



Stakeholder Engagement Report: Workshop Evaluation

Better Apartments Discussion Paper

Date of report: December 2015





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1. Introduction

Glossop Town Planning was engaged by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning ('DELWP') (the 'Department') to undertake a series of interactive workshops with practitioners, peak bodies and community groups as part of broader stakeholder engagement surrounding the 'Better Apartments' discussion paper.

This report provides a summary of views and opinions captured throughout the workshops in response to the broad themes outlined in the discussion paper, as well as proposed implementation mechanisms.

This report should be read in conjunction with the companion report entitled *Stakeholder Engagement Report: Interviews*, which was also prepared under this engagement.

Better Apartments Discussion Paper

In May 2014, the State Government released a discussion paper titled *Better Apartments*. The discussion paper outlined that medium density development would play an important role in meeting population growth and housing diversity demand and that the opportunity to influence apartment design was 'very real and immediate'.

The Discussion Paper was developed to:

- *Provide a context to apartment living and discuss key issues.*
- *Focus on the internal design, amenity and functionality of apartments and apartment buildings.*
- *Consider other issues that affect amenity for those living in apartment buildings.*

The discussion paper posited 14 separate issues affecting apartment amenity. These issues are:

- Daylight.
- Sunlight.
- Space.
- Outlook.
- Natural ventilation.
- Noise.



- Outdoor space.
- Adaptability.
- Landscape.
- Universal design.
- Energy and resources.
- Waste.
- Car parking.
- Entry and circulation.

The State Government invited submissions and survey responses from the public on the issues raised in the discussion paper and more than 1,700 online survey responses and 145 written submissions were received.

Following submissions, further consultation was undertaken through:

- Interactive workshops with local government, industry and community groups; and
- In-depth stakeholder interviews with peak industry bodies and community groups.

A summary evaluation of the interactive workshops is set out in this report.

Scope and Process of this Engagement

As part of this engagement, Glossop Town Planning has assisted the Office of the Victorian Government Architect (OVGA) and DELWP to undertake detailed stakeholder engagement on the *Better Apartments* discussion paper.

The stakeholder engagement has comprised two key engagement mechanisms:

- **Interactive Workshops:** a total of 4 interactive workshops were undertaken with a range of industry groups, local government and community representatives. The workshops were designed to identify issues and solutions regarding internal amenity in apartment design.
- **In-depth Interviews:** a total of 12 interviews were undertaken with representatives from industry peak bodies and community groups who made submissions in response to the *Better Apartments* discussion paper.



In-depth Interviews

Information about the process and data collected as part of the in-depth interviews is detailed in the *Stakeholder Engagement Report: Interviews*, which is a companion document to this report.

Interactive Workshops

A key component of this engagement was the facilitation of 4 interactive workshops with individuals and organisations that had made submissions to the *Better Apartments* discussion paper.

The following workshops were undertaken:

- Local and State Government Workshop – Friday, 28 August 2015;
- Community Workshop – Tuesday, 1 September 2015;
- Industry, Peak Bodies and Professionals Workshop – Friday, 4 September 2015; and
- A Combined Workshop – Thursday, 17 September 2015.

The objectives of the workshops were to:

- *Engage with local government in metropolitan and regional cities, industry and community in a series of stakeholder consultation workshops.*
- *Provide an opportunity for people who have written a submission to participate in constructive dialogue.*
- *Draw out design ideas and options to make apartments better.*

Each workshop was attended by 30-60 individuals. Participants were chosen by the Department and OVGA, following a review of submissions made to the first round of community engagement.

Each workshop commenced with an overview and presentation by the facilitator, who set out the process and issues identified in submissions. Following this, each person was assigned to one of six tables, which were led by a 'table captain' representative from the OVGA or the Department. Table captains led discussions on each table and asked participants to provide their views on each of the 14 issues identified within the discussion paper, as well as offer comments on any mechanisms for implementation.

All comments were recorded on large sheets of paper by the table captains or a nominated scribe and reported back verbally to the workshop. Hard copies of these sheets have been retained and the comments recorded on the sheets of paper form the basis of this analysis.

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Section 2 focuses on the 14 key issues identified in the discussion paper, while **Section 3** sets out responses in relation to implementation.



2. Summary of Issues and Solutions

This section of the report outlines a summary of participant responses to the 14 issues identified in the *Better Apartments* discussion paper.

