

# Housing and Built Environment

One of the nine Key Focus Areas of the Sustainable Nimbin Community Plan

## Local Community Vision

Sustainable Nimbin Community Plan 2016 – 2021 [SNCP]

**There are safe, affordable and environmentally sustainable and varied housing choices for all ages, linked by appropriate transport corridors and serviced by facilities and enterprises that support the ethos of Nimbin and surrounds.**

Goal 1: There are a range of safe, affordable housing options available for everyone, especially our young people, the elderly and people on low incomes.

Goal 2: There is a well-connected skill base in the community to support housing and the built environment.

Goal 3: Buildings and their surrounds are sensitive to and provide a 'liveable' environment.

Goal 4: The community has strategies in place to manage risks of disasters such as fires, cyclones and floods.

The SNCP notes that in the Nimbin area: Between 2006 and 2011, the average age increased from 43 to 46 years, reflecting an ageing community (national average at 2014 was 37.3 years), which is a regional phenomenon not limited to Nimbin. Children aged 0-14 made up 18% (consistent with the National average) and people aged 65 years and over made up 10.8% of the population (lower than the National average of 14.7%). The SNCP then notes:

There is a lack of housing suitable for older people in particular and this may in part explain the lower than average population aged 65 years and over, because as people age they are forced to leave the community due to the lack of appropriate accommodation.

## Community Achievements

### towards realizing the SNCP's "Housing and Built Environment" Goals

As of late 2015, in "Sustainable Nimbin Community Plan: Report on Achievements – From 2009 to 2015"

**Goal 1: A range of safe, affordable, sustainable housing options are available for rent, low income land owners and the elderly.**

1. New Lismore City Council by Laws have come into effect regarding secondary dwellings.
2. DA/s94 costs are significantly reduced to promote the development of more affordable housing, for a 2 year period.
3. MO Register – a list has been compiled and the MOs contacted asking for current contacts for email list etc.
4. Sustainable House Day 2014 and 15: 2014 Ultimate Green Granny Flat Design comp and 2015 Universal, Adaptable Housing for Life design comp.
5. New MOs retained in the Lismore LEP. New MOs are now under threat outside of Lismore and Tweed Shires. Some MOs have developed lower cost rehousing options – example Tuntable Falls Coop. Some of the existing MOs have expanded their housing capacity. MOU developed and executed in 2015 between NNIC, Nimbin Health and Welfare Association and Multitask in relation to the 3 community independent living units at Mulgum House.

**Goal 2: There is a well-developed and connected knowledge and skills base for housing and the built environment.**

1. The Sibley St project will act as a repository of knowledge about sustainable building, and has

been involved in Sustainable House days and other activities promoting affordable and sustainable housing.

2. The Sibley St community building will incorporate education and training to increase community building skills.
3. Sibley St will also act as a sustainable Living Centre demonstration site to showcase local achievements, provide information on sustainable building and regulations.- (e.g. BasIX)
4. HEMP masonry workshops held in 2014.
5. Building with bamboo workshops held in 2013.
6. Biotope group has constructed several 'Earthships' structures and held workshops.
7. Ongoing support and information provided to householders by RPC re PV Solar installations.
8. Composting toilets expertise in the community.
9. Water recycling and grey water management expertise in the community.
10. Djanbung Gardens courses and workshops – e.g. in 2015: Introduction to the World of Masonry, Appropriate Technology and Natural Building, The Craft of Masonry floors and paving, The Art of Rock walling and stone masonry.
11. Nimbin Garden Club activities.

**Goal 3: Buildings and their surrounds are sensitive to and provide a "liveable" environment, including both passive and active recreational opportunities**

1. The Nimbin Walking Track project is awaiting funding. Project is design-ready.
2. Nimbin Garden Club activities
3. Djanbung Gardens activities.
4. Old skate park remedial work commenced. Basketball hoop installed.
5. Nimbin Showgrounds now opened up for camping, dog walking, exercising horses and community events. New shed, toilet block and kitchen area installed. Capacity of show grounds for use for community events including the annual show significantly enhanced.

