



***PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE***

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### **Feedback from the Hunters Hill Trust to Hunters Hill Council's Draft Net Zero Implementation Plan**

The Hunters Hill Trust fully supports Hunters Hill Council adopting a Net Zero Implementation Plan to assist in meeting the obligations of both Council and the Hunters Hill community to reduce emissions and moderate the impacts of a climate emergency.

We note that Council is rapidly achieving net zero in its own operations. Council's own initiatives such as collaborating with other Councils in contracts to purchase renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, supporting low energy transport, driving the circular economy and waste minimisation and supporting water conservation, are all reducing Scope 1 and 2 emissions. This means that Council is well on its way to achieving 90% reductions in emissions from 2013, well above NSW State Government targets (50% by 2030 and 70% by 2035, based on 2005 levels).

We support the Draft Plan's suggestions for improvements in emissions in Council's own operations such as measuring emissions from waste to landfill which remains difficult for a range of reasons, but is essential for benchmarking and improvement strategies. Renewing power purchasing agreements for renewable energy is a priority plus measures such as continuing energy efficiency in Council owned premises should all be pursued.

Nevertheless the Hunters Hill Trust considers that much more needs to be done to improve the community's understanding and approach to reducing emissions. Council can and must play a leadership role locally in both raising awareness and initiating actions that will reduce the community's contribution to increasing levels of CO<sub>2</sub>.

**While Council's Carbon footprint for the year 2022-23 is estimated to be 97.3 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, the carbon footprint for the LGA is estimated to be 126,679 tonnes ie Council's footprint is only 0.07% of the Hunters Hill Community. Clearly much needs to be done to reduce the community's footprint.**

Moreover, unlike Council where there are dramatic reductions, community emissions are set to plateau by 2033 at approximately 80,000 tonnes under a business-as-usual strategy.

The Draft Implementation Plan modelled a net zero pathway by 2050 for the community that relies on households adopting a number of strategies:

- Transitioning away from natural gas to electricity for cooking, water and space heating
- Replacing vehicles that have internal combustion engines with EVs
- Installing solar PV systems, targeting 80% uptake by 2050. (We note that the SMH 25.1.25 reports that only 3.3% of apartment buildings have solar PV systems)
- Implementing energy efficiency measures at residential and commercial properties
- Increasing the share of energy purchasing from renewable sources
- Waste reduction and diversion measures.

The consultants who prepared the report see Council's role in these activities as promotion and advocacy such as an initiative with energy providers to pilot a community battery in Hunters Hill. Community batteries are already in place in a range of NSW communities and are an effective way of linking rooftop solar from individual community members to the grid.

The provision of educational resources on energy efficiency and power purchasing of electricity from renewable sources is another important way that the community can be informed about contributing to the reduction of emissions. All the suggested actions in the Draft Net Zero Implementation Plan are important but in the Trust's view quite insufficient to bring the community to net zero emissions.

### **Further Measures to support the Hunters Hill Community to Achieve Net Zero**

There are two very important initiatives that the Trust advocates because, in addition to addressing climate change, they support the character and nature of the Hunters Hill LGA as a historically significant place in both its built and natural environment, a key objective for the Trust.

The first of these, developing solar PV guidelines for heritage sites, is included in the Draft Report. Given that this is not a problem unique to Hunters Hill, it would be preferable to see some collaboration between Councils that have heritage properties within their boundaries. 75% of the land in Hunters Hill LGA falls within conservation areas. It is understandable that residents in conservation areas and owners of heritage properties would want to update their properties from time to time to ensure that they meet changing community standards and, in some cases, make their own personal contributions to lowering household emissions.

