EDGECLIFF/WOOLLAHRA PRECINCT STATE-LED REZONING PROPOSAL

Department of Planning NSW

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

Submission date: 30th October 2026

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Institute) is the peak body for the architectural profession in Australia. It is an independent, national member organisation with more than 14,000 members across Australia and overseas.

The Institute exists to advance the interests of members, support professional standards and contemporary practice, and advocate the value of architects and architecture to the sustainable growth of our communities, economy and culture.

The Institute actively works to maintain and improve the quality of our built environment by promoting better, responsible and environmental design.

+ At the time of this submission the National President is David Wagner FRAIA.
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The Royal Australian Institute of Architects recognises the unceded sovereign lands and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of these lands and waters.

This recognition generates acknowledgement and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Countries, Cultures and Communities, and their ways of being, knowing and doing.

Caring for Country practices including architecture and place shaping have existed on this continent since time immemorial.

The Institute recognises a professional commitment to engage and act meaningfully through reciprocal partnership and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Together we will support and develop the emergence of new possibilities for our shared future.

Executive Summary

The Institute supports more homes close to transport, jobs, services and good public space, and supports the Government's objective of increasing housing supply in well-located established suburbs. Edgecliff and Woollahra can and should take a meaningful share of Sydney's growth.

The Institute's view is that the exhibited proposal needs substantial refinement before it is finalised. Our concerns centre on four matters: how dwelling capacity has been set, how infrastructure will be funded and sequenced, how built form responds to a steep and heritage-rich landscape, and how the plan secures housing quality and public return.

We see a significant opportunity. Edgecliff-Woollahra is among the first precincts to test large-scale renewal of an established inner suburb. If it is done well, it can become the pilot for design-led densification across Sydney - a model that builds community confidence in the next precinct rather than eroding it. The recommendations in this submission are framed with that objective in mind, and the Institute and its members would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the next stage.

Policy Position

Setting capacity through evidence and design testing

The housing target of up to 10,000 dwellings was announced in August 2025, before detailed public testing of the precinct's capacity. The exhibited material shows limited evidence that alternative growth scenarios were examined.

Woollahra Council has also reported that recommendations of the State Design Review Panel and key recommendations of the State's heritage consultant, GML Heritage, are not fully reflected in the Master Plan. The Institute would welcome clarity on how that advice has been considered.

The supporting evidence points to a more calibrated level of growth:

- The Government's Economic Impact Assessment forecasts up to 4,800 dwellings over 20 years, a significant proportion of which could already be delivered under existing planning controls.
- Savills' independent review for Council estimates demand of 1,575 to 3,450 dwellings.
- Existing planning pathways could already deliver approximately 5,200 additional dwellings within the announcement area.
- SCT Consulting's transport modelling for Council indicates that, even with Woollahra Station and an aspirational mode shift, the network may reasonably accommodate growth of up to around 5,000 new dwellings.

Planning controls work best when they create the conditions for good development rather than maximum theoretical capacity. Development rights well beyond forecast demand do not necessarily produce more homes. They can lift land values and amalgamation costs, encourage speculation, and lead to selective and fragmented delivery, so that the key sites expected to carry the promised parks, links and community facilities may not proceed.

Woollahra Council's Alternative Approach (August 2026) offers a useful method. It tests the precinct block by block and in three dimensions, responding to topography, heritage, canopy, transport and infrastructure. Savills found its floor space ratios sufficient to support feasible redevelopment on approximately 90 per cent of sites. The Institute recommends this design-led method inform the revised proposal, with final capacity set by that testing and by the Government's own demand and transport evidence.

Aligning growth with infrastructure

- The Government identifies $1.33 billion in infrastructure requirements, including Woollahra Station. A funding strategy and a staging framework linking dwelling growth to infrastructure milestones have not yet been exhibited.
- Utilities require approximately 23.7 kilometres of sewer upgrades, pump station and substation augmentation and a new trunk water main, with cost, timing and responsibility yet to be resolved.
- A 10,000 dwelling scenario would lift the study area population from around 16,000 to more than 36,000, generating demand for 11 additional sports fields, 19 play spaces and more than 530 childcare places, in a precinct with an existing open space deficit.
- No assessment from NSW Health or NSW Ambulance has yet been exhibited.

Successful precinct renewal depends on homes, transport, open space and community facilities arriving together. The Alternative Approach pairs growth with 6,200 square metres of community floor space, 23,500 square metres of non-residential floor space and 2 hectares of new public open space. The Institute supports a staged or deferred rezoning model, as used at Green Square, so that additional uplift becomes available as the supporting infrastructure is funded and committed. This gives certainty to the community and to industry, and protects the credibility of the program as it extends to other precincts.

