Planning annual report highlights transparency and working with councils

An increased focus on transparency and working more closely with local councils were among the highlights of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure’s 2011-12 annual report released today.

Director-General Sam Haddad said the report included steps the department has taken to make planning information more available to the community.

“For example, all departmental assessments of major projects sent to the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) for determination are now published on the department’s website prior to their consideration by the PAC,” Mr Haddad said.

“For the first time, a draft version of the next Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney will be exhibited for public comment prior to its finalisation and all State Environmental Planning Policies are now publicly exhibited before being adopted.”

Other highlights for 2011-12 include:

- de-politicising the decision-making process, with 93 per cent of major project approvals given by the PAC or department, compared to just six per cent in 2008-09
- earlier and greater consultation with councils on local and strategic planning matters
- a stronger focus on public consultation and transparency, with more than 2,000 people attending a roadshow by the planning system independent review last year
- a dramatic increase in exhibitions of draft policies and plans
- an increase in the number of exhibited draft policies and plans placed on the department’s website
- repealing the Part 3A system and replacing it with a more transparent State significant assessment system
- updating and modernising the State’s planning system by approving a record number of major new local environmental plans
- a more active approach against State significant projects which breached their consent conditions, with enforcement actions up by nearly 30 per cent compared to 2010-11
- developing two regional land-use plans which protect high-quality farming land from inappropriate coal mining and coal seam gas development and beginning work on a revised Metropolitan Strategy
- supporting the Barangaroo review, exhibiting proposals for more than 300 hectares of new employment land in Sydney’s growth centres and commencing work on a structure plan for the broader Western Sydney Employment Area
- returning planning powers to local councils by increasing the capital investment value threshold for matters to be referred to joint regional planning panels and the repeal of the Part 3A system

The report also focussed strongly on planning system changes to support housing growth, noting that NSW was the only State to record increased housing approvals during 2011-12. In Sydney, housing approvals alone jumped by 18 per cent.
Key 2011-12 actions to support housing included:

- creating a Cabinet Taskforce on housing supply to deliver ‘whole of government’ housing solutions
- accelerating planning for more than 50,000 homes in Sydney’s Growth Centres and exceeding the State benchmark for available zoned and serviced land by 40 per cent
- coordinating the infrastructure needed to support growth, including working with other agencies to gain $500 million in budget funding and upgrades to Camden Valley Way and Richmond Road in Sydney’s west
- fast-tracking the publication of departmental housing data from a yearly to monthly basis

The report concludes that the City of Sydney supplied the highest number of housing approvals of any Sydney council during 2011-12, with 2,346 dwellings approved.

“This illustrates the ongoing popularity of infill housing in supplying Sydney’s housing needs in areas well-serviced by existing services and infrastructure,” Mr Haddad.

“In fact, more than 63 per cent of Sydney’s approvals in 2011-12 were multi-unit dwellings, compared to 57.4 per cent in 2009-10.”

The report also includes regional breakdowns for State significant and joint regional planning panel decisions during 2011-12.

“The financial year was also important in that we began the most comprehensive review of the State’s planning system in 30 years,” Mr Haddad said.

To download a copy of the report, please go to www.planning.nsw.gov.au

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