The Minister’s Planning Principles

The Minister’s Planning Principles bring together well-accepted practices of good planning and provide insights for achieving the best outcomes across defined focus areas.

The Minister’s Planning Principles help shape the places and communities we live in by providing guidance for strategic and land use planning and policy making.

This document answers some frequently asked questions about the principles.

How do the Minister’s Planning Principles apply?

The principles will be a consideration for the following:

- regional and district strategic planning by the relevant strategic planning authority when preparing regional or district plans.
- local strategic planning by councils when preparing local strategic planning statements
- land-use planning by planning proposal authorities in the local plan-making process
- policy making in local and state government, including when preparing state environmental planning policies (SEPPs) and other policies and guidelines.

What value do the principles add to the planning system?

Clear principles drive good outcomes. They provide consistent and overarching advice on significant planning issues and reflect policy priorities on matters of state importance and community need.

The Minister’s Planning Principles talk about planning using plain language and concepts that are universal and easy to understand. This facilitates a collaborative and deliberative culture within the NSW planning system. The principles will also enhance engagement by making the planning system, and the meaning and intent behind planning policy, more accessible for all.

The Minister’s Planning Principles promote the concept of sustainable development as a central theme in the planning system and support good growth that is inclusive and sensitive to the needs of communities and future generations.

Why introduce the Minister’s Planning Principles and why now?

The NSW Government is committed to improving and simplifying the planning system for its users. The Minister’s Planning Principles underpin the new thematic planning framework and provide clarity by setting the overarching policy purpose and intent for each focus area.

The Minister’s Planning Principles have been released to support the recent updates to the SEPPs, plan-making directions and planning circulars.

Who will use the Minister’s Planning Principles?

The Minister’s Planning Principles will be specifically considered by planning authorities (such as councils, the department, the Greater Sydney Commission) through their strategic and land-use planning work, and in the preparation of policies, guidance and strategies.
The principles provide all members of the community and people involved in planning with a contemporary reference point for important planning policy issues and will drive best practice in NSW.

How do the principles fit within the existing planning framework?

The principles are not determinative on how plans and policies are prepared and will not form a new layer of planning. Regional plans, district plans, local strategic planning statements (LSPSs) and local environmental plans (LEPs) will remain the authoritative planning documents to inform the needs of the places to which they relate and the basis for decision-making.

How do the principles support a place-based approach?

Implementing the Minister’s Planning Principles through strategic and land-use plans will support a place-based approach that best suits the specific needs of different areas and communities.

We anticipate that the principles will work in various ways in different regions and at different scales in order to respond to regional and local context. They will help planning authorities balance complex and competing considerations that can often arise in planning.

Are these yet another layer in the NSW planning system?

No. The Minister’s Planning Principles are not intended as a new layer in the planning system. They consolidate key planning considerations and best practice into one location and seek to inform and strengthen future strategic and land-use plans.

Is this at odds with the idea of having a strategically led planning system?

No. The Minister’s Planning Principles support the reforms that have given strategic plans primacy in our planning system.

The Minister’s Planning Principles will guide and inform, not complicate the existing hierarchy and function of plans. They strengthen the strategically led and inclusive planning system by providing a comprehensive source of considerations for good planning practice.

Are the roles of councils, the Greater Sydney Commission and other planning bodies being minimised?

No. While the Minister’s Planning Principles set clear guidance and expectations for the outcomes we want to see, we understand that planning authorities need to balance complex and competing considerations when preparing plans and policies.

Strategic and land-use plans will remain the authoritative documents that set out the vision and priorities for land use and development.

Why don’t the principles apply to development applications?

As statewide principles, the Minister’s Planning Principles will be most effective when applied to strategic and land-use planning. However, the principles will still shape on-the-ground outcomes and promote sustainable development by informing strategic and land-use plans and policy decisions that will subsequently inform development controls and assessment.

Are the principles changing responsibilities in the planning system?

No. The principles recognise planning in NSW is a shared responsibility between different levels of government. The Minister’s Planning Principles encourage all levels and parts of government to
fulfil their respective planning and policy responsibilities. This includes maintaining local decision making and responses to support sustainable development and other positive outcomes for the community.