**Goal 4: Bushfire and village disaster risks are addressed**

1. Reserve Roads – no longer a viable strategy due to divestment of reserve roads by the NSW Government.
2. Village fire and disaster risk management plan – no coherent plan has been developed.
3. Following the Nimbin Fires of August 2014, numerous local businesses have reviewed and upgraded their insurances, and addressed fire hazards around their premises.
4. New buildings must adhere to the new Building Code fire regulations – issues of additional expense and conflict with e.g natural airflow/light optimisation.
5. There are 2.5 active local bushfire brigades, which have been regularly called upon to fight fires. Membership is an ongoing issue.

The SNCP also notes the significant fact that: “Much of the village infrastructure including key buildings and land, is owned by community based organisations”.

## **The Regional Perspective**

The Northern Rivers Regional Development Plan 2013 – 2016 [NRRDP]

The Northern Rivers Regional Development Plan provides an extensively researched guide for ethical, visionary investment in the Northern Rivers Region. The plan identifies seven Priority Goals for achieving “a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future for the communities of the Northern Rivers region”.

One of the plan's “Priority Goals” is to build “Inclusive Communities” - highlighting the need to:

“Increase sustainable, adaptable and affordable housing choice for diversity of needs across different segments of the region’s community.”

The NRRDP clarifies:

“Creating inclusive communities aims to address matters of social inclusion by fostering means to help people participate in learning, employment, healthy living and social and economic interaction and exchange and help those Australians who may be excluded from the opportunities they need to create the life they want and are disadvantaged due to family circumstances, low expectations, community poverty, a lack of suitable and affordable housing, illness or discrimination. The Northern Rivers has relatively high percentages of vulnerable and disadvantaged people, including low-income earners, older persons, Indigenous people and people with a disability. According to the ABS SEIFA Index, the Northern Rivers has particular pockets of particular social disadvantage in the Clarence and Richmond Valleys and Kyogle. The region requires renewed investment in health care infrastructure and service delivery to support them. Housing affordability (relative to average incomes) is also a challenge throughout much of the region and there is a lack of suitable housing for some members of the community, e.g. 1-2 bedroom units for younger people and students. Coordination between the region’s service providers, together with appropriate funding, will help improve health infrastructure, service delivery and affordable housing through initiatives such as the Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan 2014-2018 and a regional social procurement strategy.”

Another of the NRRDP's seven priority goals is “Natural Infrastructure” - that is, “addressing issues concerning the region’s biophysical assets (soils, biodiversity, rivers, estuaries, wetlands, and coastal and marine environments, etc.) and the systems and processes that enable and support all forms of life”.

NRRDP:

The Northern Rivers has outstanding natural resources and is unique in the mixture and quality of the landscape, livelihood and lifestyle values it supports. The region has the highest biodiversity in New South Wales and the third-highest in Australia. Pressure for urban development is creating competing land uses and greater conflict between farmers, developers, communities and environmental interests. These conflicts compound the challenges inherent in climate variability and change, the impacts of which could affect the security of the region’s water and food resources. The Northern Rivers’ natural resource base provides a comparative advantage which supports the competitiveness of established and emerging industries including sustainable food production, which builds on the region’s agricultural strengths, natural infrastructure and its proximity to significant markets. It also presents new opportunities for growth which will require careful management. Coal seam gas extraction has been identified as a contentious regional issue with potential economic benefits, but as yet unquantified impacts on water and soil resources. There is strong community support and capacity for protecting the region’s biologically-diverse natural environment and an appreciation that the region’s internationally-significant and irreplaceable natural infrastructure – including its landscapes and seascapes – must be protected to provide for the long-term social, environmental, cultural and economic needs of all communities of the Northern Rivers.

Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers, 2013, Northern Rivers Regional Development Plan 2013 – 2016

Another of the NRRDP's seven priority goals, that of “Sustainable Industry”, has direct relevance to the “Housing and Built Environment” goals of the SNCP:

NRRDP:

Long-term economic growth in the Northern Rivers will be realised through the development of sustainable industries, that is, those which offer meaningful full-time employment across a diversity of skill sets. These industries will capitalise on the region’s lifestyle attributes and its natural comparative advantages to enhance our appeal as an investment location and a place in which to live, work and do business.

There is a desire to leverage the region's existing attributes and capacities to grow regional competitive advantage, particularly in the fields of education, health care, sustainable and high quality 'food and fibre' production and the visitor economy.

