

Letter of Response: Infrastructure-First Development in Erskineville

To: Mark Speakman MP, Leader of the Opposition
Scott Farlow MP, Shadow Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
Natalie Ward MP, Shadow Minister for Transport and Roads, and Infrastructure

CC: The Hon. Paul Scully MP, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, NSW
The Hon. Chris Minns MP, Premier of New South Wales
The Hon. John Graham MP, Minister for Transport, NSW
Councillor Clover Moore, Lord Mayor of Sydney

From: Deborah Giblett, President
Friends of Erskineville, on behalf of the community

Date: 27 October 2025

Subject: Response to Opposition's "Inner-city housing renewal" announcement - We Support Development, But Infrastructure Must Come First

Dear Mr Speakman, Ms Ward, and Mr Farlow,

We write in response to your announcement of plans to deliver up to 15,000 additional dwellings across Erskineville, Macdonaldtown, Newtown and St Peters, should the Liberal-National Coalition be elected in March 2027.

We are not anti-development. We agree that inner-city areas close to public transport, jobs, and services are exactly where new housing should be built. We agree that NSW must address the housing crisis and that well-located land should not remain underutilised.

However, we fundamentally reject that our area has "remained with primarily low-rise housing for decades" solely due to planning failure. Your announcement reveals a concerning gap between rhetoric and the lived experience of residents who are already dealing with unprecedented development without the corresponding infrastructure.

The Reality: Development is Already Happening at Unprecedented Scale

Your announcement characterises the area as "underutilised." This is not accurate for Erskineville:

- **Ashmore site:** 6,000 residents projected by 2025
- **23 October 2025:** City of Sydney approved TWO MAJOR applications (D/2025/448 and D/2025/405):
 - 1,075 apartments (Buildings F, G, H & I at 155 Mitchell Road)
 - 169 affordable housing units (in perpetuity)
 - 906 build-to-rent apartments
 - Buildings 7-13 storeys (via 30% affordable housing bonus)
 - Total cost: \$568.65 million
- **Coronation Properties Co DA:** 1,600 apartments proposed
- **Explorer Street, Eveleigh:** 400 homes (approved and commenced)

This represents a near-doubling of Erskineville's population in less than a decade—BEFORE your proposed 15,000 additional dwellings.

Erskineville is only 0.8 square kilometres—one of Sydney's smallest suburbs.

October 2025: A Warning Sign About "Infrastructure-Led" Promises

The Explorer Street approval (400 homes) and Ashmore Buildings F-I (1,075 apartments)—totalling **1,475 dwellings**—were approved without:

- Any station upgrade timeline or funding commitment
- Any specified increase in train services
- Confirmed school locations or construction timelines
- Adequate childcare (one 90-place centre for 6,000+ residents)
- Complete stormwater infrastructure

Your announcement mentions "early upgrade of Macdonaldtown Station," yet both Labor and Liberal have now approved 1,475 homes in this station's catchment without any upgrade. This demonstrates precisely the pattern we are protesting: development approvals proceed while infrastructure delivery remains aspirational.

Critical Question: Will you commit that no occupation permits for these already-approved 1,475 dwellings will be granted until Macdonaldtown Station is upgraded and train capacity is increased? Your "infrastructure-led" commitment is meaningless if already-approved developments proceed without infrastructure.

We Welcome "Infrastructure-Led Renewal"—But We Need Specifics

Your announcement contains three words that give us hope: **"Infrastructure-led renewal."**

You promise:

- "Infrastructure delivery from day one"
- "Transparent, staged master planning"
- "New schools, childcare, green space and active transport built into every stage"

This is precisely what we demand. However, we need you to be specific about what "infrastructure-led" means in practice.

The Infrastructure Crisis That Already Exists

1. Public Transport—Currently in Crisis

Current reality:

- Residents physically cannot board trains during peak hours at Erskineville and St Peters due to crushing overcrowding
- 2024 Bankstown Line Metro conversion removed direct City Circle access, displacing commuters
- Local bus services truncated without consultation

You mention: "Early upgrade of Macdonaldtown Station"

We need to know:

- How many additional trains per hour, and when?
- When does the Macdonaldtown Station upgrade commence and complete?
- How will lost Bankstown Line capacity be compensated?
- Which bus routes will be restored, and when?
- Will this be operational BEFORE the first of your 15,000 dwellings is occupied?

Does "infrastructure from day one" mean train services increase the day the first resident moves in, or that planning begins on day one with delivery years later?

