

*Towards a More Sustainable Future*



LIVING IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

**Using Land in the Blue Mountains  
A Summary of Trends Issues and Key Ideas**

Paper No 14b  
*Blue Mountains – Our Future*



**BLUE MOUNTAINS  
OUR FUTURE**

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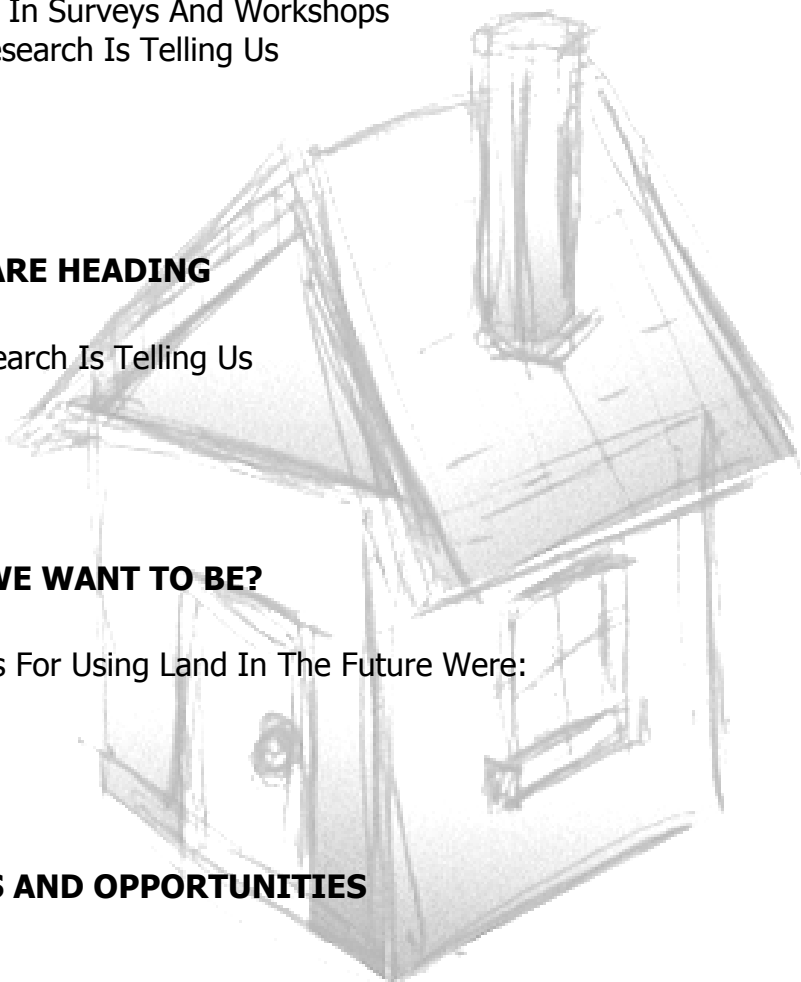
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# ***Introduction***

## **The wider context**

The Australian way of life has favoured the detached dwelling on a quarter acre block. Our increasing population has driven the demand for more and more land. Planners and politicians have responded to community expectations by allowing sub division development to spread over larger and larger areas of land.

This sprawling development pattern in Australian settlements has generally been allowed without addressing the related infrastructure and structural challenges such as water supply, sewerage, affordable and accessible housing and transport systems, access to employment opportunities, community services, recreation areas and facilities and changing demographics.

Our urban footprint is encroaching further and further into bushland. The amount of land used as space for community living is decreasing as urban settlements have sprawled. This is affecting the opportunities we now have to meet and interact as communities. The consequences of urban sprawl include a decline in the supply of affordable housing, increased bushfire risk for individuals and property and increasing impacts on the environment.

Impacts of urban sprawl on our personal lives include the need to travel long distances to work, increasing reliance on private transport for mobility and convenience, increasing suburbanisation, lack of appropriate housing for the aged and single person households, reduced access to services and facilities and increasing isolation for some communities.

Many urban settlements in Australia are now experiencing tension between the supply of available land and meeting expectations for the area of personal land space desired for living as individuals and families. The price of land is increasing as demand increases and supply dwindles. Land in desirable locations, for example for work opportunities or lifestyle preference, commands premium prices.



## **The Blue Mountains context**

The Blue Mountains Local Government Area (LGA) covers 143, 000 hectares of land on the Great Dividing Range in the west of the Greater Sydney Region. Approximately 70% of the area is incorporated in the Blue Mountains National Park. Of the remainder, about 20,000 hectares is in public ownership. Approximately 22,000 hectares is privately owned, of which approximately 7,000 hectares is zoned Environmental Protection under LEP 1991. This leaves approximately 15,000 hectares of useable land in private ownership, that is only 10.5% of the total land in the LGA.

In a regional context, the Blue Mountains LGA provides the land for a corridor bridging the east and west of New South Wales. The fact that this corridor bisects a National Park in a World Heritage area is significant.