The discussion in this section of the report captures the key matters raised by stakeholders at the workshops. It does not represent the full responses provided by each stakeholder. Rather, it reflects the general themes, views and positions adopted by stakeholder groups to best 'summarise' the positions of stakeholder groups. Not all views have been mentioned and this discussion should be read in conjunction with the individual submissions which were made by these participants to the *Better Apartments* discussion paper.

Daylight

There was general acceptance among stakeholders of the benefits in achieving daylight access in apartment design. Most commonly, this was associated with improved mental health among occupants, as well as increasing the overall amenity of the space.

There was a strong debate among participants about the importance of daylight access within development. Many participants agreed that access to daylight was most important to the living areas of an apartment and this often included the kitchen area. In terms of bedrooms, some respondents considered the need to provide daylight access to these spaces was 'secondary' to achieving good daylight in living areas, while others felt that bedrooms should be treated the same.

In general, some Council representatives felt that the current minimum standards for daylight in apartment development (within the planning scheme and the National Construction Code (NCC)) were not appropriate and failed to provide adequate internal amenity. Some community members also highlighted that the SEPP65 in New South Wales dealt with daylight issues in a more robust manner.

Council representatives also highlighted the need to consider appropriate building separation to maintain good access to daylight. They provided anecdotal comments that some developments achieved 'good' access to daylight when first constructed, but as neighbouring sites were redeveloped, daylight access was reduced to sub-optimal levels. This was seen as an inequitable outcome by these participants.

Council representatives also expressed a view that internal light courts provided in some developments were too small to achieve good access to daylight to some rooms, particularly at lower levels.

In response to many of these issues, some participants suggested that regulation should be focused around ensuring that natural daylight is achieved to bedrooms and living areas.



Some also suggested that adopting a maximum depth for rooms from a light source (window) may be appropriate.

In terms of daylight to bedrooms specifically, there was a divergence of opinion among participants over the acceptability of bedrooms relying on borrowed daylight and the use of 'saddleback' bedrooms.

Bedrooms

In terms of borrowed daylight, some community members advanced a strong view that the provision of natural daylight was essential to both living areas and bedrooms. In turn, borrowed daylight was viewed as a poor outcome and a practice that should be regulated or prevented by the building or planning systems.

Council representatives suggested that there was a move away from bedrooms with borrowed daylight in the market and that this was resulting in a greater number of apartments provided with 'saddleback' access to daylight.

Both council and industry practitioners agreed that saddleback bedrooms could provide an appropriate design solution, but that there needed to be greater regulation around the width and depth of the access to the light source, as well as its orientation.

Sunlight

Community and council representatives tended to focus on the importance of providing solar access to balconies and apartments within development. These stakeholders highlighted that solar access provided many tangible benefits in relation to health (Vitamin D), mental health, thermal comfort and sustainability.

Some community members felt that all dwellings should achieve access to sunlight, while industry and council respondents were more equivocal and tended to favour a site responsive design, provided apartments with solely southern aspects were limited.

Industry practitioners suggested that the provision of sunlight requirements might oversimplify the problem and that some occupants prefer south-facing dwellings for lifestyle reasons or to take advantage of views. They also noted that north and west-facing dwellings often require some form of shading or thermal intervention to maintain cool temperatures indoors due to the sun's radiant heat.

In terms of solutions, there were varying views put forward by participants. Some suggested that there should be a limit on the number of south-facing dwellings to 10% of all developments, while others promoted a standard for minimum hours of sunlight access to dwellings, which could be compensated against with other provisions where this is not achieved (such as higher ceilings or larger floor areas).



Council representatives also considered the need to ensure that building separation maintains solar access to dwellings and balcony spaces in development.

Space

Dwelling size

The size of dwellings was identified as an issue by council and community stakeholders.

Community members in particular felt that apartments were generally too small and that this was evidence that the market did not provide adequately sized apartments. In turn, some considered that set minimum standards for apartment sizes should be adopted to address market failure, although there was broad disagreement on the exact size that should be adopted.

They also highlighted that the size and layout of dwellings had failed to provide sufficient space for accommodating a family, their pets or visitors. The overarching view from community stakeholders was that apartments tended to be better suited to single persons or a couple. There was also concern among community respondents that bedrooms of 9 square metres (3 metres x 3 metres) were too small. To address this concern, they highlighted a need to set minimum room sizes for bedrooms, in addition to minimum sizes for dwellings.

Balconies were also considered to be an integral part of the dwelling size issue. Community members suggested that the provision of a balcony was important, but the lack of useable space both on the balcony and within apartments often meant that smaller balconies were repurposed for storage. Conversely, some council representatives suggested that larger balconies may not be an effective use of space and that part of the balcony space could be rationalised in some circumstances to increase internal space to a dwelling. It was also suggested that this rationale could be applied equally to small and impractical balcony spaces, which serve no function as a recreation outdoor space.

Some participants suggested that the physical size of apartments should not be the only consideration of space and this was a view shared across many groups. These participants tended to highlight that functionality was the most important factor in apartment design and that the “quality” of space was equally or more important than the “quantity” of space provided.

In this regard, these participants (and particularly council and industry professionals) tended to prefer a performance-based approach to any minimum size standard, to allow for a consideration of qualitative matters. These qualitative considerations included the usability of the dwelling, the proportionality of an apartment in terms of its width and depth and the relationship between ceiling heights and space.



Some community representatives felt that there was currently a lack of consideration about the functionality of apartments once ordinary household furniture (such as bedding and lounge settings) was added. They highlighted a lack of circulation space around beds in bedrooms and lack of width in living rooms as key matters.

Industry representatives were generally (although not universally) strongly opposed to a mandatory prescription of minimum apartment sizes. They expressed a view that smaller apartments with innovative design and flexible layouts for day and night usage (i.e. through moveable walls) could provide a much better internal amenity than a larger dwelling in some circumstances.

Other stakeholders suggested that smaller apartments could be allowed on the condition that communal space be provided within the development.

These considerations are consistent with the views of some stakeholders that any regulatory mechanism needed to apply flexibility and have an ability to waive or vary requirements if certain outcomes were met. Some community representatives agreed that flexibility could be adopted and that an incentivised approach to dwelling sizes should be considered.

It was also noted by many stakeholders across all sessions that mandating an increase in dwelling sizes may also give rise to unintentional consequences, such as an increase in the sale price of apartments and an erosion of affordability.

Ceiling heights

Community representatives expressed a view that floor to ceiling heights in developments were too low and that this was often coupled with other perceived poor amenity outcomes, such as single aspect design and deep living spaces, which are remote from external daylight.

Industry stakeholders acknowledged that many developments do provide low floor to ceiling heights. However, they also suggested that the market is starting to deliver higher floor to ceiling heights and this product is in demand from buyers.

Dwelling diversity

Many stakeholders across all sessions highlighted that the diversity of dwellings within developments was uneven, with a tendency to provide more 1-2 bedroom dwellings and few 3 bedroom dwellings being available in the market. Some community members felt that apartments weren't generally designed to house families due to the number of bedrooms provided and overall small dwelling sizes.

Industry practitioners recognised the current lack of 3 or more bedroom dwellings in apartment developments. However, they also mentioned that their anecdotal experience is



that the market is adapting to respond to this need, with more 3 bedroom apartments emerging as an overall proportion of dwelling stock.

Outlook

There was a key tension identified in discussions about outlook between the need to provide an outlook and the need for privacy within development.

Participants at all sessions agreed that the provision of screening to 1.7 metres in height often came at the detriment of outlook and that this outcome was less than ideal for living areas. Community representatives felt that reliance on screening was symptomatic of an overdevelopment within a site.

In terms of privacy, many highlighted the need to prevent an outlook into the bedrooms and bathrooms of other dwellings, while some community representatives felt that views towards living rooms should also be prevented.

Community representatives tended to prefer the provision of an outlook from all living areas to 'natural' scenery, such as trees, or the streetscape. In some circumstances, they considered distant outlooks to buildings acceptable. These participants tended to highlight a need to increase building separation significantly to ensure that there were no views towards other dwellings. They also tended to prefer lower scale built form that provided a strong connection to the street in terms of outlook.

Council and industry practitioners were more equivocal in their assessment. They linked the provision of good outlook to improved mental health outcomes and noted the importance of achieving landscaping in design to improve outlook. However, they also highlighted that any consideration of outlook needs to ultimately depend on site context. Council representatives preferred a good site analysis to be undertaken to identify adjoining habitable room windows and private open space. Their primary assessment mechanism was the need to consider equitable development outcomes in terms of outlook and privacy.

In this regard, many submitters highlighted that there were 'primary' and 'secondary' outlooks in development. The primary outlooks tended to be from living rooms, while secondary outlooks were from bedrooms, hallways or bathrooms. In general, there was a suggestion that 'primary' outlooks should be given greater separation between buildings and more focus in achieving an outlook beyond the site's boundaries, while 'secondary' outlooks could be to light courts or courtyards, provided they were well dimensioned.

