

New Year, New Plan:

First Impressions of The Gold Coast's New City Plan

Introduction

The Gold Coast's New City Plan has recently been released, and town planners and developers alike will be required to become familiar with the terms and implications of these new planning rules for all future projects on the world famous glitter strip. But what will this mean for the city, and the sector at large?

Place Design Group's Gold Coast Principal and renowned local Planner, Peter Bell has worked closely with his own experienced team to interpret this new direction in planning for the city.

Having provided critical input into the plan's development, and with extensive experience in obtaining approvals for projects across the city, Peter believes the underlying strategy of the new plan is to make the Gold Coast a more compact and liveable city.

More specifically, Peter and his team's first impressions are of:

- #1 – Simplification
- #2 – Certainty assisted by visual guides
- #3 – Recognition of the Light Rail corridor
- #4 – Level of Assessments
- #5 – Changes to overlays
- #6 – Introduction of Small Lots

This paper works to inform interested parties via a simplified analysis of the changes which will guide development for many years to come, and help to create further clarity and understanding of this new planning era, from the minds of those who intimately know the local area and opportunities which will present as a result.

#1 – Simplification

The City Plan is a significantly slimmer document to that of the previous scheme. This is mainly due to the reduction in codes and the removal of Local Area Plans. Instead of Local Area Plans, specific precincts have been incorporated into zones and overlays to manage development of particular areas. Peter believes that this approach will greatly assist stakeholders to understand the constraints and opportunities contained within the City Plan.

#2 – Certainty assisted by visual guides

An improvement to the readability of codes and criteria is a great inclusion in the new version of the plan. This is supported by easy to interpret figures which give a visual explanation which Peter believes will assist in achieving greater development outcomes. Furthermore, this will be useful for practitioners and the general public to understand the intent of designations and expectations for built form across the city.

#3 – Recognition of the Light Rail corridor

The City Plan clearly recognises the G:Link Light Rail network currently operating between the University Hospital precinct and Broadbeach South. The new planning scheme has generally increased building heights, residential densities and the extent of new development building footprints along the corridor. It also provides opportunity for reduced car parking numbers. These factors should create opportunities for well-connected and well-serviced urban places along the corridor. The centres of Southport, Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach will significantly benefit from this intent, and the new planning scheme should encourage the emergence of higher density and world-class built form in these and surrounding locations connected by the corridor and other public transport.

#4 – Level of Assessments

For the most part the planning scheme levels of assessment have been reduced across the city, either from Impact down to Code or Code down to Self-Assessable. Where this has occurred, it gives a

greater level of certainty to development and should assist in reducing development assessment timeframes. The benefits of this are two-fold: such changes should free up Council staff to assess applications of greater significance; and also allow development assessment to happen more rapidly resulting in costs savings for projects which contributes to product affordability.

Some key level of assessment changes include:

- The previous density trigger has been removed across many parts of the city, whereby if the proposal is above a designated density it now does not automatically trigger Impact Assessment.
- Building height limitations have also been generally increased within the Light Rail Urban Renewal Area (a large part with no designated height limit), allowing development to remain as Code Assessable.

#5 – Changes to overlays

Designated environmentally significant sites, as identified on relevant overlay maps can require that all vegetation be protected in-situ. This provision is prescribed within the overlay code and also within the strategic framework. On this basis, unless it can be demonstrated by the statutory 'sufficient grounds' test that despite the conflict with the scheme the removal is justified, the vegetation cannot be removed under any circumstances (including previous agreements with authorities). These environmental overlays are located across both Greenfield and existing urban areas. Peter strongly recommends that due diligence investigations for any development opportunities consider and properly question how these may apply.

#6 – Introduction of Small Lots

The City Plan 2015 has introduced the opportunity for the establishment of small lots. Lot sizes of these are governed by the designated density applicable to the land. Within higher density area there is no minimum lot size, and in practice the city may see freehold lots down to 125m² in size. This has already started to occur within the Southport Priority Development Area and in Robina.

It can be expected that this type of product will evolve around the fringes of Specialist Centres such as Coomera and Helensvale and also in appropriate areas of the coastal strip.

Conclusion

Overall, the Gold Coast's New City Plan has moved much closer toward the creation a brighter future for the region, and Peter understands this to present real potential for the Gold Coast and its development opportunities, not only in time for the impending Commonwealth Games, but well into the next decade and beyond. The Mayor; and Director of Planning and Environment within the Council of the City of Gold Coast, Dy Currie should be congratulated for their sensible revisions to the scheme.

It can be said that industry was vocal about some of the provisions or approaches contained within the original draft scheme, particularly in relation to changes which would affect project viability and affordability. We are pleased to see that Council has then taken much of this feedback on-board and small and significant changes have been made throughout the updated draft to address these industry concerns. Further improvements will occur through additional revisions of the planning scheme.

Further clarification and interpretation

As a key contributor to the Mayoral Technical Advice Group, and via long-term works delivering successful development facilitation and approvals on the Gold Coast, Peter Bell and his team of experienced Planners, have developed a strong understanding of the new Planning Scheme, and the opportunities and constraints which have arisen for development on the Gold Coast.

If you would like further assistance interpreting the scheme, or if you would like to know more about how these changes directly affect you and your development or investment, please contact Pete and the team on:

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