There are also opportunities to support business innovation and the development of emerging industries including the 'knowledge-based industries'.

### **Activities, projects and initiatives**

1. In collaboration with education and training providers and government agencies, promote the region's strengths and achievements as a provider of education services and lifelong learning.
2. Support and promote sustainable food and fibre production in the Northern Rivers region.
3. Support the growth and development of the region's creative industries including emerging sectors such as sustainable building design.
4. Promote R&D and investment in technologies which support the generation and delivery of renewable energy.

Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers, 2013, Northern Rivers Regional Development Plan 2013 – 2016

## **The Global Perspective**

– as represented within the compilatory work of the Earth Holocracy Proposal

The SNCP vision for 'housing and built environment' – that “there are safe, affordable and environmentally sustainable and varied housing choices for all ages, linked by appropriate transport corridors and serviced by facilities and enterprises that support the ethos of Nimbin and surrounds” - identifies key issues for all humanity at this time, and as such, addresses themes well represented within the Earth Holocracy Proposal.

### **One. Everyone's right to the basic requirements for health, well being and dignity in life**

Authentic advocates of sustainability and “real democracy” - inclusive of the International Trade Union Confederation – incriminate neoliberal governments for their policy-driven failures in safeguarding the “life, liberty and security” of the world's citizenry. To address and directly remedy the situation, the Earth Holocracy Proposal offers its “Local Community Declaration of Rights” as a template and tool for the democratic empowerment of place-based communities to themselves shoulder responsibility for ensuring that the basic requirements of all their membership are met.

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25.1

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, PART III, Article 11

The base-note theme of the Earth Holocracy Proposal is that only self-empowered and self-organized local communities – working in “global solidarity for local self determination” - can ensure a viable planetary future for all. The proposal's “Local Community Declaration of Rights” is its starting point for building a “genuinely democratic” and sustainable world, recognising that these

two goals are just as inseparable as the domains of political and economic power. The declaration's purpose is to liberate humanity's goodwill and genius from the grip of neoliberal globalization: to empower civil society – the memberships of place-based communities everywhere - to shoulder responsibility for ensuring their own long-term well being, and also that of the local environment upon which a community's sustainability depends.

## **Two. The “Win-Win” Scenario of “Nature and Humanity in Harmony”**

In one of the proposal's 1<sup>st</sup> volume's articles, “The People are the Solution”, the key revelations of David Suzuki and Holly Dressel in their 2008 book, *Good News - For A Change: How Everyday People Are Helping the Planet*, are summarised and presented. Suzuki and Dressel, noting the importance of having a clear vision in order to get to where one wants to go, explain:

“It was time to do a book about dynamic equilibrium; we needed to determine whether there existed practical ways by which humans could support themselves without despoiling the planet.”

“When we first began writing *Good News for A Change* after so many years of recognizing and publicizing the enormous dimensions of the global eco-crisis, we were actually worried we wouldn't be able to find many truly sustainable solutions... But as we traveled over three continents, interviewed hundreds of people and pored over thousands of pages of research, we discovered what we had hardly dared hope for: not just isolated or individual solutions and technologies, but a vibrant and interwoven movement for a systemic cultural change from consumption to sustainability.

“We discovered that living in harmony with the earth's natural systems brings ‘double dividends’, that there are ways for humans and for all the other animals and living things that support the entire web of life on earth to survive and thrive together, and that it is entirely possible for our restored natural systems to surround closer and more prosperous communities, populated with healthy people who are enjoying life.”

David Suzuki and Holly Dressel, 2008, *Good News - For A Change: How Everyday People Are Helping the Planet*

## **Nimbin and the Northern Rivers Regional Community**

The list of Nimbin community achievements in furthering the “Housing and Built Environment” goals of the SNCP (as above) well illustrates how widespread is the community's practical adherence to principles of sustainability and quality living. Four decades of ecologically-sound and innovative developmental practices “on the land” - in areas inclusive of home design; off-the-grid clean energy production; organic food production; ecosystem regeneration; micro-business development – have generated a significant human resource of “social capital” - that is, a great wealth of such knowledge and expertise as required for achieving sustainability goals – locally, regionally and globally.