No submitters commented on the appropriate level of building separation that should be achieved to provide a 'good' outlook, but some did note that providing increased building separation and outlook might have additional benefits in terms of daylight, sunlight and noise impacts.



Natural Ventilation

In terms of natural ventilation, the importance of providing natural ventilation to habitable rooms was almost universally affirmed at all stakeholder sessions. There was an overarching view that natural ventilation should be achieved to all habitable rooms.

In particular, there was a strong view that some second bedrooms, which currently have 'borrowed' ventilation and daylight should be provided with natural ventilation in all circumstances. In this regard, council representatives highlighted that the current Building Code of Australia (BCA) provisions were inadequate, given that they allowed a dispensation to be granted for borrowed ventilation.

Conversely, some industry practitioners considered that the BCA provided the appropriate place to regulate ventilation in buildings and that the current standard was appropriate.

While some suggested that mechanical ventilation was appropriate for bathrooms and laundry areas, others were concerned about the presence of mould. Some industry and council representatives identified that mould build-up was becoming an issue in some existing developments that are poorly ventilated and particularly in spaces that are solely mechanically ventilated.

Community and council representatives also suggested a need for communal corridors and lobbies to be naturally ventilated.

In terms of improving ventilation to all of these spaces, some council and community participants suggested that the use of courtyards and light courts may achieve better ventilation. However, they also acknowledged that there was a risk that this would lead to increased noise within a development.

Cross-ventilation

Achieving cross-ventilation within individual apartments was viewed by many stakeholders as an important objective, with council representatives highlighting the positive benefits that could be provided in terms of sustainability and energy usage.

However, the extent to which cross-ventilation should be provided or to which proportion of apartments was hotly contested between groups. Council representatives acknowledged that the majority of apartments currently on the market were provided with a single aspect and therefore could not achieve cross-ventilation. Industry practitioners also said that it would be difficult to achieve cross-ventilation to a majority of apartments in development.

Community members also suggested that a balance should be struck between trying to achieve cross-ventilation and providing security to residents. There was a view shared that the operability of windows may pose a security risk and a weak point of entry.



Other participants highlighted that SEPP65 in New South Wales has some helpful provisions for achieving better ventilation – such as designing single-loaded corridors (whereby dwellings are only on one side of the corridor) and providing ceiling fans to encourage circulation.

Noise

Many comments provided on noise were generally related to internal noise sources within a development, along with some discussion of external noise.

Some industry professionals suggested that the current BCA standards for noise protection (in relation to both internal and external noise transfer) were often not met and that there was limited post-occupancy testing and regulation to achieve compliance. It was suggested by these stakeholders that the current BCA provisions in relation to noise may require review.

Internal noise

Most stakeholders put forward a view that there were numerous noise sources within developments that were a cause of concern for many residents. They highlighted air conditioning units, hard surfaces in landscaping areas, garbage collections, noise in corridors, pets, parties in adjacent dwellings (particularly ‘short stays’) and the location of bedrooms next to lifts as key sources of noise complaint in developments.

A council representative mentioned that most police call-outs for noise complaints are related to internal noise transfer, rather than external noise issues.

In terms of providing better acoustic privacy to address these matters, participants suggested that there was a need to incentivise better construction quality or to review the appropriateness of the BCA standard. Other suggested measures included the use of better insulation and double glazing or the reconfiguration of floor plans such that bedrooms weren’t located near common corridors or living rooms.

External noise

External noise sources were generally identified by stakeholders as including road noise, railways, tramlines, commercial strips and garbage collection.

Some council participants suggested that these occupants traded off the nuisance of the noise for the locational amenity benefits of being close to transport and services. They further suggested that changes to SEPP N-1 should enshrine the need for the ‘agent of change’ to protect their own amenity, rather than existing industry.



It was again highlighted that many of these issues could be due to poor construction quality and that better provision of insulation and double glazing within a development may provide an easy solution.

Outdoor Space

The discussion around outdoor spaces primarily centred on the provision of private and communal outdoor space within developments.

There was a strong emphasis from community and council representatives that dwellings should be provided with balconies in most (if not all) circumstances. These stakeholders also focused discussion on the need for these spaces to be usable and provided with all-weather protection. In terms of usability, this is primarily concerned with the width and overall area of the space, to ensure that it is functional.

