

tently refused to admit that there was anything wrong.

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In the meantime Howard's

fee from the commonwealth is automatically disqualified

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Affordable housing crucial to residents

Byron Shire Council has been investigating an Affordable Housing Strategy. Consultant Tracy Gee has prepared an options paper on the strategy. What follows is an edited version of her address to Council last week:

Over the past decade the population of Byron Shire has increased by more than 50% with a significant proportion of these people being of working age in contrast to statewide figures where the number of people in this age bracket is

declining. 21% of households are single parent families and nearly 40% of households have an income of \$20,000 or less. Unemployment is regularly above 20% in comparison to the national average of 8%. 8% of Byron's population live permanently in caravan parks.

Housing stress

The private rental or purchaser market are both unable to be accessed by the majority of the population without incurring financial stress and paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs. Most recent estimates suggest that 85% of all private renters in Byron Shire are in housing stress.

While there is some provision of public and community housing across the Shire, demand currently outstrips supply by 239%.

In addition competition between tourism developments and affordable residential accommodation has an increasingly negative impact locally. For example the local Tenancy Advice Service reports an increasing incidence of tenants are forced to sign leases with holiday relocation clauses or short term leases to ensure the accommodation is available for peak holiday markets.

Local government already

has a major impact on housing production and affordability through its regulatory and planning authority and social planning responsibilities. Given the context and scope of local government's role, Council is in a unique position to act as a facilitator and co-ordinator in lobbying for the retention and extension of stocks of affordable housing.

Typically, mandatory provision of affordable housing through the planning system is argued as affordable housing is critical infrastructure to the efficient functioning of a region. On this basis it is deemed reasonable to have developers provide adequate affordable housing stocks or to at least replace any stock lost as a result of development.

Desirable mix

The second basis for justifying contributions for affordable housing is perhaps more robust. This argues that in some areas, such as Byron Shire, social mix and affordable housing form part of the desirable environmental fabric in the same way that heritage buildings of particular landforms might.

Therefore Council's policies would need to mitigate any adverse environmental impact, including loss of social mix.

Over the past few months a significant amount of time has been spent on consulting with the local community, industry and local organisations. The outcomes of these consultations have been clear.

Participants of all consultations acknowledged and overwhelmingly recognised that there is an affordable housing problem in the Shire which is continuing to escalate. More importantly, all agreed that a local response was necessary to ensure the preservation of the diversity of the local community.

A commitment was endorsed from all involved for Council to respond to the issue in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

Clear commitment

The options already presented to Council represent an overview of initiatives which may be implemented in the future.

But, before Council embarks on implementation, it is necessary to make a clear commitment to the provision and retention of affordable housing in the local area.

The draft Housing Policy outlines Council's intent and outlines clear aims and objectives by responding to the issue with a strategic approach.

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