

# Council happenings . . .

with Mayor  
Glenn Wall

## **Council Planning Performance.**

The NSW Government has released its Local Development Performance Monitoring Report about the processing of development applications by councils in 2005/06, which can be viewed at <http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/>

Planning Minister Frank Sartor said the report reveals which councils were performing well and those, which consistently failed to meet the prescribed 40day time limit for processing DAs. Mr. Sartor said that he would require slow councils to provide a detailed explanation as to why they did not meet the required time frames.

The mean determination time for Dungog Shire Council was 32 days, but those with high mean determination times included: Leichhardt Council (185 days), Strathfield Council (158 days), and Canterbury Council (152 days). Leichhardt explained that their area is mostly heritage listed and that each DA commonly attracts up to 500 submissions from a very active and articulate community.

The report showed that the overwhelming majority of councils (i.e. nine out of every ten) met the 40day limit for processing, but Minister Sartor has initiated a new round of planning reforms, which could potentially include reducing the role of councillors in development application assessment.

The need for this latter aspect is contradicted by the Minister's own report, which showed that very few DAs (only 4%) were referred to the elected councillors for determination, with the vast majority being determined by council staff under delegated authority.

The DAs that are referred to the elected councillors, either do not comply with council policies and therefore cannot be approved under delegated authority, or they are controversial in that they have attracted significant public interest.

Such matters should always be referred to an elected body that is accountable to the community. For the Minister to say that councillors should not debate these DAs or 'get objectors in a room and solve it in half an hour', is short sighted and unrealistic.

People want to have a say about what happens in their area, and they want consistency in the application of planning policies and quality of decision making, which are equally important as the time taken to determine a DA.

Of course there is room for improvements to the planning system, but it is unfair to lay the blame solely at the feet of local government, as state planning laws have made the process overly complicated. Governments claim that they want to simplify the process, but they keep passing new legislation.

Few people would oppose measures for dealing with mischievous or underperforming councils. Hopefully, the Minister will direct his efforts towards the few troublesome councils rather than imposing extra bureaucracy and cost upon those communities where he considers that the planning system is "performing well".

## **Child Safety in Driveways.**

Most drivers are aware of their car's blind spots, however, when reversing; there is a large blind spot space behind the vehicle. An NRMA Insurance study measured the reversing visibility for many popular vehicles. The study shows large differences in results even with some of the best vehicles having a substantial Blind Spot that could easily hide a child from a driver's view.

Tragically one child, often a toddler, is run over in the driveway of their home every week in Australia. The vehicle is usually only moving very slowly and is often driven by a parent, family members or friends.

Please remember; always supervise your children whenever a vehicle is to be moved. For further information visit [www.kidsandtraffic.mq.edu.au](http://www.kidsandtraffic.mq.edu.au) or [www.nrma.com.au/reversing](http://www.nrma.com.au/reversing)

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