2. Schools—Currently Under Severe Pressure

Current reality:

- Erskineville Public School grew from 29 students (2001) to over 400 today
- Population forecast to double in the next ten years, even before your proposal
- Alexandria Park Community School (selective high school) serves our catchment with a capacity for 2,200 enrolments and a current enrolment of 1,243 (2024)

However, Alexandria Park's catchment also includes Zetland and Alexandria—areas undergoing their own massive development. The seemingly available capacity of ~1,000 places will be absorbed by population growth across the entire catchment, not just Erskineville. When you factor in 15,000 new dwellings across Erskineville, Macdonaldtown, Newtown AND St Peters, plus concurrent development in Zetland and Alexandria, this single school will be completely overwhelmed.

We need to know:

- How many new primary school places, and where?
- What additional high school capacity beyond Alexandria Park is planned? Where and when?
- What is the total projected high school-age population across the entire catchment (including Zetland and Alexandria developments)?
- Construction timelines—will schools be operational before developments reach capacity?
- Who funds this—State Government or developer contributions?

15,000 dwellings could mean 30,000-40,000 additional residents, requiring multiple new schools rather than relying on existing capacity already consumed by other developments.

3. Other Critical Infrastructure Gaps

Childcare: One 90-place centre for 6,000 residents is grossly insufficient. How many centres and places are planned, with what timelines?

Primary Healthcare and Hospitals: Our nearest hospitals—Royal Prince Alfred and Sydney Children's—are already overcrowded. Where are the new GP clinics? What hospital capacity increases are planned? Adding 30,000-40,000 residents without planning for healthcare infrastructure is irresponsible. Notably, Stockland's scoping proposal for the Waterloo development has dropped plans for a Health One facility—demonstrating that even when healthcare infrastructure is promised, it's often the first thing removed from final proposals.

Stormwater: Incomplete trunk drainage; Solander Park floods with every heavy rain. What specific infrastructure will be delivered before occupation?

Roads/Active Transport: Victorian-era street network built for terraces, not modern traffic. For example, Erskineville Road is at a standstill during peak; footpaths on Bridge Street are only 1.3m wide. What specific improvements are planned? How will you prevent rat runs?

Parks: How many hectares of new public open space? What is the ratio of new dwellings? Will this be delivered concurrently?

Public and Community Housing: Your announcement contains **no mention** of public or community housing targets. Without mandatory requirements, your proposal will accelerate the displacement of the very "key workers" you claim to help. We need a minimum of 15% community housing (in perpetuity) with a mix of public housing, key worker housing, and older persons housing.

The Political Double Standard We Cannot Ignore

Your traditional heartland suburbs—Mosman and Ku-ring-gai—are serviced by eight railway stations and have over 85% single-detached housing.

When wealthy North Shore councils resist development, they deploy arguments about heritage and infrastructure capacity. When we raise identical concerns, we risk being dismissed as obstructionists.

We ask directly: If these arguments are valid on the North Shore, why not in our area? We have significant heritage—Erskineville was one of Sydney's first public housing intervention sites (1938) with irreplaceable Victorian-era built form.

The answer is not top-down development in inner-city areas while leaving North Shore suburbs untouched. The answer is **equitable planning that requires ALL well-located suburbs to contribute, with proper infrastructure support.**

Our Historical Context: We Understand Transformation

Erskineville has successfully transformed before, but only when infrastructure was prioritised:

- **1800s:** Working-class suburb of market gardeners and tanners
- **1920s-1930s:** Slum conditions during the Great Depression
- **1938:** Erskineville Public Housing Scheme—one of NSW's earliest and most successful slum clearance projects
- **Post-war:** Greek and Macedonian migration revitalised the area
- **1970s-today:** Gentrification transformed us into one of Sydney's wealthiest suburbs

**What we learned: Transformation succeeds when infrastructure comes first.
It fails when population growth outpaces infrastructure capacity.**

In 2015, even the City of Sydney sought to delay large-scale Ashmore development until State Government infrastructure commitments were secured. However, State approvals proceeded regardless, and infrastructure has still not caught up. This history has eroded trust.

What "Infrastructure-Led" Must Mean: Our Non-Negotiable Requirements

For your proposal to be genuinely "infrastructure-led":

1. Binding Infrastructure Delivery Schedule

Before any rezoning or development approvals:

- Publish a comprehensive schedule with specific projects, locations, capacities, and completion dates
- Identify funding sources for each component
- **Legally binding infrastructure triggers—no occupation permits until the corresponding infrastructure is operational**

2. Transport Capacity First

Before the first new dwelling is occupied:

- Increased train frequency documented in writing from Transport for NSW
- Macdonaldtown Station upgrade completed and operational
- Bus service restorations confirmed and operational
- Cycling corridors constructed and separated

3. Schools Operational Before Population Arrives

- Primary school expansion/construction begins before the first development stage
- High school planning and funding are committed in writing before rezoning
- Schools operational before development stages reach 50% occupancy

4. Childcare Infrastructure Planned and Funded

- Childcare needs assessment based on demographic projections
- Multiple centres planned with specific locations and capacities
- Funding committed and construction timelines established

