Making New Suburbs Sustainable

Comprehensive new planning guidelines for Melbourne’s new outer suburbs will help create more self-reliant urban communities with better transport and local jobs.

Planning Minister Justin Madden has released new Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines that are the ‘blueprint’ plans for designing new communities of more than 3,000 homes on green field sites.

The new guidelines have a much stronger focus on employment and the need to plan for jobs in the growth areas where half of all Melbourne’s new residential growth is going, but only 30 percent of new jobs.

“For the first time developers will have to outline both the number and type of jobs forecast for new communities,” said Growth Areas Authority chief executive officer Peter Seamer.

“The broad aim is to plan for the creation of one new job for every household proposed in a precinct structure plan,” he said.

The new guidelines inform everything from where local schools, roads, open space, shopping centres and transport will go.

“There will also be a new requirement for developers to account for the distances they expect new residents will have to travel to work,” Mr Seamer said.

“As well there’s a new efficiency check to test plans against key performance measures relating to land use, power and water use,” he said.

Planning Minister Justin Madden said developers are already out there raising the bar creating more sustainable suburbs that are responding to climate change by becoming less car, power and water dependent.

“These new guidelines provide a simpler, clearer road map giving everyone greater certainty about where we’re headed and what’s expected,” Mr Madden said.

The guidelines also integrate native vegetation and cultural heritage management into the mainstream planning process – so protecting bushland and indigenous relics can be managed up front – rather than becoming potential stumbling blocks to development later on.

Precinct Structure Plans aim to:

- Establish a sense of place and community
- Create greater housing choice and affordable places to live
- Create highly accessible and vibrant activity centres
- Provide for local employment and business activity
- Provide better transport choices
- Respond to climate change and increase environmental sustainability and
- Deliver accessible, integrated and adaptable community infrastructure.

STOP PRESS: GAA Wins Award

The GAA has picked up a gong in the Planning Institute of Australia’s Victorian Awards for Planning Excellence.

Together with council partners and stakeholders, the GAA won the Planning Minister’s Award for the development of new Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines.

The awards citation praised the guidelines as a “simple tool for designing and delivering better quality communities” which responded “in a creative and successful way to delivering the vision and aspirations of Melbourne@5million.”
Why Do We Need New PSP Guidelines?

The new blueprint for planning in the growth areas is directed at making new suburbs better places to live.

“The guidelines represent a clear break from some of the poorly serviced residential developments of the past where all the estates look the same and there aren’t enough jobs or transport close by”, said the GAA’s director of policy and strategy Steve Dunn.

The guidelines promote higher residential and employment densities especially in and around activity centres. “We’re going to get better quality outcomes on the ground via a single consistent process that delivers high quality developments that are diverse and distinctive, Mr Dunn said.”

“It will replace an ad hoc system, where developers can be asked to produce dozens of various plans by local councils, yet often achieving similar looking developments on the ground.”

“This is about coordinating the delivery of timely infrastructure, with the early and continual involvement of all the delivery agencies so that we know what’s needed; where it will go; who is paying for it and who is providing it,” he said.

They are part of a total package including the proposed shift to the Urban Growth Boundary and the introduction of the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution designed to help finance infrastructure for new residential and employment areas.

The guidelines were put together by the GAA, in consultation with councils, developers and development agencies.

They will further streamline planning across all the broad-acre land earmarked for development within the growth areas and have been developed after consultation with councils and the development industry.

Improving Transport Connectivity

Access to transport will be a central priority behind all strategic decisions made in a precinct.

All areas of a precinct will need to be adequately serviced by buses to enable efficient access to jobs, goods and services.

Bus stops will be planned prior to subdivision or development and streets designed to cope with pedestrians, cyclists, cars and emergency vehicles.

The most intensive land use for residential and employment use, generating frequent visitors, will be in, or next to, an activity centre with access to the principal public transport network.

A transport plan will show the hierarchy of streets, pedestrian and cycle paths, public transport and freight routes. This will be updated when planning permits are issued.

A transport table will set out the role and function of different categories of the transport hierarchy and street cross section drawings will show how arterial roads, connector streets and local access streets will be designed for multiple transport types.

A transport assessment report will then analyse expected traffic movements on planned roads, public transport as well as patronage on public transport.
Planning For Jobs

Creating local jobs will be a high priority in strategic planning for new suburbs, instead of being ignored or dealt with as an ‘add-on’ at the end of the process.