Community members highlighted the need to encourage balconies to northern, eastern and western aspects, rather than on the southern side. They also considered that many balcony spaces were too small and that services like hot water boosters and air conditioning condensers should not be provided in these areas.

Communal space was also seen as an advantage to a development by many stakeholders. Industry professionals mentioned the need for any communal space to be meaningful to engender a community spirit. It was suggested that these areas could be used as productive rooftop gardens, or common areas for drying.

There were divergent views among stakeholders (and even within stakeholder groups) about the appropriateness of communal open space. Some stakeholders suggested that the provision of communal space could justify a reduction or waiver of a requirement to provide a balcony to each dwelling. A subset of this group also suggested that smaller dwellings in development could be justified on the basis of greater communal open space provision.

Others felt quite strongly that, under no circumstances, should communal space replace the function of private open space, given that they served different purposes. These stakeholders tended to say that private open space was more 'useful' than communal space.

Council representatives suggested that the provision of any open space – whether it was private or communal – should be considered within the site's context and that proximity to parkland may justify a lack of provision of open space within a development. Accordingly, their view is that any future regulatory framework should reflect the need to consider a site's context in assessment.

The overall view from community members was that more open space (both communal and private) should be provided within developments and that minimum outdoor spaces



and balcony sizes were required. They also suggested that developments should be required to provide a certain amount of communal space per apartment or gross floor area of dwellings.

Adaptability

There was an emphasis within the workshops on the many different aspects of adaptability in design. Discussion tended to focus on providing adaptable floor plans, considering demographic and population change in adaptability and considering building lifecycles in adaptability.

In general, council representatives expressed a need to better 'set' structural elements and nominal floor to ceiling heights in buildings at the planning stage, so that adaptable areas could be identified and provided in the overall lifecycle of the building. While many industry practitioners agreed, they noted that setting height limits based on metres rather than storeys often discouraged the provision of high ceilings, which allowed for adaptability.

Adaptability within dwellings was considered by each stakeholder group. Some suggested that dwellings could be sold as 'shells', with fit-out left up to the individual owner, while others noted the technical limitations of this approach in terms of providing services such as plumbing and electricity.

Many participants also considered that achieving post-occupancy conversion needed to be made easier. Some suggested it would be appropriate to better identify non-load bearing walls on plans, such that they could be removed or altered easily by future occupants without the need for planning permission. Some suggested that this could be extended to options for the merger of two smaller apartments into a larger apartment, to provide more bedrooms, while others noted that adaptability in this manner may have some limitations, particularly where the adaptation to 3 or more bedrooms may trigger a need for a car parking reduction.

In terms of providing adaptability throughout the lifecycle of a building, industry stakeholders highlighted that providing an ability to fit-out car parking levels (above ground) for dwellings was a valid approach, but that there were some practical issues. They identified that the ownership structures of buildings can be prohibitive to achieving works beyond the individual titles for each dwelling. For instance, in many circumstances, works require the sign-off of 100% of owners corporation members and this is not always attainable. This was seen as particularly problematic for buildings which are at the end of their useful lifecycle.

Stakeholders across all groups highlighted that the first few levels of buildings should be designed with adaptability in mind, such that they can be used for a range of uses, including commercial, retail and residential. Both industry and council practitioners



identified a need for 'vertical zoning' regimes to be adopted to better encourage and facilitate this outcome.

Council representatives also suggested that adaptability needs to be considered in the context of demographic composition, such as an ageing population and the need to consider cultural needs in adaptable design.

Landscape

Many participants spoke broadly about the benefit of providing landscaping within developments. The positive effects of good landscaping were considered to be as diverse as providing good amenity and improving outlook to addressing the urban heat island effect, providing a contribution to urban ecology and biodiversity, and improving localised permeability.

There seems to be general agreement among stakeholders that contextual landscaping should be provided in developments. Some stakeholders (particularly community members) advanced a stronger opinion that all development should make a landscape contribution, while others suggested that landscaping may not be required for developments in the very inner urban areas. Some community members suggested that high-rise development should be better able to accommodate landscaping on site and that greater setbacks from boundaries should be promoted to achieve this outcome.

Many stakeholders identified the need to carefully consider landscape response as an integral part of the design process and that landscaping should provide for active and passive recreation space. Industry and community stakeholders agreed that the provision of quality, well-thought-out landscaping was important in design. Some community representatives also highlighted the importance of species selection and the need to consider the deciduous nature of some species, particularly where the planting served a screening and privacy function.

