Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

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Guide to Faster Assessments for SSD Housing Applications

For applicants lodging applications under the following State Significant Development (SSD) pathways:

- Schedule 1, sections 26, 26A, 27 and 28 of the State Environmental Planning Policy (Planning Systems) 2021
- Schedule 2, section 19 of the State Environmental Planning Policy (Planning Systems) 2021
- Housing applications declared as SSD under section 4.36(3) of the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979,* following advice from the Housing Delivery Authority

August 2025

Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

Published by NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

dphi.nsw.gov.au

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First published: December 2023

Updates:

- Update 1: August 2024
- Update 2: August 2025

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Introduction

This Guide outlines how the Department will work with applicants to speed up the assessment of relevant housing applications under State significant development pathways.

The NSW Government recognises the need to build more homes for our growing population, boost housing supply and improve housing affordability.

The State significant development (SSD) pathways, alongside other policy initiatives, provide opportunities for faster delivery of new housing, including affordable housing, in well-located areas to meet the needs of a wide range of households.

Applications covered by this Guide

The Guide to Faster Assessments for SSD Housing (the Guide) applies to the following SSD applications:

- **Housing development carried out by certain public authorities**, lodged under Schedule 1, section 26 of State Environmental Planning Policy (Planning Systems) 2021 (Planning Systems SEPP)
- **In-fill affordable housing**, lodged under Schedule 1, section 26A of the Planning Systems SEPP
- **Build-to-rent housing**, lodged under Schedule 1, section 27 of the Planning Systems SEPP
- **Seniors housing** lodged under Schedule 1, section 28 of the Planning Systems SEPP
- **Development in accelerated Transport Oriented Development (TOD) Precincts**, lodged under Schedule 2, section 19 of the Planning Systems SEPP and
- **Housing applications declared as SSD** under section 4.36(3) of the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979 (the Act), following advice from the Housing Delivery Authority (**HDA Pathway**).

Policy context

NSW has an ambitious target to deliver 377,000 new homes over five years to July 2029 under the National Housing Accord.

The NSW Government is committed to providing the homes that young people, families and workers need through reforms that are designed to streamline planning approvals for major housing developments. To help deliver the housing target, the Government has made the following policy changes affecting SSD housing applications:

Floor space ratio and building height bonuses

The Government amended State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing) 2021 (Housing SEPP) to provide an increased floor space ratio (FSR) bonus and a new building height bonus for shop top housing and residential flat buildings, where the development includes at least 10% of its floor space as affordable housing[1]. This will encourage developers to fast-track delivery of affordable housing.

The Department released a Practice Note and Planning Circular to provide additional guidance on the in-fill affordable housing policy. These documents provide examples and guidance to consent authorities and applicants on the application of FSR and height bonuses under the Housing SEPP.

SSD pathways to support housing delivery

In-fill affordable, Build-to-rent and Seniors housing

The government introduced the following new SSD pathways in 2021 and 2023:

- **Build-to-rent housing**: Introduced in February 2021, where a development is permitted under Chapter 3, Part 4 of the Housing SEPP and meets the criteria and estimated development cost (EDC) thresholds in the Planning Systems SEPP[2].
- **Seniors housing**: Introduced in November 2021, where the Seniors housing component meets specific criteria and exceeds specified thresholds in the Planning Systems SEPP[3].
- **In-fill affordable housing**: Introduced in December 2023, where the EDC of the residential component exceeds specified thresholds in the Planning Systems SEPP[4].

[1] FSR and height bonuses under the Housing SEPP do not apply to development in the accelerated TOD precincts

[2] Schedule 1 section 27 of the Planning Systems SEPP

[3] Schedule 1 section 28 of the Planning Systems SEPP

[4] Schedule 1 section 26A of the Planning Systems SEPP

Housing development carried out by certain public authorities

The Government amended Schedule 1, section 26 of the Planning Systems SEPP in December 2023 so it applies to more applications. This SSD pathway is now available for development carried out by or on behalf of NSW Land and Housing Corporation, the Aboriginal Housing Office, or Landcom which meet the thresholds specified in the Planning Systems SEPP.