The way in which land is used in the Blue Mountains is extremely varied. The LGA includes urbanised development and dormitory townships as well as isolated settlements and extensive areas of rugged bushland. Urban development is predominantly restricted to ridgelines and plateaus by steep slopes, cliffs and escarpments. Development is aligned with the main east-west road and rail corridor along the Blue Mountains range. Residential land use dominates the urban areas of the LGA. Due to the elongated pattern of development from east to west an extensive urban / bushland interface exists. The size of this urban / bushland interface is problematical when trying to manage for the minimisation of environmental problems and bushfire risk.

Historically, much of the development in the Blue Mountains has encroached well into bushland with little regard for environmental impact and often without supporting infrastructure, such as sewerage and transport systems. This dispersed, sprawling development pattern along ridgelines has been added to by post war residential development, creating many of the 'suburbs', particularly in the lower Blue Mountains. Over time, the consumption of large blocks of what was relatively cheap land has left approximately only 20 hectares remaining of potential greenfield development sites. As all available sites for new development dry up it is likely that existing urban areas will come under increasing pressure for redevelopment.



In 2001 Blue Mountains people still value owning their own home on a large block of land. This preference is mirrored in the wider Australian context and has shaped settlement patterns throughout the country. Choices about how we want to live affect what happens to our land.

Ensuring the provision of required infrastructure within this setting as well as the achievement of a diversity of lifestyle, employment and recreational opportunities are key challenges. Provision of water and sewerage systems, electricity, waste disposal, telecommunications and transport infrastructure is particularly challenging given our fragile environment and role as a water supply catchment for Greater Sydney. Existing landfill sites in the Blue Mountains have a limited life and waste minimisation strategies are already necessary. Much of the drainage, water and sewerage infrastructure in our city is aging and does not have the capacity to service an increasing population. The cost of retrofitting existing and providing new infrastructure outside existing urban areas is prohibitive. The need for us to centralise development around existing infrastructure, services and facilities is evident. This applies also to existing public transport nodes.

Recreation and sporting activities are a very important part of life for residents and visitors to the Blue Mountains. Parks, walking tracks and open space play an important role in the provision of opportunities for recreation and also contribute to village character as well as the protection and conservation of areas of environmental significance.

Effective urban forms use limited land supply efficiently. How we choose to live, the way in which we use our available land and space, above and below ground and now cyberspace, are issues for consideration in thinking about how best we can use our limited land in the Blue Mountains.

## **How can we best use our available land and space for living?**



## ***Where we are now***

### **What you said in surveys and workshops**

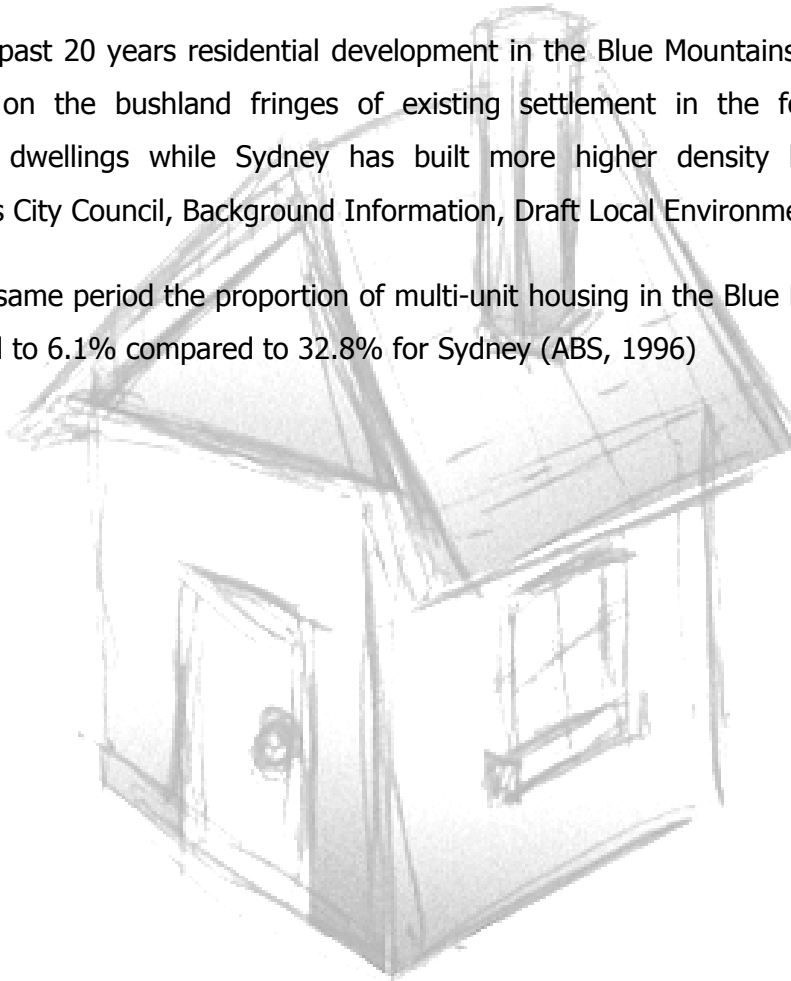
- You want greater controls on development so as to protect the environment
- Development should be contained to prevent further impact on bush land
- You are concerned about maintaining the unique character and identity of our villages and towns
- Limited land supply is pushing up land and house prices
- Opportunities for public interaction are needed in our villages and towns
- There is a need to think of infrastructure before developments are approved and to make better use of existing infrastructure
- Settlement in the Blue Mountains are on the urban / bushland interface and bushfires are a constant high risk
- Exotic cottage gardens are still a key part of the character of the Blue Mountains
- The capacity of Blue Mountains waste disposal sites is limited and you see the need to reuse and recycle
- You have concerns about roads and their maintenance