Many council representatives were supportive of the provision of green roofs and green walls, although they also recognised the practical maintenance cost involved in providing these forms of landscaping.

The need for deep soil planting was highlighted by council and community representatives. It was suggested by these stakeholders that maximum site coverage or minimum setbacks for basements from boundaries should be adopted to provide an opportunity for deep soil planting along boundaries. Council representatives suggested this requirement could be reduced or waived depending on context.

Industry practitioners were generally supportive of the provision of appropriate contextual landscaping. However, they were also the only stakeholders to comment on the logistical management issues associated with the provision of landscaping. In particular, they



highlighted the long-term management and upkeep of communal landscaping as an issue for owners corporation management, which may be undertaken to varying degrees of success.

Universal Design

Many respondents highlighted that existing regulation did not necessarily cater appropriately for the consideration of universal design and people with limited mobility in development outcomes.

Industry practitioners and council representatives highlighted that current regulation and legislation exists in a 'maze' of conflicting and sometimes contradictory information. It is not immediately clear when certain standards are relevant. This led industry practitioners to advance the view that there were many difficulties in delivering universal design in development.

Community members expressed that there was a need to implement flexible design outcomes that promote accessibility for people with limited mobility. Some mentioned that many want to be able to stay where they live when their mobility needs change and that staying in place can have benefits in recovery and management, but that building design does not currently facilitate this in many circumstances.

They also considered that the need for flexible design extended beyond the apartment and was equally as relevant to allow movement within the building.

Council representatives suggested that the Liveable Housing Australia Guidelines (which are referred to in SEPP65) might provide an appropriate mechanism for considering universal design in development.

While industry practitioners did not have a view on implementation mechanisms to achieve this outcome, they did say that achieving universal design should not come at the expense of affordability in development.

Energy and Resources

There was widespread agreement between stakeholders that development should achieve 'passive' design outcomes that improve the energy efficiency of apartments.

Many councils have their own requirements for environmentally sustainable design (ESD) measures and the adoption of these tools varied from municipality to municipality. Council representatives highlighted the need to adopt a statewide approach through policy. Industry practitioners tended to support this measure through the encouragement of sustainability reports upfront in development assessment.



Participants variously highlighted the need to achieve improved air quality and ventilation in design. They also highlighted that encouraging or mandating the provision of double glazing or better insulation in design could have increased development costs, but lower long-term energy costs.

Some participants highlighted that the need to improve the environmental performance of the building could also be delivered through a greater encouragement of renewable energies and overall lower energy use through measures in design.

Waste

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of ensuring that waste is addressed properly at the planning application stage. Some community members noted that it was difficult to retroactively seek to address shortfalls in waste management once a development was completed.

Council representatives suggested that the provision of a waste management plan should be a mandatory application requirement for all apartment developments across the state. Industry practitioners suggested that the current practice adopted by many inner city councils to require waste management plans (and private collection) for larger developments tended to work quite well.

Many stakeholders suggested that developments need to make provision for easy waste disposal for residents. Often, this included the use of waste chutes or the provision of rubbish rooms to each floor. Council representatives added that waste chutes and waste storage areas should be well ventilated and able to be easily cleaned and maintained.

In terms of practical waste collection, all stakeholders highlighted the need to ensure that adequate space was provided for storage and separation of waste and recycling between collections.

Moreover, community and council representatives highlighted the need to consider hard rubbish and organic waste. The anecdotal evidence suggested that often hard rubbish was left to accumulate on the street or in resident car spaces and common areas, in the absence of on-demand collection or dedicated storage areas for this waste.

Community members also highlighted the need to incentivise recycling collection and that developments should consider the provision of charity bins for discarding of old clothes.

Car Parking

There were disparate views advanced by different parties in relation to car parking provision. Responses from community participants tended to focus on the insufficiency of car parking to existing developments. These stakeholders suggested that at least two car spaces needed to be provided per apartment.

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Council representatives favoured a more location-based approach to car parking considerations, noting that car dependency was entrenched in many middle to outer suburbs and that the provisions in Clause 52.06 did not address existing demand in these areas.

Mechanical car parking solutions, such as “stackers” were viewed to be undesirable by some community members, who highlighted that the stackers are often underutilised, due to the time taken for access and egress to parking spaces. Council representatives shared these concerns.

