

2 August 2010

Australian Government – Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2
Collins St East
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Attn: Chris Holder

Dear Sir

In Queensland a raft of initiatives have been recently implemented that I believe have moved Queensland towards having a 'best practice' planning system. These include:

- amalgamation of local governments to create regional councils, better able to deal with regional and sub-regional planning issues
- progressive completion of regional plans across the State with the attendant infrastructure plans
- review of the Integrated Planning Act to create the Sustainable Planning Act (SPA) providing a better system of structure planning for greenfield sites
- undertaking the Growth Management Summit to identify the key issues and actions to address them
- creation of Growth Management Queensland bringing together under one senior executive planning and infrastructure co-ordination in the state and
- creation of the Urban Land Development Authority (ULDA) to address the development/redevelopment of specific areas.

This submission relates to the ULDA and its part in Queensland's planning system move towards best practice.

Background

The Queensland Government's Housing Affordability Strategy released three years ago in July 2007 foreshadowed the creation of an urban land development agency by November 2007.

This commitment was delivered with the ULDA's establishment on 27 November 2007 under its own Act; the Urban Land Development Authority Act 2007. The purposes of the ULDA are to facilitate:

- delivery of urban land, co-ordinating and delivering infrastructure where required
- provision of a diversity of housing
- an ongoing supply of housing affordable to low to moderate income households and
- planning principles that give effect to ecological sustainability and best practice urban design.

For the ULDA Act to apply to an area, a site is required to be declared as an urban development area (UDA).

In 2008, three UDAs, all within Brisbane, were declared; Bowen Hills, Northshore Hamilton and Fitzgibbon.

During 2009, the strategic directions 2010-2014 for the ULDA were developed which foreshadowed future UDAs would be considered in the context of three 'program areas', namely:

Strategic Sites – Large brownfield or infill sites, requiring master planning and infrastructure co-ordination.

Regional Diversity Sites – Sites that would allow the direct delivery of affordable housing and that would also have a demonstration value.

Resource Town Sites – Projects to provide housing diversity and key worker housing to those regional towns experiencing housing stress from the resources boom.

In 2010, a further ten UDAs will be declared as part of these three program areas; e.g. four strategic sites in SEQ, three regional diversity and three resource town UDAs.

Achievements

The achievements of the ULDA within just two and a half years of its formation are testament to the strong support and commitment of the government and the ULDA Board.

These achievements include:

- completion of the master plans and development schemes for the very complex infill sites at Bowen Hills, Northshore Hamilton and Fitzgibbon
- undertaking the analysis and preparatory work to allow the declaration of UDAs in Townsville, Mackay, Gladstone, Roma, Moranbah and Blackwater and
- preparation of strategies and guidelines that cover housing affordability, accessibility, residential neighbourhood design.

The ULDA is not just about planning, but it is about getting development happening on the ground, either in its own right, or by facilitating private development.

Again the results in two and a half years, and notwithstanding the GFC, prove the ULDA can demonstrate it can deliver 'on the ground' results quickly with:

- development by the ULDA of over 100 allotments at Fitzgibbon Chase
- five private residential towers under construction at Fitzgibbon, Bowen Hills and Northshore Hamilton and
- master planning of three brown field sites to allow EOIs to be called for the first stage development in 2011.

The ULDA however is also mindful that the fast pace of planning and development activity can not be undertaken without consulting with the community. The ULDA community consultation process for the Northshore Hamilton development scheme won two Australasian IAP2 Award in 2009 testifies to the effectiveness of the ULDA community engagement process.

Recently the government tasked the ULDA of bringing forward the three new major communities in Ipswich and Logan of Ripley, Flagstone and Yarrabilba, to provide a long term, steady supply of well priced land in this burgeoning part of SEQ.

The ULDA's target is that in all UDAs the planning is in place to allow for construction to commence within twelve months of declaration. This was achieved at Fitzgibbon Chase and feedback from the local councils and land owners is that similar results can be achieved in these three new communities, as well as the regional projects recently announced. On this basis, by this time next year, the ULDA will be either undertaking itself, or facilitating, residential development on twelve projects in SEQ and regional Qld.

Key Success Factors

There are a range of factors that make the ULDA a powerful tool for the government to achieve affordable housing outcomes on the ground quickly. The key factors for this success are outlined below.

Whole of Government approach

The declaration of a UDA and the gazettal of the final development scheme occur by way of cabinet decisions. Consequently, a UDA declaration is a whole of government decision, not just decision by the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning; the Minister responsible for the ULDA Act.

The ULDA has experienced very high 'buy in' from other agencies for its work on UDAs after declaration and the achievement of the very tight master planning timeframes and resolving of complex intergovernmental agency issues is considered to have only been possible by the agencies recognising the 'whole of government' nature of a UDA declaration.

Independence

The ULDA is governed by a Board that brings independence in decision making. While community engagement and consultation is a fundamental aspect of the preparation of development schemes and development applications, the Board as the decision maker takes local politics out of the decision making process. The ULDA experience has been that projects that have been controversial in other circumstances have not proven anywhere near as controversial in UDAs.

When a UDA is declared, the Sustainable Planning Act and local planning schemes no longer have effect, with the ULDA Act requiring the ULDA to put in place a development scheme. Consequently, the ULDA is not constrained by previous planning templates, policies or standards. The Minister has explicitly requested that the ULDA approach UDAs with a 'clean slate' to test new ways of doing things. As a consequence the ULDA has not been constrained in its approach and can truly look at issues and solutions with independence.

Planning and Development

The ULDA Act requires the ULDA to become the planning and assessment agency and also permits the ULDA to develop land as well.

As the ULDA staff comprises professionals with planning and development expertise, preparation of the development schemes and planning policies are 'tested' to be commercially viable before release. Similarly, ULDA development projects benefit from the urban design and planning skills from within the organisation. Consequently, both products of the ULDA, planning documents and development, benefit from the synergies gained from both groups of professionals being in the one organisation.

In addition, the commercial experience of the ULDA staff, combined with the independence of the organisation, means that unbiased advice can be provided to the Department on planning policy matters shortening the time for feedback on new policy.

Planning Scheme Components

The ULDA Act requires the development schemes to be comprised of three elements; a land use plan, an infrastructure strategy and implementation strategy. Consequently, the focus from the outset is not just planning, but the other key matters that need to be considered to facilitate development outcomes; infrastructure and implementation. For these reasons, on the more complex projects, facilitation of development is promoted early as the barriers to development will have been identified and solutions formulated.

Summary

The ULDA is unusual among the government land organisations around Australia, having planning and development powers, and scope to work throughout the State.

The ULDA is being used as a specialised 'tool':

- to facilitate redevelopment of complex sites
- where there is an emerging failure in localised housing markets and
- to be a test bed for new ideas.

Consequently, I am of the view that the ULDA has been set up in such a way that it can deliver high quality outcomes on the ground quickly and is part of the movement towards best practice' planning in Queensland, complementing Growth Management Queensland's activities.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'P A Eagles', with a stylized, flowing script.

P A Eagles
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER