The City of
Newcastle

Social Impact
Assessment Policy
For
Development Applications

GUIDANCE NOTES

November 1999

The City of Newcastle

Contents

Introduction

These notes are to be used as guidelines by the respective parties to implement Social Impact Assessment Policy for Development Applications.

Section One – Social Impact Scoping Questions provides a list of impact category scoping questions to assist in understanding what impacts may occur for a particular proposal.

Section Two - Practice guidance for applicants in preparing Social Impact Statements. This section gives advice on research methods, participation, and data collection.

Section Three - Practice guidance for Council in assessing Social Impact Comments and Statements. This section provides guidance for Council staff and councillors in terms of their roles in the SIA process.

Section Four – Review of the policy. The last section deals with the procedure for *review* of SIA policy for development applications and addresses *cumulative effects assessment.*

1. SOCIAL IMPACT SCOPING QUESTIONS

1.1 Use of scoping questions

These sets of scoping questions are intended to assist with the preparation of the Social Impact Comment component in SEE required in support of a development application (DA).

Scoping questions are a tool for thinking about the kinds of impacts that could occur for a specific proposal.

The scoping questions are not intended to act as a checklist of issues that need to be addressed.

They are not a series of questions that must be answered in the SEE.

If after considering the scoping questions, some of the issues raised appear relevant to the proposal, these issues should be addressed in the SEE.

1.2 Social impact scoping questions

Access (disabled) and mobility

- Does the development conform to the requirements of the Building Code of Australia and the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 in terms of disabled access?
- If it is a public facility or transport facility, has the local Access Advisory Committee been consulted about the development?
- Does the layout and design of the development facilitate easy access to the surrounding communities?

Accommodation and housing

- Will housing stock be increased or lessened as a result of the development?
- Will the proposed housing stock be of benefit to local people (affordable, consistent with local housing needs or local demand)?
- Is there a loss of low-moderate rental housing stock or boarding house rooms?
- Are rents likely to change in the the local area as a result of the development?
- Will accommodation be necessary for any temporary workforce associated with the development?

Community services and facilities

- Will the development cause an increase in demand for community services and facilities?
- Is this demand in excess of the provisions identified in Council's Section 94 Contributions Plan?
- Will the development require on-site community facilities (eg childcare in retail developments)?
- Will the development require on-site support services?
- Will the development affect local meeting places (eg shopping malls, local parks, street squares)?

Community structure (severance, cohesion and identity)

Social cohesion – the bonds in a community, the extent and strength of interrelationships in the community expressed through participation in community life and cooperation for social goals.

- Does the proposal enhance or detract from opportunities for individuals or groups to participate in the community?
- Will the development increase or decrease the community's capacity to act cooperatively?
- Will the development cause divisions within the community?

Community severance – physical separation of one part of a community from another.

- Does the development increase or decrease opportunities for social interaction in the community?
- Does the development physically separate homes, community facilities, educational institutions or aged persons' group residences from other parts of the community?
- Is this severance permanent or only temporary (eg during construction)?
- Can the separation be mitigated by changes in design, construction or location of the development?

Community identity – how the community views itself, its local history and vision for the future. If the local community is diverse (eg ethnic identity), there may be a number of community identities.

- How does the development engender a sense of place?
- Is this consistent with the existing community identity?
- Does the development enhance the character of the locality?
- Has the effect of aesthetic or visual impacts been considered?
- Does the development necessitate demolition of an area of community significance?

Crime and public safety

- Are proposed entry/exit areas, pedestrian pathways, and car parks safe and well lit, especially at night?
- Are surveillance systems necessary in association with the development (eg windows overlooking car parks and open spaces, video camera systems)?
- Are 'target hardening' measures necessary in association with the development (eg security grilles, alarms)?
- Are any proposed common spaces 'defensible' – that is do they give the impression of being an integral part of the development?
- Does the development maximise opportunities for active street level uses maximised?
- Does any proposed landscaping allow for clear sight lines?
- If the development is a high-risk activity, have appropriate measures been taken to anticipate potential crime and to minimise opportunities for crime?
- If the development is a high-risk activity, have the local police and Neighbourhood Watch groups been consulted and their views taken into account?

Culture and community values

- Will the development alter or affect the cultural or religious values of the community (including minority groups)?
- Will the development enhance or detract from the existing cultural heritage of the locality?
- Does the development encourage the acceptance of diversity of cultures and multiculturalism?
- Will the development enhance or detract from the cultural life of the community?

Note – see the DA Guide for general issues relating to heritage.

Employment

- Does the development involve any new employment opportunities?
- Will any proposed increase in jobs be suited to the needs of local people?
- Will specialist skills or experience be necessary for the new jobs?
- Will the development increase or decrease the diversity of job opportunities in the local area?

Health

- Will there be an increase in demand for health services as a result of the development?
- Will the development involve any on-site health issues (eg occupational health and safety, transport accidents)?
- Are there specific health impacts or risks associated with the development or activities occurring within it?

Note – see the DA Guide for issues relating to waste, air, odour, noise, and water pollution.

Interaction between new development and the existing community

- Is the development a major industrial or commercial use in a primarily residential area?
- Is the new development likely to cause conflict with the surrounding community or adjacent land uses?
- Will the new development involve the introduction of a large non-resident workforce?

Needs of social groups (eg women, aged, people with a disability, children, youth, ethnic groups, indigenous)

- Will the gender mix of the population be affected by the development (eg influx of temporary male workers)?
- Will the development require additional services primarily affecting women be required?
- Does the development modification to accommodate special needs groups?
- If the development is for a special needs group, have the wider societal benefits been considered?
- Does the development adequately address the needs of children and young people (whether seen as a direct user group or not)?
- Are the needs of local people of Non English speaking background relevant to the proposal?
- Do indigenous peoples have an interest in the proposal?

Population change (size and characteristics)

- How will the resident population change as a result of the development?
- How will the workforce population change?
- What is the size and likely characteristics of the new population (age groups, income bracket, professional status, and cultural or ethnic mix)?
- What are the likely characteristics and size of any user groups associated with the proposal?
- Will the development result in a change in the number of tourists/visitors/shoppers?

Recreation facilities

- Will the development cause an increase in demand for recreation facilities?
- Is this demand in excess of the provisions identified in Council's Section 94 Contributions Plan?
- Will on-site recreation facilities be necessary or desirable in association with the development?
- Will the development cause a change in the amount or quality of open space or parkland?

Risk perception in community

- Is there a perception in the community that the development poses a health, environmental or social risk?
- What is the nature of the perceived risk?
- Will the development reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour in the community?
- Have the hazards or issues of concern been observed with other similar developments elsewhere?
- Is expert opinion required to establish the validity/extent of risk associated with the development?

Social equity (displacement, needs of disadvantaged groups)

- Will social groups who might otherwise be disadvantaged benefit from the development?
- Will existing residents of the subject property be displaced by the development?
- What are the characteristics of these displaced residents (eg aged, mentally ill, young people, other at risk groups)?
- Will any groups in the community be disadvantaged by the development?

2. Practice guidance for applicants in preparing Social Impact Statements

2.1 Data collection

Collecting the right data is one of the most important processes in assessing social impacts.

Data may come from a variety of sources – the Council, government agencies, or non-government organisations. In some cases, community groups may have useful local information, for instance, on rents or crime. Some key data sources are listed in Appendix A. Published data sources are called *secondary data*.

Much information is now available through the Internet. A literature search on a topic (using either the library systems or the Internet) can be an extremely fruitful way to obtain data on the impacts of a development or specific impact categories.

Public participation is another way of gaining information. This may be through surveys, interviews, workshops or focus groups. In social impact assessment, public participation is viewed primarily as a way to gain information on impacts and how a community may respond to them. This type of data is called *primary data*.

An important principle with data collection is to maintain focus. Collect and present only the necessary data required to establish the validity of potential impacts. The SIS is not intended to be an encyclopedia of statistics but a targeted analysis. The scoping questions or the community focus meeting should alert the practitioner to the task's data needs.

More detail on data collection, social surveys, social profiles, cultural plans and safety audits can be found in *Social Impact Assessment for Local Government: A Handbook for Councillors, Town Planners and Social Planners* (Cox & Miers 1995).

Hints for data collection

Collecting data from existing sources

- Look at the social profile from Council. Identify social and economic issues relating to the locality.
- Check any local survey work that may have been researched and is relevant to the project.
- Carry out a literature search, using libraries or the Internet.
- Council's cultural plan may be useful in identifying the cultural needs relating to the proposed development and its surrounding location.

Collecting data via public participation

- Call for written submissions from the adjoining owners or the affected community.
- Document issues raised in public forums or workshops.
- Conduct a survey of local residents and/or the affected community.
- Address concerns raised at public meetings, resident committees or committees of council.

From: Cox & Miers 1995.

2.2 Use multiple data sources

Using more than one data source can enhance validity of data. For instance, Census rental data can be used alongside the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning's Rent Report. A survey of local real estate agents may be a third source. This will strengthen the claims made in the SIS. This technique should be used to prepare SIS's for critical impact issues.

2.3 Obtaining primary data

Often published data sources will not contain the information necessary for the assessment. So, the social impact practitioner may have to obtain data directly from the community. This may be in the form of survey research, oral histories, informant interviews, focus groups, or workshop material. As previously mentioned, public participation in assessing social impacts is first and foremost a data collection tool.

Participation for better social impact assessment

In the first instance, community participation is about discovering the range of issues that may be significant. In the methodological sense, it is a data collection technique and may usefully commence during the scoping stage.

However, it is not about obtaining community consent; therefore, the process should not seek to eliminate conflict or opposing views. In essence, participation should enable mutual understanding of differing views, both of the proponent and of less articulate groups in the community. However, it should be borne in mind that consensus may not be reached.

From Cox 1994.

The value of local knowledge is increasingly being recognised as an important data source. Local people may have critical information that may have an important bearing on the assessment. They may have expertise on local social and economic conditions and how change occurs in their communities. A further significant aspect is that communities respond to developments or social changes differently. This will be an important consideration in the assessment.

Options for primary data collection

- Public meetings
- Community liaison groups
- Open house / information centres
- Workshops
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Telephone hotlines
- Resident committees
- Oral history collection
- In-depth interviews
- Key informant / community leader interviews

Public consultation should not be about gaining consent for a project. In particular, any survey work that is undertaken should not be focussed on questions like: 'Do you support or oppose the development?' Surveys are easily biased. They properly should focus on impact issues and community values and not be used as a referendum on the project.

The objectives of any consultation program will be diverse. It will be partly to inform the public of the nature of the development. Information sharing is an important starting point. Consultation may be

the only way to identify public concerns and gain an understanding of underlying community values. Gathering information from the public will be the chief objective. Ultimately, the entire process will improve decision-making and assist in obtaining better development.

Applicants and social impact practitioners should refer to Newcastle City Council's *Consultation Policy and Guidelines* prior to commencing any public participation.

2.4   Identify gaps in data

Often social impact assessment has to be finalised in the absence of relevant or necessary data. These gaps may be the result of high costs of collecting the data, faults in published sources, or lack of comparative information. **It is essential that these gaps in data are identified in the assessment and are not masked.**

The significance of these data gaps needs to be evaluated when making the final recommendations. Two principles should be followed in making sense of data gaps.

Data gaps

Principle 1. It is more important to identify likely social impacts than to precisely quantify the more obvious social impacts.

Principle 2. It is more important to take a precautionary approach in reporting social impacts.

Social impacts are what managers have to manage. Any form of impact assessment is anticipatory. Lack of complete proof that impacts will occur should not deter measures to mitigate them. Preparedness may be a less costly procedure than fixing up the problem after the event.

3. Practice guidance for Council in assessing the SIC component of the SEE or the SIS.

3.1 Evaluation (for Council officers)

Council as the consent authority is responsible for evaluating the development application under S.79C of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. In the first instance, Council officers will carry out this evaluation in the form of a report.

Critical to the task of evaluating an application will be weighing-up the impacts outlined in a SIC component of the SEE or the SIS. The major techniques for evaluation of social impacts are outlined in *Techniques for Effective Social Impact Assessment: A Practical Guide* (Cox 1995).

Steps in Council officer evaluation

Step 1. *Evaluate research validity* (especially any primary data collection and data gaps). Check the relevant social impact matrix for a SIC. Assess conformity to the ToR for a SIS.
Step 2. *Identify critical impacts* from the SIC component of the SEE or the SIS.
Step 3. *Assess mitigation measures* and requirements for monitoring.
Step 4. *Make the final evaluation and recommendation.* Do the benefits outweigh any negatives?

What is the conclusion on social impact grounds? List reasons if appropriate.

3.2 Steps in evaluation

Step 1 is to consider the *research validity.* This should be a basic review of all the identified impacts, positive or negative. A few questions to consider are:

- Have the benefits of the project been over-stated (especially economic effects)?
- Been assumed as a positive impact?
- Is the data presented sufficient to justify the significance of impacts stated?
- Might impacts judged as less significant be viewed differently if other data sources were used?
- Has support for the project Are there significant data gaps or missing parts of the analysis?

If it is a SIC, check the impact categories reported on with the social effects matrix for the development type. If an impact category is indicated in the matrix but not reported on, evaluate if this is justified. The impact category may not be relevant in the particular case.

If it is a SIS, Step 1 will also involve checking whether the SIS has fully conformed to the Terms of Reference set out at the start of the SIA process.

In the light of reviewing research validity, some judgement should be possible on what are the main impacts of concern. These may be benefits of the project as well as negative impacts.

Step 2 should *identify what the critical impacts* are likely to be.