Development in Accelerated TOD Precincts

The Government introduced a new temporary SSD pathway[5] in November 2024, available until November 2027, for residential development on land identified as an "Accelerated TOD Precinct" on the *Accelerated Transport Oriented Development Precincts Rezoning Areas Map.* This pathway applies to development that has an EDC above certain thresholds for residential accommodation or the residential component within a mixed-use development.

Housing Delivery Authority

The Government established the HDA in December 2024 to provide advice on whether residential development should become SSD. The HDA evaluates EOI proposals against specified criteria that accord with the objectives of the HDA Pathway to:

- Identify high-yield housing proposals by focusing on known high-yield types of residential accommodation.
- Identify housing projects that can be assessed and constructed quickly by focusing on more compliant, major housing proposals that can commence construction quickly.
- Drive quality and affordable housing by focusing on housing development proposals that are well-located, have enabling infrastructure and contribute to affordable housing supply.
- Complement the State Significant Rezoning Policy by providing a potential pathway for major housing proposals that are seeking concurrent rezoning.

The HDA makes recommendations to the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces (Minister) who may declare certain development as SSD under Section 4.36(3) of the Act.

For more information, visit the Housing Delivery Authority landing page.

Background

These policy initiatives align with the National Housing Accord that the Australian Government announced in its Budget in October 2022.

[5] Schedule 2, section 19 of the Planning Systems SEPP

The National Housing Accord brings together all levels of government, investors, and the residential development, building and construction sector. The aim is to unlock quality, affordable housing supply over the medium term. It provides an initial, aspirational national target of delivering 1.2 million new, well-located homes over a period of 5 years from 2024. There are immediate and longer-term actions for all parties to support the delivery of more homes.

Faster assessments for SSD housing

The Department will prioritise the assessment of SSD housing applications to help speed up the delivery of more homes, with an end-to-end target assessment timeframe of 275 days on average.

End-to-end assessment timeframe targets will give public and private applicants, industry, councils and the community more certainty. They will also increase the likelihood of delivering the homes people need sooner, in line with the National Housing Accord targets. End-to-end timeframes will be calculated as follows:

- from lodgement to determination where the Department is acting under delegation from the Minister; or
- from lodgement to referral to the Minister, where the Minister determines the application; or
- from lodgement to referral to the Independent Planning Commission (Commission), where the Commission determines the application.

The Government and applicants both have a role to play in speeding up SSD housing assessments. At the same time, we must ensure the assessment process is robust, and leads to good planning and development outcomes.

This Guide outlines the steps the Department is taking to achieve faster assessments for SSD housing applications and what applicants can do to help.

Key features

- An end-to-end target of 275 days[6, 7] on average.
- Of the 275 days, a target of 90 government days on average, including exhibition.
- Improved processes to speed up the assessment, including:
    - a mandatory scoping meeting for early advice to applicants
    - industry-specific Secretary's environmental assessment requirements (SEARs), to be issued within 7 days for eligible projects

[6] To be achieved as a 6-month rolling average by end of 2024–25.

[7] Targets will not apply to build-to-rent and seniors housing applications lodged before 1 July 2025.

    - a commitment to reduce requests for information
    - only referring SSD housing applications to the Commission in certain circumstances.
- Dedicated housing assessment teams with increased capacity to assess SSD housing applications and support a more streamlined and consistent process for applicants.
- Guidance to applicants on preparing better applications.
- A shared expectation for applicants to submit responses as quickly as possible and within timeframes set by the Department.
- A maximum two-year period of consent for approved SSD housing applications to encourage faster commencement of work. SSD applications lodged via the HDA pathway will be expected to commence within 12 months of receiving consent.

When faster SSD assessments apply

SSD housing applications will benefit from faster SSD assessments, unless they:

- are a concept application[8];
- have unresolved voluntary planning agreements; or
- are delayed by a parallel planning proposal process.

Additionally, an application will not benefit from faster SSD assessment timeframes if it requires re-exhibition, or where an applicant does not make a reasonable attempt to provide required information within the stipulated timeframes.

[8] Concept applications via the HDA Pathway may still benefit from faster SSD assessments

Enhanced assessment process

Early engagement and a shared commitment between the Department and applicants will underpin faster assessments.

Statutory requirements for the lodgement and assessment of SSD are set out in legislation, primarily the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021.