For the first time under the new guidelines, developers will also have to prepare an employment statement outlining both the number and type of jobs forecast for new communities.

The broad target, according to GAA chairman Chris Banks, is the creation of one job for every new household planned for a new suburb.

“This is about making sure jobs are located closer to where people live so that they travel less and don’t become long haul commuters adding to congestion,” Mr Banks said.

The guidelines require developers to account for the distances they expect new residents will have to go to employment, in a travel to work statement.

Developers will need to prepare an employment plan showing the location of jobs provided across the precinct, activity centres, community hubs and designated employment areas.

An employment table will be required to set out the expected ‘job yield’ in the precinct, space requirements for different employment types and the overall number of jobs to be generated.

A travel to work statement will explain how residents are likely to travel to work; how the distance and travel time is likely to be reduced; and how public transport, cycling and walking is being encouraged.

The needs of home-based businesses will also need to be considered along with access to the principal freight network.

Housing: Higher Densities and Greater Choice

The guidelines place a new emphasis on getting high quality residential housing and more choice closer to public transport.

They implement Melbourne 2030 policy and the State Government’s objective of achieving minimum housing densities of 15 lots per hectare.

“Higher density housing around major shopping centres and transport is important because it allows people at all ages and lifecycle stages to either stay in their community or return if they’d moved away,” Mr Seamer said.

The guidelines will promote diverse housing types by applying a variety of residential and mixed-use zones.

The housing design response will also take account of how higher density housing has been planned close to public transport, shops and jobs.

Another critical element is ensuring the delivery of more affordable housing in the growth areas.

“The precinct structure plan will identify opportunities for a mix of private, affordable and social housing in and around activity centres,” Mr Seamer said.

“Any retirement villages or residential aged care facilities should be within an activity centre or within 400 metres of one along with a public transport stop,” he said.

Developers will prepare a housing plan showing where high, medium and conventional density housing will be located in relation to activity centres, public transport, community facilities and open space.

A housing table will set out the intended ‘housing yield’, the mix of lot sizes and densities.

“But greater than the sum of all that will be the need for developers to think about the sense of identity they’re creating in a particular place. The question is ‘what will give the precinct its unique identity, sense of place and liveability?’” Mr Seamer asked.
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Image And Character

One of the early critical elements in establishing the building blocks for a new suburb is deciding on its image and character.

This involves considering the local and surrounding topography and environment, including any distinctive landscape, water features and views.

All these elements are integrated into the precinct design from the very early stages, alongside local heritage.

An image and character plan will show the way that features are integrated into the precinct design, the way that housing densities and a mix of land uses transition across the precinct along with particular character areas.

“We want landscape, water features and cultural characteristics in a precinct to guide the pattern of streets and public spaces,” Mr Seamer said.

“The plan should also provide for future redevelopment to create areas of higher density, even if initially the land is used for other purposes that don’t preclude it from being redeveloped in the future,” he said.

Safe, attractive and ‘walkable’ neighbourhoods are the aim, along with creating desirable places for businesses and homebuyers to invest and live in.

Ten percent of land in a precinct should also be available for open space and should clearly be fit for the purpose and at least six percent of land should be available for active open space with shared use by sports groups and others.

Making Suburbs Greener

The creation of ‘greener’ suburbs that leave a lighter environmental footprint by a careful use of land, energy and water is a core aim of the guidelines.

An integrated water management plan will be required from developers, for each precinct. These should demonstrate a commitment to water sensitive urban design elements and contain estimates of how much stormwater can be harvested.

Areas of significant biodiversity will need to be protected with buffers between high conservation areas and urban land use.

When it comes to utilities and energy, developers will prepare a utilities plan showing the location of current and proposed infrastructure.

An energy statement will also be required to explain how development in the precinct will minimise the use of non-renewable energy.

The design of key structural elements should also allow at least 70 percent of lots across the precinct to have good solar orientation.

“We’ll be asking whether opportunities have been taken to reuse construction waste, whether renewable energy is accessible to homes and the wider neighbourhood and whether energy efficiency standards are being exceeded,” Mr Seamer said.

The plan will also consider how fibre-to-the-home infrastructure is provided and whether land needs to be set aside for infrastructure like telecommunications exchanges.

To download a copy of the new Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines go to: www.gaa.vic.gov.au/PSPGuidelines