For critical negative impacts, careful *assessment of mitigation measures* should be made.

Step 3 is to ensure that major impacts can be successfully managed. Are impact mitigation measures achievable? Will the mitigation measures manage what they are intended to address? Can they be monitored or otherwise evaluated or tested? What role does Council have to play in this process (eg conditions of consent, monitoring)?

Step 4 is the *final evaluation and recommendation* stage. This cannot be carried out in isolation – all issues to be considered in a Statement of Environmental Effects form part of the evaluation. Social impacts are just one part of the equation.

The fundamental focus of this step is the question: **Do the benefits outweigh the costs?** There may be trade-offs between employment generation or housing production and local negative effects. Ultimately, this may be a judgement that only the councillors

can make. However, for most applications mitigation measures should be able to be proposed that will address the main negative effects.

Step 4 involves a determination decision on the social impact assessment. For the Council officer conducting this evaluation, this will be one of four courses of action:

- Request further information or consultation procedures from the applicant (especially if a SIS report does not conform to its Terms of Reference);
- Recommend approval of the project subject to the outcome of a full merit assessment (all the grounds listed in the *DA Guide*);
- Recommend approval of the project with conditions of consent applying;
- Recommend other SEE criteria be carefully considered given that the social impact component has been assessed as 'concerning'. It is important that full reasons for the determination are given.

3.3 Making a decision (for councillors)

The box contains an extract from *Social Impact Assessment for Local Government: A Handbook for Councillors, Town Planners and Social Planners*, published by the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW.

It gives a useful checklist for councillors when making decisions based on social impact data. It may

be useful to consider these points, particularly for difficult decisions. The focus is on ensuring that the process has been complete and sufficient.

Pointers to an informed decision

- Have all the affected communities or parties been notified?

- Have they been provided with an opportunity to comment fully?

- Have these comments been fully considered in the report to council?

- How will the development affect people's quality of life (both the negative aspects and the benefits)?

- Have you been given sufficient information on the social impact of the development to make an informed judgement?

- If you decide to approve the development, are the conditions of consent sufficient to alleviate any negative aspects of the development?

- Are the conditions of consent clear and unambiguous?

- What systems exist to monitor the impacts of the development?

From: Cox & Miers 1995.

4. Review of the Policy

4.1 Purpose of the review

The purpose of the review of the Social Impact Assessment Policy for Development Applications is:

- To gauge the effectiveness of the policy for improving the process of assessing the social impacts of development applications in Newcastle;
- To see how effective a tool Council, applicants and the community regard the policy;
- To see how efficient the policy is in terms of time and cost issues;
- To monitor cumulative social impacts that may be occurring;
- To make recommendations for amendments to the policy;
- To assess the capacity of Council's resources to effectively and efficiently respond to enquires relating to this policy.

The review will involve the key stakeholders in the social impact assessment process.

4.2 Cumulative effects assessment

There are difficulties in adequately assessing cumulative effects under the general provisions for development assessment, though they are now part of the assessment process for projects requiring an Environmental Impact Statement. The community focus meeting to scope a Social Impact Statement should consider potential cumulative effects of the proposal.

The review process provides an ideal time for Council to consider the cumulative effects of all developments that have been the subject of a SIC in the SEE or a SIS. Council should prepare an *annual cumulative effects summary table* of developments that have been assessed under this policy.

This analysis will provide an overview of impacts across Newcastle. In succeeding policy reviews, a time series impact data set can be established as each year's data is added.

Annual cumulative effects summary table

- Development type (by the categories in the social effects matrix);

- Location of development (by the neighbourhoods delineated in the Newcastle Urban Strategy);

- Listing of main impact categories identified in the SIC components of the SEE or the SIS.

This summary data will only provide an indicative picture. It should highlight significant categories of impact. These can be further examined, possibly using a sample of SEEs submitted, to ascertain if cumulative effects may be occurring.

The outcome of this process may be a decision to prepare a cumulative effects study for a type of development (eg multi-unit housing), impact category (eg crime), or a location. The cumulative effects study would be best conducted via the Social Impact Consultative Panel. The study should make recommendations about changes to the LEP, DCPs or conditions of consent for specific types of development. Some form of cumulative effects assessment should form part of the environmental study conducted prior to major revisions to the LEP.

A key reference document for cumulative effects assessment in the Australian context is the *Review of Commonwealth Environmental Impact Assessment – Assessment of Cumulative Impacts and Strategic Assessment in Environmental Impact Assessment* (Court & Guthrie 1994).

4.3 Timing of the review

The review of the policy will occur one year after adoption of the plan by Council. It is appropriate that the policy be reviewed at regular periods after the initial review.