What is planning in favour of sustainable development?

Achieving sustainable development is a central focus of planning in NSW. The Minister’s Planning Principles describe sustainable development as a ‘golden thread’ that runs through the planning system. The consideration and pursuit of sustainable development guides the application of the Minister’s Planning Principles.

What is the ‘golden thread’, and why is it important?

The golden thread represents the connection between visions with outcomes. In the Minister’s Planning Principles, sustainable development is the clear, guiding, singular reference point that connects strategic planning to the land-use plans, controls and policies that bring those long-term visions to life through on-the-ground outcomes.

Why do the principles identify sustainable development when the planning system already recognises ecologically sustainable development?

Sustainable development is an all-encompassing concept that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Ecologically sustainable development (ESD) is more granular in its nature. The broad concept of sustainable development described in the Minister’s Planning Principles encompasses ESD.

How do the principles support emissions reduction?

The importance of mitigating and adapting to climate change is recognised throughout the Minister’s Planning Principles. The principles echo the NSW’s Government’s goal of net zero emissions by 2050, stating that this goal should be a foundational element of sustainable development and strategic and land-use planning.

There are a number NSW planning documents/sources that already have principle-based statements. How are these planning principles any different?

Principles have always underpinned planning policy and practice under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. They can be found in existing legislation, plans, and policy. The Minister’s Planning Principles have drawn upon this context to develop a consolidated set of key strategic land-use and policy considerations and best practice in one location.

Are there examples of overarching planning principles for other areas and have these worked?

Yes. The Minister's Planning Principles have been prepared with regard to existing principle-based frameworks including the UK’s National Planning Policy Framework, Queensland’s State Planning Policy and the State Planning Policies for South Australia.
Who has been involved in the development of the principles?
A range of stakeholders and specialists have been involved in the development of the Minister’s Planning Principles to ensure they are consistent with adopted best practice and policy positions:

- The minister convened an independent expert panel of leaders from government, urban development, environment and planning to advise on the preparation of the Minister’s Planning Principles. The panel’s expertise and input has shaped the principles.
- The Greater Sydney Commission and Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) were involved shaping the Minister’s Planning Principles through early and ongoing engagement to ensure alignment between principles and existing parts of the planning system.

Why isn’t there any formal consultation?
The Minister’s Planning Principles distill existing policy and industry best practice. This will inform future policy making and review which will, as a matter of course, be subject to appropriate consultation.

There will be a 3-month implementation period to provide councils and industry time to consider the principles and work through any questions ahead of their commencement.

What has informed the preparation of the Minister’s Planning Principles?
The Minister’s Planning Principles draw upon and distill planning legislation, regulation, policies and plans into a single source of information that sets out key policy and practice issues in relation to specific focus areas. Although the precise wording may differ, the principles have sought to capture the intent of existing sources and planning documents including:

- the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000
- key strategic plans, including regional plans and district plans
- local plans and plan-making directions.
- departmental policy and guidelines.

When will the Minister’s Planning Principles come into effect?
The Minister’s Planning Principles were published on 2 December 2021 and will come into effect on 1 March 2022.

Will the Minister’s Planning Principles be reviewed over time?
Yes. The Minister’s Planning Principles will be reviewed and adapted over time to reflect changes in community needs and planning priorities.

How do I know what specific planning principles apply to a planning proposal and how do I consider them?
The Minister’s Planning Principles cover a wide range of topics and in most situations not all of the focus areas will be appropriate to consider. Determining which of the Minister’s Planning Principles are relevant will be up to the planning authority, which is best placed to balance complex and competing considerations that can often arise in planning.
There are some technical terms used in the Ministers' Planning Principles. Where are these defined?

While a set of terms commonly used in the document have been defined in the introduction section of the Minister’s Planning Principles, the document has been drafted using plain language and concepts. It does not rely legal definitions in legislation, and should be read with a common, plain understanding of the terms used.

Further information

For more information, please visit the department’s website or email the Systems and Productivity Team at: SystemsProductivity.Policy@planning.nsw.gov.au.