

16 September 2020

The Hon Robert Stokes MP  
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces  
GPO Box 5341  
Sydney NSW 2001

cc. Katie Stevenson CoS  
cc. Jim Betts Secretary, DPIE

Dear Minister

I write on behalf of the Urban Taskforce members asking what has happened at Ku-ring-gai. They refer to the link below (the words of the Council link say it all):

[http://www.kmc.nsw.gov.au/Your\\_Council/Organisation/News\\_and\\_media/Latest\\_news\\_-\\_media\\_releases/NSW\\_Planning\\_Minister\\_says\\_no\\_legal\\_requirement\\_to\\_meet\\_Greater\\_Sydney\\_Commission\\_housing\\_targets\\_in\\_Ku-ring-gai](http://www.kmc.nsw.gov.au/Your_Council/Organisation/News_and_media/Latest_news_-_media_releases/NSW_Planning_Minister_says_no_legal_requirement_to_meet_Greater_Sydney_Commission_housing_targets_in_Ku-ring-gai)

Urban Taskforce led industry early criticism of the GSC LSPS assurance process late last year, arguing that it was impossible endorse each LGA's LSPS without the completion of their Housing Strategy. To their credit, at the time, the GSC staff agreed with this view and sought to work with Councils to have targets written into the Advisory Notes in their letter of support to Council. The result was a much-improved (though not perfect) outcome.

In the case of Ku-ring-gai, the GSC letter of support for the LSPS recommended that the local Housing Strategy show how Council would deliver a relatively modest growth target of 3,000 – 3,600 additional dwellings in their LGA - between 2022 and 2027.

It appears that Ku-ring-gai Council has protested that they simply do not want to assist with the economic growth of Greater Sydney and they complained to their local MPs. It now appears, through the letter that has been sent, that you have simply let them off the hook.

Ku-ring-gai Council, with all its massive potential for growth, has been one of the worst performers in the context of COVID-19, with a meagre seven approvals in the June quarter (start of April – end of June) for new multi-unit dwellings out of a total approved of 307 in the Northern District.

As you are aware from my many writings on this subject and beyond, economic growth will be critical to saving jobs and securing our future. Population growth is a key driver of economic growth, but it can't happen without increased housing supply. The GSC took a conservative approach to housing supply targets – far lower than the draft NSW Housing Strategy – but even these low-ball targets appear to have been too much for Ku-ring-gai Councillors and, it appears from your letter, the Government.

Perhaps this letter to Council was never meant to go public – but thanks to Ku-ring-gai Council enthusiastic media and public communications team, the cat is out of the bag.

It is not too late for you, Minister, to re-assert the need for population growth spread fairly across all Councils in the Greater Sydney region. That is what GSC sought to do.

There has been a lot of good work done in the context of COVID-19, but there seems to have been a recent trend of reversal with the release of the Crows Nest St Leonards 2036 plan; the publication of the draft Housing Diversity SEPP; the perfunctory alienation of seniors housing from 13 LGAs (notwithstanding the continuing undersupply of this housing type); and now this letter to Ku-ring-gai Council.

When I met you for the first time in your office, you were very clear that the GSC would be setting the strategic settings, including the housing supply targets for Districts and for LGAs. Then, you advised, Councils would be held to account for the delivery of those targets in the LEPs and through their Housing Strategies.

I urge you to be strong in supporting targets for each LGA – indeed, given the consistent under supply of housing compared to population growth, there is an even greater need for strong leadership from the centre of the planning system.

I look forward to your response. Please feel free to call me any time to discuss this matter. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to examine, not so much this specific issue in Ku-ring-gai, but the precedent it could set moving forward.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Forrest', written in a cursive style.

**Tom Forrest**  
Chief Executive Officer