These requirements are supported by the State Significant Development Guidelines, which provide the step-by-step process and detailed information for the assessment of SSD in NSW.

Applications that benefit from faster SSD assessments will follow an enhanced process, which emphasises targeted scoping and early engagement to identify and resolve issues early in the process and facilitate a faster and smoother assessment (refer to Figure 1).

Applications lodged via the HDA pathway may follow a slightly different process to applications assessed under the other SSD housing pathways during the Scoping and SEARs stage to support faster assessment. This is because HDA proposals are submitted through an expression of interest (EOI) process, and evaluated against set criteria, before being declared SSD. These differences are explained in the following sections.

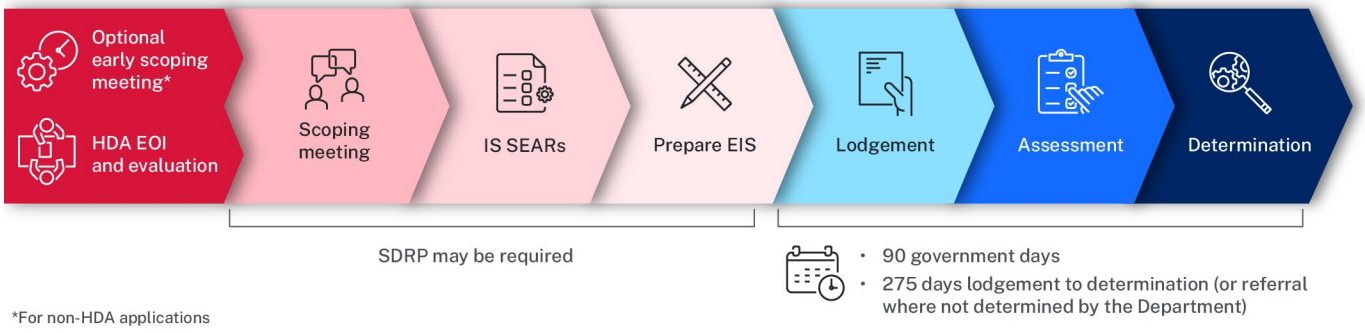

Figure 1: Steps to prepare, lodge and assess housing applications eligible for faster assessments.

Early scoping meeting

Applicants can request an early scoping meeting[9]. While this step is voluntary, we encourage early scoping meetings for complex developments that are expected to have significant impacts.

Early scoping meetings allow applicants to have an informal discussion with the Department to seek high-level advice on:

- whether the application is likely to meet the relevant SSD thresholds outlined in the Planning Systems SEPP
- the suitability of the site
- any site constraints (such as flooding, evacuation, and bushfire risk)
- other relevant planning considerations.

The Department expects the applicant to bring basic information about the site and the proposal to this meeting. Plans and studies are not necessarily needed at this stage.

To arrange an early scoping meeting, please contact the Department using the relevant email address for the type of SSD housing application, which can be found on the Department's website.

Scoping meeting

Applicants must attend a **mandatory** scoping meeting with the Department to discuss the development before submitting an application for industry-specific SEARs[10].

The Department will discuss expectations, commitments and timeframes for lodging the development application.

Before the scoping meeting

To arrange a scoping meeting, please contact the Department using the relevant email address on the Department's website and supply the required information. The meeting will be booked and held within 4 weeks of receiving the request.

Applicants must provide the following minimum information when booking the scoping meeting:

- summary of the proposal, including the indicative number of market and affordable homes that would be delivered and the EDC

[9] For HDA projects, an early scoping meeting is not required as applicants have already been through the HDA EOI process.

[10] For HDA projects, the information required to be provided as part of the mandatory scoping meeting is likely to be reduced and in some instances the Department may waive the requirement for a scoping meeting entirely

- conceptual plans, which might include site plans, floor plans, sections and elevations
- a high-level planning summary, including details of:
  - the site's zoning and permissibility
  - confirmation of the site's location within an accessible area (for in-fill affordable housing projects only)
  - any non-discretionary development standards that apply
  - other development standards that apply, and an indication of whether the proposal would comply, or any variations to be sought
- a high-level consideration of key design criteria in the Apartment Design Guide, including building separation, solar access and cross-ventilation
- an indicative timeframe for lodging the application and environmental impact statement.

