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Five urgent green infrastructure policies



The Living Cities Alliance is pushing for a fund to back green projects around the country. **Phil Hearne**

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by **Hugh Arnold**

Five urgent "green infrastructure" policy issues have been highlighted and sent to both major parties and the Greens for a pre-election response by the Living Cities Alliance and Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA).

"One of the key issues is to recognise green infrastructure as we do grey infrastructure, so it is properly considered as an asset," [Shahana McKenzie](#), CEO, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects and convener of the Living Cities Alliance, says.

"This would enable local councils, state governments and federal governments to be able to look at and manage those assets as they would other capital assets, which would have a great impact in terms of how they can be maintained and operated."

Speaking at the recent 2020 Vision roundtable held in Sydney, McKenzie says the green infrastructure asset recognition issue is aimed at having green infrastructure formally recognised by Treasury as an asset class, to be valued during business case development for major federally funded projects, and to hasten the removal of

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barriers to green infrastructure investment and accelerate the implementation of new projects and policies.

"The big issue regarding funding green infrastructure is really about the source of the money and whether you can depreciate for an asset's replacement or not," AILA's pre-election submission says. "Operational money is hard won and councils typically have much less available for projects. In local government there are a number of instances where landscape works are not able to be capitalised."

McKenzie confirmed the example in the US when Treasury recognised [green infrastructure](#) as an asset class. "Instead of all green infrastructure costs having to be put into operational funding, councils can now do it out of capital funding which allows them to spread the cost over multiple years."

The establishment of an investment fund – a National Living Cities Fund – for the implementation of green infrastructure projects across Australia, is another key policy issue for the parties to consider immediately. AILA says this would typically involve a percentage of all federal government expenditure on "grey infrastructure" projects such as roads to be placed in an investment fund for allocation to state and local government "green infrastructure" projects.

"We'll be calling for councils all across Australia to put forward places that would be able to be funded through something like a Living Cities fund," McKenzie says.

"They might be parks or playgrounds, it might be the upgrading of streets. It is so much easier to find money for roads, for infrastructure projects generally. So we want local councils to have the opportunities to be able to secure funds for green projects – through grants or other funding programs."

AILA and the Living Cities Alliance is also calling for a National Green Streets and "Grey to Green" Pilot Program, which they says seeks to redefine the role and design of road corridors "to express the full potential of environmental, social and economic benefits from green infrastructure strategies, as well as the active retrofit of grey infrastructure to green infrastructure".

McKenzie said the policy is about trying to change the way that people look at streets and the way they interact with streets, and leverage streets as a community asset.

"There's research on the way green streets perform in terms of retail, and the increase of people actually engaging in a cafe or a shop if it is on a street that that has a large foliage or canopy or green content to it. There's also fantastic research how well-placed street trees can reduce your electricity bill by \$400 a year."

The Living City Alliance comprises industry leaders from more than 50 organisations in urban planning, infrastructure, utilities and the greening sectors including Engineers Australia, AILA and 202020 Vision.

AILA and 202020 Vision are also partners in a number of programs, most notably and recently, My Park Rules.

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"This was a really successful campaign, calling on schools to nominate a space in their school yard to be reimaged by a landscape architect," McKenzie says. "We had 100 schools nominate a space by doing little videos. Then the public voted and we had a national jury that included Lucy Turnbull. They selected the state finalists; the state finalists were teamed up with a landscape architect; they had a concept design created for that space; and the national winner was announced just a couple of weeks ago.

"Marrickville Public School in Sydney is the national winner, so we're now working with Marrickville Public School to turn that space into a reality."

Federally, the parties are already indicating a response to AILA and Living City Alliance's points of policy before the July 2 election.

"Just for them to read those five points and to be interrogating those, and to look at the case studies, particularly the one for Treasury, for us is a really good step because it really does plot out the challenge that we're up against if we can't start to recognise green infrastructure as we do our grey infrastructure," McKenzie affirms.



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