

Brisbane City Council's Corporate Sustainability Policy CS1

Overview

This sustainability policy formally adopts a way of thinking and a process that will help us achieve the *Brisbane Vision 2031* which is Council's long-term plan for the city. Brisbane is a city to look forward to living in – a clean and green city that is smart, prosperous, accessible, connected, creative and healthy, and that leads the region by example.

Population growth challenges our ability to achieve the *Brisbane Vision 2031*. With each new person comes an additional demand on resources (e.g. land, water, electricity and petrol), and the creation of more waste. The impact of a growing population is magnified because people are using more resources per person. These population pressures and individual preferences also have implications for our economy and our community.

In simple terms, Council and its staff need to continue to incorporate the principles of ecologically sustainable development into business and management systems and decision making processes if we are to achieve the *Brisbane Vision 2031*. Innovation and outstanding leadership will be keys to a sustainable future.

We have already made commitments to sustainability in many policies, plans and strategies. Following the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, Council adopted the principles of the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development. Council's Environmental Policy states Council's aim to be a leader and champion of sustainability. The Administration has introduced policies to promote sustainability, including in urban development, and has changed the budget, program structure, division and branch names to incorporate sustainability. This Corporate Sustainability Policy reconfirms our high-level commitment to sustainability and consolidates our approach.

Establishing a common understanding of sustainability within Council and the community will help us to focus on actions leading to greater sustainability. The following definition of sustainability is designed to be relevant to Brisbane and Council (see 'More about sustainability' below for more discussion about the concept).

Sustainability is a principle to influence our decisions to maintain and enhance our quality of life now and in the future in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends. It requires an integrated consideration of economic, environmental and community factors.

Applicability

Sustainability is a principle that Council and its employees will apply to their decisions and activities.

Definitions

Biodiversity. The variety of all life forms: the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form. It is a concept that emphasises the inter-relatedness of the biological world. It is often considered at three levels: genetic diversity, species diversity and ecosystem diversity.

Community engagement. The involvement of people, businesses and stakeholders in decision making. There is a spectrum of ways in which we can involve people - from informing and consulting them, to collaborating and partnering with them.

Integration. In this context, integration means bringing together multiple, sometimes conflicting, objectives and considerations – as well as time (short and long-term) and space (local, regional, global). It requires an understanding of how different objectives and systems are linked and affect each other.

Natural resources. All the resources that are produced by the Earth's natural processes including mineral deposits, fossil fuels, soil, air, water, plants and animals and are used by people for agriculture, industry and other purposes.

Quality of life. The level of enjoyment and fulfilment derived by humans from the life they live within their local economic, cultural, social and environmental conditions.



Outcomes

Sustainability will be embedded in the organisation's work. All employees will have a clear and shared understanding about what it means and how they can apply it to their daily tasks. Management support, cross-program integration and corporate systems will assist staff in their decision making.

We will have learned more about sustainability and have applied some of the best available sustainable technologies. We will be using realistic performance indicators to measure and report on our progress with sustainability. Our knowledge and skills in community engagement will allow us to gain insights from the residential and business communities, and achieve a high level of trust with citizens. For the city, our application of sustainability will have allowed us to take an integrated approach to the *Brisbane Vision 2031* strategic directions, contributing to the vision's realisation.

To enable an effective and realistic response, we have identified four target areas to make sustainability easier to promote, interpret and implement. These areas are where we will place our initial focus.

- Resource efficiency: saving energy and water and reducing waste.
- Sustainable places and urban form: improving Brisbane's built environment, especially the interactions between land use, transport and the environment.
- Biodiversity conservation: protecting and enhancing biodiversity, natural areas and waterways.
- Health and wellbeing: developing a city where our people and communities enjoy physical, mental and social wellbeing.

Principles

To determine if a decision or action is likely to make a positive contribution to sustainability, we need a basic understanding of the key considerations or criteria of sustainability. The following principles build on and update our existing commitment to the principles in the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development. They provide a set of core issues for consideration and broad objectives to be pursued as part of our decisions. All of our decisions and actions should:

1. Integrate long and short-term economic, environmental and community considerations. Decisions need to consider the linkages between economic, environmental and community dimensions, and take account of impacts that may occur over several years.
2. Provide for equity within and between generations. Ensure that everyone and every community has enough for a decent life and opportunities to seek improvements. We should not simply use up all available natural resources. Instead, we should commit to ensuring that all community members have equitable access to resources now, and into the future.
3. Enhance and maintain biodiversity and natural environmental systems. Natural systems, and the plants and animals that inhabit them, have important benefits to the community. We need to build a relationship between people and the environment that will maintain the long-term integrity of these systems.
4. Act cautiously when there is a risk of serious or irreversible impacts on the environment or the community. This is the 'precautionary principle'. We should avoid causing serious or irreversible damage and not use uncertainty as a reason to not protect the environment or community.
5. Recognise dimensions beyond our border while concentrating on issues we can influence. Environment and development issues operate on a global scale. Our local actions should connect with regional, national and global scale activities and directions. For example, although we cannot single-handedly stop climate change, we can demonstrate leadership by taking actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as part of a global effort.
6. Provide for broad public involvement on issues that affect the community. We need to engage individuals, communities, stakeholders and businesses and adopt more open deliberations to build an understanding of sustainability and promote collective responsibility.

Policy

Council commits to applying the principles of sustainability to all of our decision-making and activities. We will lead by example and become an inspiration to the Brisbane community and the region.

Authority

Adopted by full Council on 8 August 2005.

More about sustainability

This policy's definition of sustainability identifies the three areas of environment, economy and community, but these are not separate areas to think about. To be sustainable, we have to look at them together and emphasise where we can make progress with all three concurrently. We also have to move beyond our tendency to focus on the short-term and combine short-term with long-term thinking.

Sustainability is a challenge to our historical ways of thinking and doing things. We need to look for positive alternatives to unsustainable paths. Sustainability is a comprehensive way of looking at things – not just an add-on to our usual list of considerations.

To move in a sustainable direction, our decisions and actions have to recognise that our wellbeing and the wellbeing of natural systems are connected and depend on each other. We have to appreciate that there are absolute physical limits in our world, but that we have an endless opportunity for innovation to work within these limits. Sustainability is a set of principles and a process, not an end point to be achieved. The process we use to make decisions, and the ways we consult in that process, are important, as well as the decisions themselves.

Our sustainability policy connects us to the numerous sustainability efforts around the world. Sustainability contains some basics that apply everywhere, but we also have to tailor our approach to our own place and circumstances.