### **What other research is telling us**

- Blue Mountains residents value living in a detached house on a large block of land – while in Sydney pressure on land has already resulted in more people living densely (Blue Mountains City Council, Community Survey, 2001 and ABS 1996)
- The Blue Mountains has a home ownership rate well above the average rate across Greater Western Sydney (Centre for Regional Research and Innovation, 2001)
- Most housing comprises single detached dwellings (90.9%) with alternative housing types such as town houses or flats comprising 6.1% of the total (Blue Mountains City Council, Background Information, Draft Local Environment Plan 2002)



- 57% of Blue Mountains residents use ovals regularly either through active involvement, spectator activities and / or leisure use (Blue Mountains City Council, 2001)
- Much of our drainage, water and sewerage infrastructure is aging and requires upgrading, there are serious water supply and sewerage carrying capacity issues in localised areas (Sydney Water, 2001)
- The cost of retrofitting existing and providing new infrastructure outside existing developed urban areas is generally prohibitive (Blue Mountains City Council, Background Information, Draft Local Environment Plan 2002)
- Over the past 20 years residential development in the Blue Mountains has occurred primarily on the bushland fringes of existing settlement in the form of single detached dwellings while Sydney has built more higher density housing (Blue Mountains City Council, Background Information, Draft Local Environment Plan 2002)
- Over the same period the proportion of multi-unit housing in the Blue Mountains has decreased to 6.1% compared to 32.8% for Sydney (ABS, 1996)





## ***Where we are heading***

### **What the research is telling us**

- Sydney's population is expected to grow by an average of 40,000 people each year placing more pressure on metropolitan fringe areas such as the Blue Mountains (Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, 2001)
- If approaches to land use continue tension will increase between maintaining existing character (exotic gardens and large blocks), protecting the environment and housing changing and diverse populations
- Household sizes are getting smaller (University of Western Sydney, 2001)
- The life expectancy of landfill sites are: Katoomba 5-10 years and Blaxland 30-40 years (Blue Mountains City Council, 2002)
- Land availability for new and infill development is set to expire at the latest around the year 2015 (Blue Mountains City Council, Background Information, Draft Local Environment Plan 2002)
- The number of people participating in nature based recreation (such as bush walking and abseiling) is projected to grow particularly in light of recent World Heritage listing (Blue Mountains City Council, 2002)



## ***Where do we want to be?***

**Your key ideas for using land in the future were:**

### **To use and re use land to provide adaptable housing more responsive to changing needs**

Using eco-design in houses and gardens for low environmental impact

Integrated well designed accessible built environment

Wise use of space

### **To maintain the unique identity of the Blue Mountains as a place to live**

Halting Sydney sprawl to the Mountains

Development sympathetic to the natural environment

No high density housing

Well designed medium density housing in appropriate areas

Big backyards and beautiful gardens

### **To use attractive urban design in our places and spaces**

The cityscape celebrates our artistic strengths

Katoomba has been revitalized

Heritage buildings are restored and protected

Tree lined streets

### **An active and healthy community where people have things to do**

There are more centralised and collocated sports and recreation facilities

Local parks are well kept and well used

There are places and spaces to celebrate our culture

Young people have a safe place to hang out and things to do



# ***Challenges and Opportunities***

## **Challenges**

- Land available for living is limited by the Blue Mountains National Park
- The Australian way of life favours the detached dwelling on a quarter acre block
- Blue Mountains topography and dispersed settlement pattern strains resources for infrastructure and service provision
- The retention of character housing on large blocks limits the extent to which land can be used efficiently for housing and other uses
- The provision of sporting fields and facilities is constrained by limited available and or suitable land
- Residential development has been allowed in high bushfire risk areas
- There is a lack of hi speed data links to facilitate home offices and reduce commuting

## **Opportunities**

- Whilst the topography is in many ways a constraint limiting the land supply and increasing the costs of infrastructure it can also be seen as an opportunity creating the impetus to realign the existing housing stock and centralise the provision of new housing and facilities.
- The natural, built and cultural heritage of the Mountains provides opportunities for sensitive well designed human settlements providing rich and varied living spaces
- Being a city in a World Heritage National Park provides opportunities for more environmentally sensitive design and efficient land use
- Existing transport infrastructure offers opportunities to further consolidate land use around more accessible centres