5. Mandatory Public and Community Housing

- Minimum 15% community housing (in perpetuity) in all new developments

- Mix of public housing, key worker housing, and older persons housing
- Enforced through planning controls, not voluntary agreements

6. Community Oversight and Enforcement

- Independent community infrastructure monitoring committee
- Quarterly public reporting on infrastructure delivery against targets
- Enforcement mechanism to halt development if infrastructure falls behind
- **Community veto power if infrastructure commitments are not met**

7. Comprehensive Social Impact Assessment

Before any rezoning:

- Full assessment examining displacement, gentrification, and community cohesion
- Protection mechanisms for existing renters and low-income residents

Your Commitment to "Full Consultation"—What This Must Mean

You state commitment to "full consultation with the City of Sydney Council alongside heritage groups, local residents, and community organisations."

For consultation to be meaningful rather than tokenistic:

- **Early:** Before rezoning is determined, not after
- **Genuine:** Community feedback must have the power to change outcomes
- **Ongoing:** Continuous engagement through all planning stages
- **Enforceable:** Community must have formal mechanisms to halt development if commitments aren't met

We accept your invitation to be "genuine partners in this process, not merely informed stakeholders."

Our Challenge to You

You are in Opposition, proposing this for March 2027. You have a unique opportunity to learn from previous failures.

We challenge you to:

1. **Be specific now:** Publish detailed plans, timelines, and funding models as part of your election platform—don't wait until you're in government.
2. **Legislate it:** Commit to legislation making infrastructure delivery legally binding before development proceeds. Make it impossible for future governments (including your own) to break these promises.
3. **Apply it equitably:** If well-located land near transport should be developed, apply this to North Shore suburbs with equal rigour.

4. **Fund it adequately:** Show us the budget. Commit State funding upfront—developer contributions have repeatedly proven insufficient.
5. **Give us enforcement power:** Include community oversight mechanisms. If infrastructure falls behind, communities must have legal standing to halt development.

Conclusion: An Opportunity for Genuine Reform

Your announcement represents either genuine infrastructure-led development done right or more broken political promises.

We want to believe it's the former.

Erskineville's 1938 transformation succeeded because infrastructure came first. We are not opposed to your vision. We are insisting you deliver on your rhetoric.

Infrastructure-led renewal means infrastructure comes first, not eventually. Transparent staged master planning means binding commitments, not aspirational statements. Infrastructure delivery from day one means operational infrastructure from day one, not planning that begins on day one.

Prove your approach is genuinely different. Make infrastructure delivery legally enforceable. Give communities oversight and veto power. Apply your principles equitably across all of Sydney.

If you do this, you will have our support. If you don't, you will face the same resistance every government has faced when it prioritises developers over residents.

We are not anti-development. We are pro-sequencing. Infrastructure first.

We await your detailed response to the specific questions outlined below.

Yours sincerely,

Deborah Giblett, President

Friends of Erskineville, on behalf of the community

For further information or to discuss these matters, please contact:

friends@friendsoferskineville.org

Appendix: Specific Questions Requiring Written Responses

Transport:

1. How many additional train services per hour will be added, and when?
2. What is the construction timeline for the Macdonaldtown Station upgrade? When does construction begin and when will it be completed?
3. How will lost Bankstown Line capacity be compensated?
4. Which bus routes will be restored, and when?
5. **Will you commit that no occupation permits for Explorer Street, Eveleigh (400 homes) OR Ashmore Buildings F-I (1,075 apartments, approved 23 Oct 2025) will be granted until**

Macdonaldtown Station upgrade is complete and train capacity is increased? These 1,475 dwellings are ALREADY APPROVED.

Schools:

- 6. How many new primary school places will be created, and where?
- 7. What additional high school capacity beyond Alexandria Park Community School is planned, where, and when?
- 8. What is the total projected high school-age population across the entire Alexandria Park catchment area (including Erskineville, Zetland, and Alexandria developments)?
- 9. What are the construction timelines for each school?
- 10. Who funds these schools—State budget or developer contributions?

Childcare: 11. How many childcare centres and places are planned?

- 12. What are the construction timelines?

Infrastructure Funding: 13. What is the total infrastructure cost estimate?

- 14. How much comes from the State budget vs developer contributions?
- 15. What happens if developer contributions prove insufficient?

Enforcement:

- 16. What legal mechanisms will bind infrastructure delivery to development approval?
- 17. What oversight and enforcement powers will the community have?

Public and Community Housing:

- 18. What percentage of new dwellings will be public and community housing?
- 19. How will this be enforced?

North Shore Equity:

- 20. Will similar rezoning be applied to Mosman, Ku-ring-gai, and other North Shore suburbs serviced by eight train stations? If not, why not?