



Australian Institute
of Landscape Architects

National Policy Statement

RETROFITTING URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

Governments across Australia, and the communities they serve, are experiencing increasing pressures from population growth, rising consumption, competition for diminishing resources and degradation of the natural environment.

These are serious challenges. Our cities and settlements are complex, evolving social-ecological systems which are dependent on the health of their associated natural environments for ongoing sustainability. And they are currently home to over 90% of the Australian population.

The shape and form of our existing urban environments reflects historic human patterns of consumption and waste. However, these cities and towns were also built to last, and the embedded physical legacy of outmoded planning approaches and infrastructure influences not only our current behaviour & ecological footprint, but also our capacity to adapt to future change – as individuals and as a nation.

The challenge is how we can best adapt our urban environments to address the destructive patterns and effects of human activity which threaten our long-term survival, while at the same time ensuring active stewardship of the best qualities of those places we call 'home' – i.e. the tangible and intangible characteristics of our living environments which uplift, inspire, sustain and delight us, and which are central to our individual and communal identity, health and spiritual wellbeing.

Recommendations: That Government acts at all levels to ensure that:

1. The Australian Landscape Principles guide the planning, design and management of urban retrofitting and redevelopment across local, regional and national scales.
2. Integrated design & planning frameworks, informed by integrated sustainability assessment approaches, drive strategic planning and management of all urban design & infill projects, and underpin decision-making across multiple scales.
3. The role of Green Infrastructure is recognised and articulated in improving climate adaptation and sustainability strategies for urban retrofitting and redevelopment – and mechanisms are put in place to fund, design and manage it accordingly. Green Infrastructure provision and performance should be incorporated as an integral component of assessments for all urban retrofitting and redevelopment proposals.
4. Decision-making processes which impact on urban development are underpinned by a genuine respect for the value of the associated landscape and urban/suburban context, and incorporate processes to establish benchmarks, set performance targets & monitor and evaluate progress accordingly.

KEY URBAN RETROFITTING ISSUES

Accommodating a growing population will have major implications not only for industry, employment & housing, but also associated infrastructure including transport, energy, water and open space or green infrastructure. Urban densification and infill are frequently proposed as the magic-bullet 'solution' to these problems, however such solutions seldom consider impacts across a range of different drivers, demographics or landscape scales.

Climate adaptation requires a reassessment of virtually every aspect of built environment form and function. In addition to population growth, cities and settlements will be subjected to a broad range of impacts in relation to risk and vulnerability – including demographic and migration shifts due to more frequent and extreme weather events. Long-lead changes in climate patterns as well as unpredictable, short-term events will affect resource availability, security, community resilience and economic opportunity. Adaptive planning and management approaches will be central to effective response - integrated within urban design and retrofitting processes and outcomes, and applied across all scales.

Infrastructure constraints currently include ageing, underutilized and inadequate existing infrastructure, as well as a lack of integration in planning, design & management strategies for future infrastructure development in order to optimise climate adaptation & sustainability outcomes. There is also currently insufficient recognition and management of regenerative infrastructure capacity (both existing and potential), as well as the potential role of integrated green infrastructure strategies for leveraging sustainability gains across a range of landscape scales.

Resource use & efficiency at local and urban scales is intricately linked to broader national agendas, including water, energy, health, housing and transport. Current lack of integration of planning and management across resource-related and design sectors increases inefficiencies and potential for perverse outcomes of climate adaptation and sustainability strategies.

Community identity and sense of place – our existing built environment has a nominal life span of 50-100 years, which means that we will need to adapt the existing urban form, rather than rebuild from scratch, to accommodate future climate change impacts and demographic changes effectively. This will require sensitive and sophisticated urban infill and retrofitting design responses – balancing understanding & expression of natural and cultural processes - in order to protect, enhance and regenerate the characteristics most valued by current individuals and communities, as well as for future generations.

Business and investment sectors will need to look towards managing for ongoing economic sustainability – in particular, urban infill and redevelopment proposals will need to contribute to the emergence of alternative pathways to 'green', 'clean' and/or 'steady-state' economies based on balancing social, economic and environmental resilience factors.

GUIDELINES FOR SUSTAINABLE RETROFITTING OF URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

Urban infill and regeneration proposals should:

1. Respond to the significant challenges of providing appropriate housing, recreation and employment opportunities at a range of scales for a growing population, in balance with environmental carrying capacity.
2. Acknowledge that design challenges for urban settlements are inextricably linked to broader national sustainability challenges – including the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, population growth and economic development.
3. Be guided by adaptive, performance-based, integrated planning frameworks at precinct, neighbourhood and metropolitan scales to support, articulate and advance community values and aspirations.
4. Proactively enhance community health, safety and wellbeing, as well as the health of the broader natural environment for existing and future generations.
5. Enhance connections between individuals and communities to expand opportunities for positive social interaction and reinforce social identity and civic pride, encourage social inclusion and improve social health and community resilience.
6. Acknowledge the role of integrated planning and design of landscapes and buildings as a key mechanism for achieving more climate-responsive, socially equitable and affordable urban retrofitting solutions.
7. Demonstrate a measurable commitment to design excellence and innovation.
8. Demonstrate commitment to improved management of urban landscapes in order to reveal, enhance and regenerate the value of ecosystem services across a broader range of landscape scales.
9. Incorporate collaborative & inclusive integrated planning and design strategies at relevant spatial scales.
10. Incorporate processes to establish benchmarks, set performance targets & monitor and evaluate progress in relation to all of the above.

This Policy statement is part of the AILA's Sustainable Settlement suite of Policy Statements on Australian Landscape Architecture, the profession committed to the creation of meaningful and enjoyable outdoor places and to the sustainable management of our built and natural environment.

More details on AILA National Policy Statements: www.aila.org.au/policies

All queries on National Policy should be directed to the AILA's CEO.

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