Built form that responds to place

The draft permits buildings of up to 34 storeys around Edgecliff Station and 32 storeys around Woollahra Station. The precinct's topography is dramatic, and the established pattern in Eastern Sydney concentrates height on ridgelines and centres, stepping down to the valleys and heritage streets.

The Institute supports height where landform, precedent and transport access can carry it, and questions whether a tower typology is appropriate across the whole precinct.

The Alternative Approach illustrates a coherent spatial logic. It locates towers of approximately 30 to 35 storeys at the Edgecliff Centre and concentrates height on ridges and centres, transitioning to lower forms elsewhere. It caps tower floorplates at 750 square metres and requires a minimum 30 per cent deep soil on most sites. Controls of this precision would strengthen the final framework.

Housing quality and the missing middle

As a pilot for established suburbs, the precinct should demonstrate not only how many homes can be accommodated, but how good those homes can be. The Institute recommends:

- the Apartment Design Guide standards are maintained in full, not traded for yield;
- competitive design processes for government-owned sites and all tower sites;
- a genuine mix of dwelling sizes, including family-sized apartments;
- well-designed mid-rise housing on slopes and secondary streets. This "missing middle" form is the most transferable lesson for other established suburbs, and the precinct is an ideal place to test and refine controls for it.

Landscape, heritage and existing homes

- Council estimates that almost 25 per cent of the Key Sites may result in the loss of more than 500 existing, more affordable dwellings, while the affordable housing strategy delivers up to 430 dwellings if the rezoning is realised in full.
- Contributory buildings proposed for demolition are spread across the precinct. The Institute supports concentrating these where they enable well-located uplift near transport, as the Alternative Approach proposes.
- The announcement area has 32 per cent canopy cover, above the LGA average of 27.4 per cent. The draft controls promote retention. A denser precinct should aim to increase canopy, towards 40 per cent, supported by enforceable deep soil and canopy controls.

Affordable housing

The draft sets an affordable housing contribution of 3 per cent in perpetuity, rising to 15 per cent on certain sites. Where uplift is created around a publicly funded station and on a publicly owned rail corridor, the Institute considers there should be a substantially greater public return. We recommend a higher contribution across the precinct and a target of 30 per cent and more on government-owned land, built to market quality, held in perpetuity and delivered within the precinct or the Woollahra LGA, with controls that seek to avoid a net loss of existing affordable dwellings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Institute recommends that the Department:

1. Refine the proposal before it is finalised.

2. Draw on the methodology and design principles of Woollahra Council's Alternative Approach in preparing any revised rezoning.
3. Calibrate capacity to the Government's own demand forecasts and transport capacity, set through three-dimensional, place-based design testing rather than a predetermined target.
4. Implement uplift through a staged or deferred rezoning mechanism so capacity becomes available as the supporting infrastructure is funded and committed.
5. Exhibit an Infrastructure Funding and Delivery Strategy, including the funding and delivery program for Woollahra Station, with input from Transport for NSW, Sydney Water, Ausgrid, NSW Health and the Department of Education.
6. Increase the affordable housing contribution, with a target of 30 per cent and more on government-owned land, built to market quality and held in perpetuity within the LGA, and seek to avoid a net loss of existing affordable dwellings.
7. Set a 40 per cent tree canopy target with enforceable deep soil and canopy controls.
8. Concentrate tower forms on ridges and centres where landform, precedent and transport access support them.
9. Secure housing quality through full application of the Apartment Design Guide, competitive design processes on key sites, a mix of dwelling sizes and well-designed mid-rise housing.
10. Establish a collaborative design review for the next stage, led by the NSW Government Architect with Council, the community and the design professions, and publish how the advice of the State Design Review Panel, GML Heritage and Council has informed the final framework.
11. Use the outcomes to inform a transferable framework for design-led densification of other established suburbs.

Conclusion

Edgecliff and Woollahra can make a meaningful contribution to Sydney's housing supply. The opportunity is to show, in one well-connected precinct, that density can deliver better homes, better streets, more landscape and stronger community infrastructure together. The Institute would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department, the NSW Government Architect and Council to achieve that outcome. Good density is measured by the quality of homes, streets, landscape and services it delivers, not by the number of dwellings it permits.

RAIA welcomes the continued opportunity to participate and provide solution-focused options. We look forward to continued discussions on this matter. Both NSW Chapter President, NSW Vice President and NSW Chapter Executive can be reached at any time on the email below

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Yours sincerely,



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Sources

Woollahra Municipal Council, *Alternative Approach to the State Led Rezoning*, Final Version, 28 August 2026.

Woollahra Council, *Council Submission: Edgecliff-Woollahra State-led Rezoning*, October 2026.

Exhibited proposal figures: NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Edgecliff-Woollahra webpage, updated 7 October 2026.