For more details, refer to Scoping Meeting Requirements – for Applicants on the Department's website.

During the scoping meeting

The Department and the applicant will:

- confirm whether the application is likely to meet the relevant SSD thresholds outlined in the Planning Systems SEPP
- confirm whether Chapter 2, Part 2, Division 1 of the Housing SEPP applies[11]
- confirm whether the development is eligible for industry-specific SEARs
- confirm whether the proposal requires design review by the State Design Review Panel
- identify key considerations such as:
  - whether a concurrent rezoning is required
  - potential variation requests to development standards
  - the need for any early engagement with council or agencies
  - the applicability of any housing bonuses.

[11] Not relevant for development in accelerated TOD precincts

After the scoping meeting

The Department will advise if the applicant:

- **can apply for industry-specific SEARs**
  The Department will confirm that it has received sufficient information for the applicant to apply for industry-specific SEARs.
- **needs to provide further information**
  The Department will inform the applicant within 14 days of the scoping meeting of the additional/amended information it requires before industry-specific SEARs should be applied for. This may include asking the applicant to attend another scoping meeting.
- **is discouraged from applying for industry-specific SEARs**
  The Department will advise the applicant within 14 days of the scoping meeting if it forms the view that the proposed development has significant issues in its current form. In these cases, the Department would discourage the applicant from proceeding with the application until these issues are addressed ('early no').[12]

In some cases, the submitted information may be sent to Government Architect NSW and the relevant local council for their information and early engagement.

Application for SEARs

Industry-specific SEARs are ready-made assessment requirements for a particular development type that have been prepared upfront in consultation with government agencies.

Industry-specific SEARs have been prepared for eligible SSD housing applications. You can view them on the Department's website.

Under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021, the Department has 28 days to issue SEARs once an application has been made. The Department will accelerate issuing industry-specific SEARs to within 7 days.

The industry-specific SEARs cover letter may set out additional requirements to support a faster assessment process.

Study requirements for a concurrent rezoning

For SSD applications with a concurrent rezoning, study requirements will be issued alongside SEARs.

[12] Applicants may still request SEARs under section 173 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021.

Applications that are partially or wholly prohibited and require a concurrent rezoning process are not eligible for industry-specific SEARs[13]. Instead, the Department will issue project-specific SEARs within 28 days following receipt of a Scoping Report.

Where a concurrent complex rezoning is proposed, applicants will be required to attend a Planning Focus Meeting before the SEARs are issued. The Department will invite relevant agencies and the local council to discuss key issues for assessment.

The Department will seek to align project-specific SEARs with the requirements of the industry-specific SEARs for SSD housing applications, unless additional requirements are imposed as a result of feedback from a State agency or the local council.

Preparing the EIS

To support faster assessment for SSD housing, applicants should show how they will achieve good planning outcomes by addressing legislative requirements and following relevant guidance.

Applicants are expected to engage with the Department during the preparation of their Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to provide opportunities for early feedback and clarification of expectations. Applicants should also contact the Department prior to submitting their application through the NSW Planning Portal to support an efficient lodgement process.

Preparing a quality application

All SSD housing applications must demonstrate how they meet relevant SEARs, which consider key issues such as design, flood and bushfire risk, traffic impacts, environmental amenity, biodiversity and heritage.

Guidance for applicants

A suite of SSD Guidelines is available to support the preparation of a high quality EIS and any supplementary documentation. Applicants should refer to the *State significant development guidelines - preparing an environmental impact statement (Appendix B)* for more information on what is required to be lodged with their EIS.

[13] Concept SSD applications or those that would otherwise be designated development are also not eligible for industry-specific SEARs.

The Department provides access to guidance on assessing the impacts for a range of issues via its Key Guidance page. Some specific guidance and case studies are also available on the Department's website, to support the streamlined assessment of SSD housing projects.

All applications also need to be reviewed and signed off by a Registered Environmental Assessment Practitioner to ensure they have been prepared to a high standard and contain all the necessary information for the Department to assess each project, helping them move more efficiently through the planning process.