Council has a key role to play in ensuring that these type of changes are sympathetic to the heritage values of Hunters Hill without subjecting the owners to delays in approval or additional design and other costs. To this end, Council should publish definitive guidelines specific to the heritage constraints in our LGA. We note that guidelines for the installation of solar panels in Conservation Areas without approval are simply, clearly and encouragingly stated on the websites of other LGAs such as Inner West and North Sydney Councils:

<https://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/home-improvements-maintenance/solar-energy-systems>

[www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/develop/development-support/development-approvals-for-solar](http://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/develop/development-support/development-approvals-for-solar)

We also note that the City of Sydney has developed even more comprehensive, illustrated guidelines in their document Development Application Exception for Solar Panels in Heritage Conservation Areas (January 2023):

[www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/development-guidelines-policies/development-application-exception-solar-panels-heritage-conservation-areas-guideline](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/development-guidelines-policies/development-application-exception-solar-panels-heritage-conservation-areas-guideline)

Heritage Victoria has also developed guidelines to assist owners in making decisions about solar panel installations with specific reference to heritage items:

[www.heritage.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/634025/Solar-Panel-Guidelines-OCT-2022.pdf](http://www.heritage.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/634025/Solar-Panel-Guidelines-OCT-2022.pdf)

While the circumstances in our municipality will require a tailored approach, with relevant case studies as examples, similar clear and helpful guidelines for solar installations for Conservation Areas and heritage items are urgently required for Hunters Hill if some of the current poor outcomes are to be avoided.

The second strategy we support involves actions not included in the report. Hunters Hill LGA, because of its character and proximity to the city, is a desirable location. Where Complying Development is allowed, particularly in Boronia Park, there has been significant demolition of existing houses to enable the building of large new modern homes. The demolition of sound and readily adapted homes is also commonplace within Conservation Areas.

While some of this may be unavoidable, the Trust considers that Council must do more to discourage wholesale demolition and instead give clear preference to alterations and additions to encourage the adaptive reuse of existing housing stock. The reasons why this is important are:

- There is significant embedded carbon in existing dwellings. The demolition and removal of building materials contributes to the waste problem outlined in the Report and requires new materials, usually produced and transported using carbon intensive methods, contributing to the community's Scope 3 emissions problem;
- There is a tendency to build larger and larger houses on sites which formerly held smaller family dwellings with large established gardens, thereby reducing the amount of green space and trees and the opportunity for the environment to absorb carbon dioxide.
- Demolition and rebuilding to the maximum envelope has significant impacts on the historic streetscapes of Hunters Hill, particularly in the Conservation Areas.

Council should investigate existing resources available on adaptive reuse of housing and promote them to the community. Where adaptive reuse is proposed, Council should encourage the preservation of existing trees and the avoidance of mature vegetation removal.

Households might be more open to adaptive reuse if Council could offer some incentives, for example, a reduction in rates over a significant period and reductions in other Council charges. Retaining large gardens might be incentivised by offering additional free removal of garden waste.

Sceptics might doubt that adaptive reuse could happen in non-conservation areas but in one street, Park Rd, between numbers 2 to 20 there are three instances where rather than demolition and rebuild, adaptive reuse has guided architects to maintain significant parts of the existing dwellings. It could have a much greater place in construction in Hunters Hill if given more support by Council.

Council has not finalised its LEP however we understand that it is due to be submitted to the NSW Government shortly. Concerns about oversized dwellings, massive excavations, lack of green space and the concomitant carbon emissions must all be addressed in the final version of the LEP.

The Trust argues that the new LEP must maintain existing ratios of "soft" landscape, garden areas and mature trees for all the benefits they provide and particularly for cooling. Recent media reports on the temperature differences in suburbs contrasting streets where the tree canopy has been maintained and where it has been removed, demonstrate that maintaining tree cover reduces the need for mechanical forms of cooling thus contributing to goals for net zero. (SMH 14.2.25 p.12)

In conclusion we congratulate Council on making significant gains in reducing emissions in its own operations. We strongly endorse the recommendations for taking the next steps in achieving net zero. The Hunters Hill Trust believes that there is very significant work to do in reducing emissions in the rest of the LGA and supports the suggestions made in the Draft Plan but considers that Council can take a stronger leadership role. In particular we draw Council's attention to strategies that were not included in the report relating to improved adaptive reuse of existing housing and the key role Council can play in making this happen.