Participants offered differing views on the appropriateness of car parking reductions. The need for a precinct-based approach to car parking in activity centres was identified by some participants in all sessions. Others suggested that the primary consideration of the appropriateness of a reduction should be based on car ownership demographics for the area and other locational characteristics. Other solutions included that car parking spaces should be on separate titles to dwellings, which can then be sold or rented on an as-needs basis and that lower car parking requirements should only be permitted where bicycle parking is increased.

In terms of visitor parking, community members called for a greater number of visitor spaces. They felt that the lack (or waiver) of visitor parking was problematic in some areas, as visitors were unable to park close by on the street due to restrictions or lack of available on-street parking. Conversely, both council and industry representatives said that their experience showed that visitor spaces were largely underutilised.

There was a general consensus among different stakeholders that the current bicycle parking provisions at Clause 52.34 are inadequate. Some participants also suggested that bicycle parking location is not carefully considered as part of an integrated design and that more visitor bicycle spaces were necessary.

From an urban design perspective, there was a general view expressed by all groups that above ground, podium car parking detracts from streetscape activation. In their view, it was better to provide all car parking below ground. Other participants said there was a need to improve safety to car park entrances, particularly where they are provided off a rear or side laneway that has little streetscape activation. Council representatives also highlighted a need to improve circulation and separation between pedestrians, cars and bicycles in car park design.

In seeking to achieve improvements in urban design, some participants also highlighted that there could be benefit in ‘sharing’ facilities, such as ramps to basement car parks, to improve traffic conflicts and urban design presentation.



Entry and Circulation

Comments raised by stakeholders in relation to entry and circulation issues were generally in relation to the function of lobbies and entries, the design and function of corridors and the provision of areas for loading and unloading.

In terms of lobby areas, there was a general consensus among stakeholders that lobbies can serve a multi-function purpose and the need to provide a strong 'sense of address' to define a building entry.

Both council and community participants acknowledged that the lobbies 'set the tone' for the building and that there are positives which can be achieved from using the spaces as a social hub. Industry professionals said that, despite planning policy seeking integration between retail and residential lobby spaces, there were often difficulties in providing a properly integrated solution for practical reasons.

In terms of mailboxes and deliveries, some participants highlighted the need to provide secure mailboxes and a safe space for parcels to be left, if residents weren't home.

The lack of loading areas in development was also seen as a significant issue across all stakeholder groups. This was relevant for mixed use development, as well as development which was solely residential in nature. Some felt that the lack of loading bay provision would cause blocked streets and footpaths, particularly when people move in and out. While industry practitioners acknowledged this view, many felt that on site loading (particularly for removal trucks) was not realistic due to vehicle movement constraints.

Some participants saw the need to ensure that goods lifts were provided to development (or multiple lifts) to ensure that there wasn't disruption to all residents when occupants moved in and out. Equally, the size of lifts was viewed as an important factor, with some too small to move furniture safely and sometimes resulting in damage to common areas.

At upper levels, some community respondents expressed a need for ventilation (in particular) and daylight to be provided to corridors, while council representatives suggested that long corridors needed to be discouraged in design.



3. Implementation

Towards the end of each workshop session, participants were asked to provide views on the implementation mechanisms for achieving better internal amenity in apartment design.

Differing views were put forward in each session (as well as by stakeholders from the same groups).

Interestingly, almost all responses seemed to assume that some level of regulation would be provided. There were no responses by participants that indicated that a 'do nothing' approach would or should be adopted.

Many stakeholders also spoke of the current lack of consistency in decision-making around internal amenity for apartments. There was a widespread call for 'certainty' to be provided by many stakeholders and this is reflected in the various implementation approaches that were suggested.

In general, responses tended to be based around a need for either a mandatory or performance-based approach. There were also some other matters raised as part of this discussion that warrant comment in this chapter.

A performance-based approach

The performance-based approach was heavily favoured by industry practitioners, who tended to highlight that this approach would provide the certainty required, while still allowing for flexibility and providing an incentive for outcomes to go beyond minimum provisions.

Many of these stakeholders tended to suggest that the ResCode approach was their preferred model to allow for a series of generic standards to be applied, but flexibly considered dependent on site context and a balance of competing policy outcomes.

Industry professionals also preferred that any future regulation would form part of the planning scheme, rather than sit outside it as a reference document, as the current Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) Guidelines for Higher Density Residential Development do¹.

