



# Submission about the Adelaide City Plan 2036

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Commissioner  
Y for Children &  
Young People

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Consultation on the City Plan 2036, City of Adelaide

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In my role as Commissioner for Children and Young People I promote and advocate for the rights, interests and wellbeing of all children and young people living in South Australia, in line with the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016*. Since 2017, I have been actively engaging with the children and young people of SA to hear their thoughts and speak up on their behalf. During this time, I have heard from many children and young people about what they think about the City of Adelaide and what makes a great place to live and hang out.

Where young people live, the facilities available to them locally, and their ease of access to school, activities and employment have an enormous impact on their lives and can mean the difference between getting on well in life and being impoverished. However, their views are seldom considered.

As part of my role, I provide opportunities and support to enable young people to speak up for themselves, and encourage governments to ensure they consult them about the decisions that will impact their lives. I am disappointed to see that no provision has been made in the City Plan 2036 consultation process for children and young people to be engaged specifically, and that the survey and other opportunities to input into the consultation are not child friendly. I urge you to ensure that the voices of children and young people are incorporated into this process to ensure that the City of Adelaide meets their needs now and in future.

The voices of children and young people will be critical to the success of the City Plan to understand how they want to live, work, learn, play and connect with their capital city. Adelaide City Council must meaningfully and appropriately engage with children and young people to thoroughly understand their unique and diverse current needs, and their valuable perspectives as the voice of future generations.

Specifically, in this submission I will summarise what I have heard from children and young people about **what** is important to them about their local area and city, and what the features are of a place are **where** they think there are opportunities for growth and renewal.

Yours sincerely,



**Helen Connolly**

Commissioner for Children and Young People  
Adelaide, South Australia

## The importance of engaging children and young people in planning

The question of how and where the City of Adelaide should grow between now and 2036 needs to consider the views of children and young people. Not only do they form a large proportion of the current population, they also represent the interests of future generations. Understanding the nuances and complexity of young people's perceptions and experiences provides insights into where the City of Adelaide needs to focus.

If Adelaide is to remain relevant to future generations, and change the narrative from being a city in "genteel decline" suffering from "brain drain", we must invite children and young people to meaningfully contribute to future planning, decision making and outcomes.

Young people know what they want - they would like to be invited to participate in meaningful opportunities to share their ideas with decision makers and community leaders. To understand the diverse interests of children and young people it is important to hear from:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people;
- Children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds;
- Those with caring responsibilities;
- LGBTQIA+ young people;
- Children and young people with a disability;
- Those living with chronic illness; and
- Children and young people living or going to school in relevant parts of the city.

Children of all ages can meaningfully participate and express their views on issues affecting them to inform policy when provided with appropriate opportunities. Children have valuable insights about the programs, facilities and services that local councils provide. This includes the design of public spaces, parks and playgrounds, and the importance of bike tracks and jumps, libraries, active transport and road safety, waste management and litter. Children want to have more of a say in decision making, and for their right to be heard to be upheld by all levels of government, and in their schools and communities.

There is a growing body of research exploring effective engagement with young children as active citizens in collective decision making, including how local governments can support the participation of children under 5 years old outside of formal early learning settings.<sup>i</sup> When children are included in decision making, there are many different benefits for individuals and communities. Building a culture where children are respected and valued has the potential to:

- Lead to better and more cost-effective decisions that are informed by the views and experiences of those who are affected the most.
- Improve quality of life for children and families by revitalising communities, promoting health and wellbeing, and addressing social exclusion, discrimination and inequity.

- Build trust and respect between different generations and between people and institutions.

Some local councils in South Australia and other jurisdictions are already successfully embedding child-friendly principles into practice. Campbelltown City Council, for example, appears to be an exception in South Australia in terms of recognising children and young people as active citizens in policy and planning with a focus on children's active participation, belonging, outdoor play, safety, education and health. Child Friendly Campbelltown was recognised by UNICEF Australia as a Child Friendly City in 2015.

