

# Australia International NPF4 Event

3 September 2020

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This event was organised as part of a wider engagement programme undertaken by RTPI Scotland and commissioned by the Scottish Government for the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). The three international events aimed to identify relevant planning practice across the world, which could help to shape the new NPF.

## Context

The Australia International NPF4 event addressed why Melbourne is seen as one of the most liveable cities in the world, with presentations from Jenny Divine and Ian Gilzean, and contributions from Alan Pert.

## Presentation and Discussion

- Leadership strategy has made a big difference to Melbourne's liveability over the years. The city centre used to be a 'monoculture of commercial property' and had little appeal due to the expansion of sub-suburban areas. To improve the status of the empty city centre, politicians implemented the City of Melbourne Strategic Plan in 1985, which laid the foundations for Melbourne to become more of a mixed use activities centre. Rob Adams, the Director of City Design in Melbourne, was key to taking this strategy forward.
- The plan included an initiative called Postcode 3000, which focused on regenerating derelict buildings for better use, in particular residential. Targets were set for residential units in the city to encourage citizens to move back into the Central Business District (CBD) and direction was given in Building Recycling Guidelines to show how buildings could be transformed into different types of units.
- Improved permeability and walkability through the city was a key target to improve the city centre's liveability. The opening of the city's laneways gave new businesses the chance to set up here, which brought energy and vitality to the night time economy as well as new found street culture and connectivity. Streets make up 80% of cities and commenting on this, Rob Adams stated "If you can design a good street, you have a good city".
- Jan Gehl, Danish architect and urban designer, conducted several public life and public space studies in Melbourne and made a set of strategic recommendations for improvement within the public realm. The impact of this research has led to significant investment for initiatives around the city including dedicated cycle lanes, expansion and maintenance of the tram network, street trees, flood prevention infrastructure, wider sidewalks and the creation a café culture that is famous around the world. Swanson Street has also now been pedestrianised, Federation Square set up as a cultural hub and symbolic meeting point in the city centre, St Kilda boardwalk provides a close connection to nature and the city in general is seen as Australia's sporting capital.

Melbourne really makes the most of its existing assets and resources and this has been key to making the city liveable.

- The surrounding inner suburbs have been regenerated too – the neighbourhoods are walkable and the local high streets are well maintained with a variety of diverse units. This creates a string of vibrant mini centres around the CBD. One of the challenges with this development however, is that it is now very expensive to live in these neighbourhoods. This means more and more Victorians are moving to the outer suburbs of Melbourne in order to afford living costs.
- In line with this, one of the nine principles in Plan Melbourne is ‘living locally’, which the concept of the 20-minute neighbourhood branches off from. The idea was first mentioned in the 2014 version of Plan Melbourne but unfortunately the initiative has not reached some parts of Melbourne since then, in particular the outer suburbs.
- A pilot study was conducted in 2018 to review the practicalities of delivering 20-minute neighbourhoods throughout Melbourne. The report included concerns about the ability of the current Victoria Planning System to implement the initiative. 20-minute neighbourhoods require high quality and innovative designs, which given the rigidity of statutory planning processes in Victoria, may not be possible to deliver. The initiative also requires a place-based community partnership approach to planning, which also may not be possible under the current zonal planning system as it applies specific purposes for different areas of Melbourne and therefore lacks flexibility. These findings suggest that statutory planning processes may need to be altered to allow strategic policy initiatives to be delivered successfully.
- Another study, this time conducted by Monash University on the issue of Forced Car Ownership in Melbourne, found that between 2001 and 2016 forced car ownership households continued to grow in Metropolitan Melbourne, with higher growth in the middle and outer suburbs. This suggests that the current statutory mechanisms to reduce car dependency are not working as they should and therefore for local authorities to implement the 20-minute neighbourhood initiative, these need to be changed.
- It can therefore be seen that the ‘living locally’ principle is having some success in the CBD and inner suburbs where 20-minute neighbourhoods complete with a variety of services and buzzing high streets are found. However, moving away from the city centre it is easier to see where the inequalities lie in terms of access to services and most of all liveability.

## Learning for NPF4

- Interestingly, Plan Melbourne aligns closely with the National Planning Framework (NPF) 3 goals on liveability but there are lessons Scotland can take from Melbourne in terms of implementing the new NPF.
- The NPF4 could perhaps look to Melbourne’s approach to 20-minute neighbourhoods as a lesson, focusing on how 20-minute neighbourhoods can be implemented all over Scotland and not just in city and inner city regions.
- It was felt that NPF4 should therefore align policy with appropriate statutory mechanisms in order to deliver goals, for example NPF4 could use local place plans and the place standard design tool as a way of helping to deliver the neighbourhood concept in Scotland.



- NPF4 could also use Melbourne as an example to learn how to use Scotland's existing assets and resources to deliver liveable places with walkable neighbourhoods and lively high streets. In addition to this, Plan Melbourne is the city's plan for the next thirty years but population predictions keep moving up which is a big challenge for Melbourne to deal with.
- NPF4 should therefore be continually monitored and flexible to change in order to compensate for any major challenges that come up in its lifetime. Lastly, liveability should underpin the NPF4 as Covid-19 has given us a necessary refocus on priorities that shows how important being able to live locally is.

### Read more

- [Revitalising Melbourne's city centre from 1985](#) (including Postcode 3000)
- [Building Recycling Guidelines](#)
- [Plan Melbourne 2014](#)
- [20-minute neighbourhoods Melbourne](#) (findings and recommendations from the 2018 pilot study)
- [Monash University 'Forced Car Ownership' study 2018](#)