Council representatives also tended to prefer the performance-based approach for applying any future regulation for internal amenity. However, they also highlighted that a

¹ The Guidelines for Higher Density Development provide guidance on developments of five and more storeys. The document is a policy reference at Clause 15.01 of the Victoria Planning Provisions and all planning schemes. Unlike the ResCode provisions at Clauses 54-56 of the Victoria Planning Provisions, the Guidelines sit outside the planning scheme and are afforded less weight in decision-making due to their status.



performance-based model can often result in people achieving the minimum standards without serious consideration of a site-responsive design. In their view, this would lead to a series of developments which merely 'ticked the boxes' to achieve a favourable outcome.

Some community members advanced a view that the performance-based approach of ResCode had failed to adequately achieve site-responsive design that respected an area's character.

A mandatory approach

Many community members tended to favour the adoption of a mandatory approach to provide an appropriate level of certainty to the community and the development industry. Their responses suggested that there needed to be protection against development subverting the provisions to achieve an outcome that did not provide good amenity and protect yield.

Some community members favoured an adoption of SEPP65 as best practice. This was supported to a more limited extent by industry and council practitioners, who considered that the NSW rules were a good guide, but too rigid for an appropriate assessment.

Council representatives also suggested that adopting a mandatory approach would stifle innovation and lead to a fairly uniform and generic form of development across the city.

Other options

Many other options were advanced by participants, including:

- A code assessment tool (similar to Brisbane).
- The development of 'deemed to satisfy' provisions, that can be varied with a permit.
- A 'traffic light system', which places a building in a different stream of code assessment, merit assessment or deemed to satisfy, depending on its adherence to any regulatory framework.

National Construction Code

Industry practitioners highlighted that there is a blurring of the separation of matters covered by the National Construction Code (NCC) and the planning system. It appeared to these stakeholders that, over time, the planning system had developed a 'regulatory creep' into matters that are already covered by the NCC. Sometimes, the planning regulation was consistent with the NCC, while other times it sought outcomes which conflicted with provisions in the NCC.



These stakeholders tended to suggest that a single place was required for regulation, rather than duplication for the sake of red tape. They tended to favour the NCC as the best place for the regulation of the technical performance of buildings and suggested that if the 'Better Apartments' engagement had identified any inadequacies with the NCC, then it would be most appropriate for it to be corrected, rather than a conflicting piece of regulation introduced.

Council representatives also highlighted a need to ensure that any regulation that was ultimately developed as part of this project, needed to ensure that it did not conflict with the NCC. Many of these stakeholders favoured better alignment between the NCC and the planning system, while a limited number also supported the view that the appropriate place for this regulation was solely in the NCC.

Current regulation

Many industry and council stakeholders expressed views that the existing DSE Guidelines for Higher Density Residential Development were inadequate. They advanced these views on the basis that the Guidelines were not afforded enough weight in decision-making because they were only a reference document; and that they were not prescriptive enough to guide any meaningful assessment of an application.

Other matters

In discussing appropriate implementation mechanisms, stakeholders also raised the following matters that should be given consideration:

- There is a need to consider the effect that any further regulation will have on affordability of apartment construction and purchase.
- There is a need for education of consumers, industry professionals and councils to achieve better outcomes in design, quite separate to any regulation.
- There is a need for clarity and transparency regarding internal amenity in decision-making and that this is currently not provided.
- There are currently no incentives for good design in development.



4. Conclusion

The stakeholder workshops undertaken as part of this engagement highlighted differing attitudes to regulation for internal apartment amenity. In general, we observed that:

- Some participants felt there was a policy vacuum and that a consistent approach was required.
- There were conflicting views within some stakeholder groups about appropriate outcomes in relation to internal amenity issues. Conversely, there were also consistent views between different stakeholder groups on appropriate outcomes to respond to internal amenity issues.
- There was a general acceptance on the need to improve some amenity outcomes. In general, these outcomes tended to relate to outlook, design of common areas (entry and circulation), size of apartments, daylight and sunlight, landscaping, adaptability and car parking.
- In terms of implementation, there is general support among industry and council practitioners for a performance-based model, which incorporates opportunities to vary provisions based on site context and innovation, notwithstanding that some respondents do not see the need for regulation.
- Community respondents tended to favour a mandatory approach to regulation.
- There are concerns by some respondents that any regulation could impact affordability and affect innovation.
- Some respondents noted that many matters in the *Better Apartments* discussion paper were covered by the National Construction Code. In general, there was a view that regulation should remain in one place and that this may mean that the National Construction Code requires review.

The summary and conclusion of this report should be read in conjunction with the companion report summarising interviews with industry professionals, as well as the submissions of the participants who took part in the interview process.

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