Development Control Plans (DCPs) do not apply to SSD applications[14], however they may be a good guide to help minimise impacts and align with existing development in the area. In this respect the Department may, in some circumstances, ask applicants to consider DCP controls.

The design principles for residential apartment development outlined in Chapter 4 of the Housing SEPP, and the Apartment Design Guide remain as standard considerations for any residential apartment development.

State Design Review Panel

The State Design Review Panel (SDRP) program provides design advice for projects of state significance. Under this program, a panel of built-environment design experts provide independent evaluation and advice on the design quality of projects.

SSD housing projects may be reviewed by the SDRP where required by an Environmental Planning Instrument or as outlined in the NSW State Design Review Panel Guidelines for Project Teams. Applicants should review the criteria and engage with the Department early to ensure they are aware of the design review requirements for their project.

Where review by the SDRP is required, it should take place as early as possible. Two reviews are typically required, except where there are multiple buildings or public domain, or if the project has received a competition exemption.

Further information about the SDRP can be found on the State Design Review Panel page on the Department's website.

Lodging the development application and environmental impact statement

Once the application is lodged through the NSW Planning Portal the Department will carry out a high-level check of the application and EIS, including all appendices, before placing it on public

[14] Section .2.10 of the Planning Systems SEPP

exhibition. If the EIS is illegible or unclear about the development consent sought, or does not contain the information and documents required, the Department can reject the application within 14 days or require more information. The applicant will be notified of the reasons for rejection.

If the application is rejected, the applicant can relodge the EIS but must resubmit it with all appendices on the NSW Planning Portal.

Applicants using the HDA pathway are expected to lodge their EIS within 9 months of SEARs being issued.

Assessing the application

The Department will assess each application on its merits, considering the likely economic, environmental and social impacts and the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

For applications seeking affordable housing bonuses, it is important to note these are not an entitlement[15]. There may be circumstances where the maximum allowable FSR or building height would result in unacceptable impacts and would not be supported. The Department will consider each application on its merits and seek to balance the impacts of the development on the amenity of the site and surrounding land with the Government's clear policy intent to deliver more housing.

Exhibition timeframes

To support efficient assessments, SSD housing applications will generally be exhibited for the minimum period set out in the legislation and in line with the Department's Community Participation Plan. The Department may extend the exhibition beyond the minimum period, where appropriate.

Responding to submissions

The Department will ask the applicant to prepare a submissions report to respond to the issues raised during exhibition and through agency advice. The submissions report must also address any key issues the Department identifies in its key issues letter.

The Department will set a response timeframe depending on the scale and nature of the issues raised and the actions that need to be taken to address them. Typically, this timeframe will be 60 days. If the Department does not receive the submissions report within the specified timeframe the application may no longer benefit from faster SSD assessment.

[15] The availability of housing bonuses does not affect any responsibility under section 4.15 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, which requires the consent authority to consider the relevant provisions of all applicable Environmental Planning Instruments (EPIs), the likely impacts of a development, the suitability of the site for the development and the public interest (amongst other matters).

Requests for information

Because of the enhanced assessment process, including early engagement and more targeted scoping, the Department is likely to issue fewer requests for information.

If the Department does require more information, applicants must provide a response addressing all issues raised within the timeframes set by the Department. If the Department does not receive the requested information in this timeframe the application may no longer benefit from faster SSD assessment. Alternatively, it may determine the application based on the available information.

Determination

Referrals to the Independent Planning Commission

SSD projects require development consent from the Minister or the Commission before proceeding. The Planning Systems SEPP[16] sets out the circumstances under which the Commission is the consent authority for SSD applications.

SSD housing applications are only required to be referred to the Commission for determination in certain circumstances. This allows the Department to determine many of these applications under delegation from the Minister, reducing overall assessment times and allowing the Commission to focus on more contentious and complex SSD applications.

Period of consent

In accordance with the aim of the National Housing Accord to unlock and deliver more homes over 5 years from 2024, SSD housing consents will lapse after a period of 2 years. This will encourage faster commencement of work and dwelling completions.

Applicants receiving a consent under the HDA Pathway will be expected to commence work within 12 months.

Under section 4.54 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, the applicant may apply to the consent authority, before the period of consent expires, for an extension of one year

[16] Section 2.7 of the Planning Systems SEPP