




Speech By
Amy MacMahon

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Record of Proceedings, 11 June 2024

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (8.02 pm): We know that this government works for property developers, and this bill is yet another example. Labor truly believes that for-profit property developers will save us from the housing crisis and this bill is just the next measure designed to speed up the approvals process to help make developers as much money as possible. In reality, property developers who are chasing profit have helped cause the housing crisis. Priority development areas, which are covered in this bill, are a planning tool that this government has developed to help it manage large, often very controversial development projects. PDAs provide a streamlined approvals process for property developers that further cut the community out of having any meaningful say in the future of their communities.

We have been critical of PDAs for a number of reasons. Community consultation is extremely limited. There is an initial period of consultation on the draft development scheme and, once this broad development scheme is approved, development can occur over many years with no required additional community consultation for any developments in the PDA. There is limited transparency about how decisions on PDAs are made. Local planning rules can be overridden. There are no third-party rights of appeal.

Let's take a look at one other example of a PDA: the Toondah Harbour PDA. This Labor government approved the development of units on a Ramsar listed wetland—wholeheartedly approved this project—and this was only stopped after years of community campaigning and the federal environment minister stepping in to stop the project.

This bill allows the Minister for Economic Development Queensland to compulsorily acquire land with new powers. At the moment, the minister relies on other entities to acquire land required for priority development areas. This bill allows the minister to acquire land directly and can confer rights or interests in land to other entities, and that entity may derive a measurable benefit from the action taken on that land. What could these other entities be? This could be another public sector entity like the local government or it could be a local public sector entity like a community housing provider, but there is nothing in the bill that prevents the minister from conferring these rights to a private entity—acquisitions that could be handed over to a private entity. It was not too long ago that this government was planning to acquire homes backing onto Raymond Park and then turn that park into an Olympics warm-up track. Thanks to the amazing community campaign, the park and those homes are now safe, but these new rules would have made it easier for the Labor government to literally bulldoze over the community.

Let me touch on affordable housing, because there is nothing in this bill that guarantees that affordable housing will be built in priority development areas. Under this bill, the definition of 'affordable housing' is 'housing that is affordable to particular types of households under criteria prescribed by regulation'. The draft regulation provides some guidance on what is classified as 'affordable', but there are some huge loopholes that could leave any priority development area, including the Woolloongabba Priority Development Area, with zero social or affordable housing, including the use of offsets. Developers will be able to make a payment in lieu of affordable housing or enter into a voluntary housing

agreement with EDQ that can include land outside of the PDA. If the plan here is to include affordable housing near transport and within priority development areas, why are offsets being included? With access to offsets there is no guarantee that there will be any affordable housing in any priority development area.

In referring to the Woolloongabba Priority Development Area, my critique of this plan is well known and on the public record. This PDA has a lot of potential, particularly given that the core of the PDA is public land where the government could be delivering beautiful new parkland and thousands of new public homes, but instead, based on the current plan, we are going to be getting 80 per cent of the dwellings in the PDA that are unaffordable and we are likely to get paved walkways and plazas in areas where the government has suggested there might be parkland and the community voice is cut out. The community has been given two months to have its say on a 106-hectare section of Woolloongabba and East Brisbane. This two months has just been extended from an initial six weeks. That is all the government was going to give the community to have its say when the plan dramatically changes the character of the neighbourhood.

There has been no mail-out to community members, residents or businesses within the priority development area or surrounding the priority development area. You can live in the priority development area where there are plans to drastically rezone your area and you will have gotten nothing in your letterbox to let you know that this is coming or to invite you to the consultation that has been taking place. In fact, people have been saying that my office has been doing better consultation on the PDA than the government has been. The community has been asked to provide feedback on the PDA plans, but there are crucial documents and bits of information that we do not yet have access to. There are no details on what is included in the developer charge and offset plan and we do not have the finalised guidelines for affordable housing, so people are being asked to give feedback on a plan that is partial in nature.

The Woolloongabba PDA includes plans for what the government describes as open space. For the publicly owned land around the Cross River Rail station, the government will be targeting 50 per cent of this area to be allocated for open space purposes, and a number of new mini parks are described as privately owned, publicly accessible open space. There is an important distinction between green space and parkland and open space. Open space is defined as green space and public realm and public realm is defined as any publicly accessible streets, pathways, cross blocks, links, arcades, plazas, parks and open spaces, key civic spaces and any public or civic building and facilities.

When the plan talks about 'open space' that can include buildings, paved areas, roads and pathways. I remind the government that in 2020 the community was promised that half of the Cross River Rail station site at the heart of this PDA would be parkland. The government said that no less than 50 per cent of the new Gabba station site would be reserved for parkland. This has been reneged on. Now we are told we are getting open space that can include roads, walkways and public buildings.

The plan also includes a 20 per cent target for developments over 10 storeys to be social or affordable housing. Rather than a binding mandated level of public housing, the PDA gives developers a target, it gives developers the choice of either social or affordable housing and it gives developers the option of offsets. Without mandates for public housing and with access to offsets, what can we expect to see? Developers will be able to wriggle out of delivering any affordable housing with offsets, developers will have the choice of affordable or social housing and, in essence, the 20 per cent target will mean that 80 per cent of housing in the PDA will be unaffordable. With no limits on rent increases, the PDA could result in new developments that are unaffordable to most local residents and unaffordable to local healthcare workers and teachers.

The PDA plan includes a huge amount of new population growth and new dwellings but does not include a plan for new schools. In fact, not only does it not include a plan for new schools; the existing school, East Brisbane State School, remains at risk from whatever future plans the government makes for the Gabba stadium. With no new schools and the existing school at risk, what is the government planning for the future of the kids who live in this area? That is on top of the fact that in this neighbourhood public infrastructure is also stretched thin. We have a lack of green space. We have a lack of safe pathways, walkways and pedestrian access. We have crowded schools.

When I have conversations with locals about the priority development area, people say that the government cannot even keep up services for the population that we have now so how can we trust them to deliver the services for this kind of population growth? Given that this community just spent three years fighting for a park and a school, why should they trust the Labor government?

Finally, this plan backs in the idea that somehow developers are going to save us from the housing crisis, but we know that a developer's main goal is profit. We know that developers hold back supply to keep prices high and they do not even try to hide it. The Meriton CEO told the *Australian*

newspaper, 'I am holding a lot more than I am selling at the moment, and as the value of property goes up, the value of what I have kept rises.' Big developers are sitting on a huge backlog of land that is zoned for housing but they will not be building new housing on that land any time soon. That is a deliberate choice that is designed to maximise their profits from skyrocketing house prices, driving up the costs of houses and rent. Labor and their friends in the real estate world claim that developers will build more if only councils and the state government would approve more developments faster and hand over more public land. In reality we know that developers will not do anything to genuinely bring down the cost of housing and this government supports that.