and the North Ryde Station Planned Precinct to provide housing diversity;
- The recent identification of the Sydney Water Pumping Station site at West Ryde as land that could be protected and preserved for community uses; and
- Other significant projects and announcements, including the redevelopment of the Ivanhoe Estate, the development of the Meadowbank Education Precinct and the agreement to buy back the former Peter Board High School site to deliver a new high school.

Our stakeholder engagement to date has identified a range of matters that are adversely affecting the liveability, productivity and sustainability of Ryde LGA, including:

- The often limited co-ordination and collaboration between local and State Government agencies, and the development sector, resulting in a disconnect between planning and infrastructure delivery;
- The lack of co-ordinated and contemporary planning controls, infrastructure plans and funding mechanisms resulting in an ad-hoc approach to development, the failure to fund adequate local and regional infrastructure, together with uncertainty for industry investment;
- Missed opportunities to plan and incentivise investment in the LGA's employment areas, such as Macquarie Park, to create vibrant, attractive places and grow the night-time economy;
- Concerns regarding the loss of, and lack of new, open space and recreational opportunities for residents and workers, including in Macquarie Park;
- The impact of development on the environment, and resultant risks to natural habitats and flora and fauna, including that of the Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest; and



- Perceived lack of attention to, and inconsistency in, design quality, particularly in relation to larger developments, which is exacerbating community concern regarding the appropriateness of development.

A number of discrete issues concerning liveability in the Ryde LGA, unrelated to the strategic context of this Review or to current or prospective planning processes or decisions, have been raised by stakeholders. These will be outlined in our Stage 2 report and we will share these matters with the relevant State or local agency for action, where appropriate.

### **Preliminary actions**

We are of the view that, given the rapid increase in development and the observed disconnect with the phasing of infrastructure delivery in the Ryde LGA, the NSW Government could immediately implement several actions to help restore community confidence in local planning, as outlined below.

#### **1. Establish a Ryde LGA Co-ordination Group**

Establish a Ryde LGA Co-ordination Group (RCG), to be chaired by the North District Commissioner. The objective of the RCG will be to create the best opportunities for 'place-based planning' where urban form and design and open space is planned along with systems (such as transport, including active transport) and services (including health, education and community services).

The RCG will bring together the City of Ryde and State Government agencies to improve collaboration and co-ordination across the LGA. This will seek to enhance the alignment of development with the provision of infrastructure and services to improve planning outcomes for the local resident and business communities. The RCG could be modelled on the Greater Parramatta and Olympic Peninsula (GPOP) Co-ordination Group and the Collaboration Areas initiative led by the Commission.

The RCG should commence immediately and operate for a specified period, for example, for 12 to 24 months, or until such time as the infrastructure co-ordination matters in the Ryde LGA have been appropriately addressed.

#### **2. Complete a Macquarie Park Investigation Area Master Plan**

Instruct the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) to complete work on the Macquarie Park Investigation Area and deliver a Master Plan within 12 months.



The DPE's activities should be overseen by the RCG and the final Master Plan approved by the Commission's Infrastructure Delivery Committee (IDC). The IDC includes the Greater Sydney Commissioners and the Secretaries of Health, Education, Premier and Cabinet, Treasury, Transport, and DPE. The CEOs of Infrastructure NSW and Roads and Maritime Services act as observers. Oversight and approval by the RCG and IDC respectively will provide a consistent and co-ordinated approach to development and infrastructure provision.

The Master Plan should provide a shared vision for the Macquarie Park Investigation Area that implements the GSRP and the North District Plan, including a plan for funding, securing and delivering the necessary local and regional infrastructure. It should also be consistent with the City of Ryde's Local Strategic Planning Statement.

The Master Plan must also be prepared having due regard to the scale and nature of existing and proposed surrounding development<sup>8</sup>, the natural environment, the needs of business, design quality, walkability and street level activity, amongst other matters that will be presented in our Stage 2 report.

### **3. Master Plan Additional Sites to Complement Existing Residential Development**

Immediately identify additional locations within the Ryde LGA to be master planned to complement existing residential development. Preliminary discussions between State Government agencies regarding the Meadowbank Education Precinct and surrounding areas (including the Sydney Water Pumping Station and the West Ryde Industrial Area) have occurred and have identified the value of working collectively to optimise the planning of this area to contribute to local communities.

Identified sites should optimise local employment generation and the provision of community facilities and open space, improve connectivity and cycle connections, and protect and enhance the natural qualities of Ryde LGA.

The master planning should be overseen by the RCG and approved by the Commission's IDC.

### **4. Review Local Planning Controls**

The NSW Government should maintain its existing position on the current pause on new residential planning proposals in the Ryde LGA and the delayed commencement of the *Low Rise Medium Density Housing Code*.

The NSW Government should also pause the finalisation of any existing residential planning proposals in the Ryde LGA for a 12-month period. This would allow sufficient time for the NSW Government to respond to the findings of the Stage 2 Assurance Review report and for improvements to be made by the RCG (Action 1). It would also allow for existing proposals to be considered in the context of the Macquarie Park Investigation Area Master Plan (Action 2).

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<sup>8</sup> Including Macquarie University, the Macquarie University Station (Herring Road) Planned Precinct and the North Ryde Station Planned Precinct.



The Commission's assurance program will continue to monitor the progress of the City of Ryde's update to its LEP, in collaboration with the DPE, to ensure delivery timeframes are met and that future development and infrastructure is aligned with the priorities and strategies of the GSRP and North District Plan.

Among a range of issues that must be considered through the preparation of its local housing strategy, including diversity of housing choice in appropriate locations, the City of Ryde should identify those locations within the LGA which are and, importantly, are not appropriate for medium density housing so as to protect and enhance the local character of the Ryde LGA. The findings of this analysis should be reflected in the City of Ryde's updated LEP.

The City of Ryde should expedite the review and update of its LEP to bring the earliest possible certainty to the local and investment communities of the Ryde LGA.

During this period, the City of Ryde should also prioritise the review and update of its Local Development Contributions Plan<sup>9</sup> to ensure adequate funding is secured for the timely provision of local infrastructure.

### Next steps

We trust that our Stage 1 findings, together with our four proposed preliminary actions to address the identified challenges in Ryde LGA, are of assistance.

With the benefit of additional time and engagement, we will be exploring some of the key issues raised in this letter further. We look forward to providing more detailed analysis and advice in our Stage 2 report in May 2019.

We are also confident that our Stage 2 report will be able to highlight learnings from this Assurance Review that can inform broader improvements to planning practices and the successful alignment of development with infrastructure across Greater Sydney more generally, to the benefit of all Sydneysiders.

Yours sincerely

**Lucy Turnbull AO**  
**Chief Commissioner**

25 FEB 2019

**Geoff Roberts**  
**Deputy Chief Commissioner**  
**Economic Commissioner**  
**Chief Coordinator for Western Sydney**

<sup>9</sup> In accordance with Section 7.11 of the NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*



## **ATTACHMENT A**

### **NSW State Agencies**

- NSW Department of Planning and Environment
- NSW Health
- Health Infrastructure NSW
- School Infrastructure NSW
- Sydney Metro
- Transport for NSW
- NSW Roads and Maritime Services
- NSW Land and Housing Corporation