

ITEM 4 COUNCIL ACCELERATED ASSESSMENT PROGRAM - DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

In June 2020, the Secretary of the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) wrote to Council extending an invitation to participate in the Local Accelerated Assessment Program. This program is intended to unlock the benefits of an improved planning system and access the potential to create jobs and stimulate the local economy in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Council officers have expressed a preliminary interest in working with DPIE to develop a pilot Local Accelerated Assessment Program that is appropriate for Wollongong and that will trial a range of initiatives to bring about long-term improvement to development assessment systems and processes.

Proceeding to develop a Wollongong Council Accelerated Assessment Program will require consideration of a range of matters including:

- development of appropriate criteria
- governance and probity
- process framework that provides clarity and confidence to proponents and the community
- alignment with Panel processes
- access to the State's new "One Stop Shop"
- documentation and evaluation.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1 Endorsement be given to Council's participation in the Council Accelerated Assessment Program for significant local employment generating development applications.
- 2 Council investigate the development of two steams involving:
 - a Working with the Southern Regional Planning Panel and Wollongong Local Planning Panel to finalise the assessment and determination of long-standing development applications.
 - b Establishing end-to-end procedures that will streamline the assessment and determination process for eligible development applications.

REPORT AUTHORISATIONS

Report of: Mark Riordan, Manager Development Assessment and Certification

Authorised by: Linda Davis, Director Planning + Environment - Future City + Neighbourhoods

ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments for this report.

BACKGROUND

In April 2020, the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, the Hon Rob Stokes MP, announced the Planning System Acceleration Program which is designed to support NSW's immediate and long-term economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Under the Program, qualifying projects that require State planning approval are able to undergo a "fast-tracked assessment process". To qualify, a project must already be in the system, it must be able to demonstrate public benefit through new public open spaces or affordable housing, it must demonstrate an ability to create jobs both during construction and once complete, and it must be able to commence construction within six months if it is a development application, or proceed to the development application phase within six months if it is a rezoning.

To date, four tranches of projects have been announced, however, no applications within the Wollongong LGA have met the criteria for inclusion in an accelerated tranche.

In June 2020, the Secretary of Department of Planning, Industry and Environment wrote to councils seeking expressions of interest to develop a Council Accelerated Assessment Program to build off the critical role local government plays in the NSW planning system to stimulate local and regional economic activity.

Wollongong has a demonstrated track record as an innovator in planning systems, having participated in the best practice assessment guide, standard conditions review, standard DCP review as well as being an early adopter of the planning portal and being the only LGA outside of Metro Sydney to have a Local Planning Panel.

In line with our culture of innovation, Council staff provided an initial response that welcomed the opportunity to have further discussions about what a Local Acceleration Program might look like for Wollongong and how it may be able to use the pilot program to bring about long-term systems and process improvement in partnership with DPIE.

PROPOSAL

Wollongong City Council is already a high performer in terms of development application statistics relative to comparable councils. Council also has a range of initiatives in place that help proponents navigating the planning system such as the Small Business Support Team. Notwithstanding this, staff are always open to system and process improvement.

Council's Development Assessment and Certification team intend to develop a Wollongong Council Accelerated Assessment Program which incorporates two streams.

Stream One would mirror the model used by the State Government in its "Fast-tracked assessments process".

This is an end of assessment process and would involve reviewing existing development applications in the system to identify opportunities to complete final assessment reports for consideration of the relevant Planning Panel within a specified period. Typically, projects identified under this Stream will have completed the substantive planning work and are post the exhibition and community consultation phase.

Eligible development applications would be announced through tranches like the State process.

This component of the program would apply to existing development applications that meet the criteria and have the potential to translate to development activity within a reasonable timeframe. Given this focus, Stream One would have a finite lifespan and would be retired once application backlogs are cleared.

Stream Two would be a bolder initiative to consider and trial changes to end-to-end systems and procedures to streamline the assessment process for complex and significant employment generating development applications.

Development of a program to support this Stream would be undertaken over the next two months and would require consideration of a range of matters including:

- Appropriate criteria tailored for Wollongong
- Governance and probity
- Process framework that provides clarity and confidence to proponents and the community. This may include:
 - establishing pre-DA process requirements
 - clarifying expectations about the quality of development applications that are submitted
 - rapid preliminary assessment
 - multi-disciplinary assessment team for each project

- tightening of additional information opportunities
- Review of Panel processes, including preliminary briefings and proactive meeting schedules
- Access to the State's new "One Stop Shop" to resolve agency issues
- Documentation and evaluation.

This Stream has the potential to incorporate permanent changes to development assessment processes for significant proposals.

All development applications to be processed under a Wollongong Council Accelerated Assessment Program will be subject to the same level of assessment as they are under the current process and will comply with the requirements of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act.

Both streams will be developed having regard to the suite of resources to be made available by the NSW Government. These resources will include program controls, eligibility criteria, probity principles and templates.

CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

All development applications to be processed under the Wollongong Local Accelerated Assessment Program will be subject to the same level of assessment and opportunity for consultation as they do under the current process.

PLANNING AND POLICY IMPACT

This report contributes to the delivery of Our Wollongong 2028 Goal "Objective 1.3 - The sustainability of our urban environment is improved". It specifically delivers on the following -

Community Strategic Plan	Delivery Program 2018-2022	Operational Plan 2020-21
Strategy	4 Year Action	Operational Plan Actions
1.3.1 Manage land uses to strengthen urban areas and improve connectivity to train stations and key transport routes	1.3.1.1 Impacts from development on the environment are assessed, monitored and mitigated	Engage with other tiers of government, the development / building industry and the broader community to achieve improved development outcomes

Participating in the Council Accelerated Assessment Program would provide an opportunity to deliver on the following action from the adopted Economic Development Strategy:

- 5.1 Establish a mechanism to expedite significant employment generating projects, which involves input from multiple specialist teams across Council.*

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Participation in the Council Accelerated Assessment Program would aim to deliver efficiencies and improvements in the development assessment process. It would provide an opportunity to trial a range of new processes to streamline service delivery in the planning system.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Any decision around an accelerated assessment process requires adherence to probity principles. In establishing its "fast-tracked assessments process", DPIE consulted with the Independent Commission Against Corruption and appointed an independent probity advisor to ensure that its program is robust and transparent. Council will have access to the State's probity principles to ensure that a Wollongong Accelerated Assessment Program is appropriately managed and documented.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Participation in the program does not involve additional fees or resources that Council can draw on. The development and trial of a Wollongong Accelerated Assessment Program will be through existing staff resources.

CONCLUSION

Council has been invited to participate in the NSW Government's Council Accelerated Assessment Program which would involve adapting and applying the State's "fast-tracked assessments process" as appropriate for Wollongong.

Under the Program, Council would seek to accelerate the final assessment and determination process of significant employment generating development applications that have completed the substantive planning work and are post the exhibition phase.

In considering the invitation to participate in the Program, staff have identified an opportunity to apply the principles that underpin the Program more broadly to achieve system improvement in the development assessment process. It is intended to develop and trial some different approaches that may result in streamlining of our end-to-end development assessment processes for significant proposals that will contribute to local economic development and employment opportunities.

The Program aims to deliver accelerated assessment of key projects without in any way compromising the current assessment process, community input, or transparency in decision making.