Campbelltown City Council is currently seeking feedback on a draft Children's Plan 2024-2026 based around the themes of connections, play, neighbourhood and kid's ideas and voices. Campbelltown's broader Community Plan 2024 also includes commitments to:

- Continue Child Friendly Campbelltown's 'children's voices' goal in playground redevelopment consultations.
- Review Council's open and recreation spaces with a child-friendly lens including children's reviews.
- Review Council's built environment with a child-friendly lens.
- Facilitate an annual children's forum and an annual youth forum.
- Develop an easy read document for 'how to participate in Council decisions'.<sup>ii</sup>

A range of online resources provide guidance on engaging with children as active citizens and building child friendly cities and communities as part of the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative.<sup>iii</sup> The Child Friendly Cities and Communities programme has produced a [child rights impact assessment \(CRIIA\) template](#), with accompanying [guidance and advice](#), specifically for local government and partners. I encourage the use of these resources and case studies to inform consistent child-friendly practice in Adelaide.

Young people have unique perspectives on what makes a place tick. They provide lived insight into how to attract and retain young talent; how to be clean and green; and how to ensure our actions are inclusive and visionary. My [Youthful Adelaide](#) report captured conversations with local young people who identified that if a place is to be attractive to them it must enable them to be connected, creative and confident.

Priorities for young people in relation to their local areas focus on:

- Greener, climate resilient environments;
- Child and youth friendly places and spaces;
- Access to high quality internet and Wi-Fi connections, and charging facilities; and
- Well-connected places where they can walk or cycle to school, university, work and activities, or safely, easily and cheaply access direct public transport.

## What children and young people have said about Adelaide

In 2018, I met with 130 young people aged between 12 and 22 years to ask them what they thought would make the City of Adelaide a more youthful place. They identified three distinct features of a youthful place: that it should support young people to be connected, creative and confident.<sup>iv</sup>

Young people want the City of Adelaide to be confident of its place in the world. They want to celebrate its cultural foundations, acknowledge its historical context, and look to its youthful future.

They envision a city that recognises fresh ideas, perspectives, and skills, where the creative arts are more valued and accessible, and careers in the arts are sustainable. They highlight that music, arts, festivals and events are central to a vibrant youth scene.

They told me that they want dedicated spaces that support their need to connect, build relationships, participate in community, and have positive experiences which are open, inclusive, welcoming and well-connected.

*“It’s hard for youth to consume/share their music because a lot of music is shared in places that only adults can attend. Young artists can’t share their art because the consumerism is targeted towards adults, with 18+ age limits. This makes it hard for young people to express their [music and] art.” – 16 year old*

They want a city that celebrates Aboriginal culture, preserves old buildings, and builds new smart ones. They want a city which better utilises our precious green spaces, celebrates the diversity of our international students and incorporates these longer-term visitors into a new vibe.

Affordability is a key concern for many young people so combining arts, music and film with public spaces and transport is essential for a youthful and vibrant city. They raised concerns about the lack of unlicensed venues and low levels of promotion of local young talent through small scale festivals, venues and/or competitions.

Many young people commented that when ‘passions are showcased’, when they can ‘see young people succeeding and excelling’, when ‘something is created that is Instagramable’, that’s when you have a youthful city.

*“Employ local artists to create pieces for landscape architecture in new spaces, have shelters for rain and shine, seating on the ground and benches, under 18 events around the city to bring together with bands and other groups performing in this space.” – 17 year old*

## What young people think about festivals

Adelaide considers itself to be a world leader in festivals, but this is not necessarily the perception of the children and young people who live here. While young people express some pride about the festivals and events for which Adelaide is known, they have raised concerns that many of these events are primarily aimed at adults or families with young children.

As the 'Festival State', young people think it is time to give more prominence to events that feature young South Australians. They have called on adults to reflect the diversity and creativity of the whole population.

In May 2022, I undertook an in-person survey about festivals at a NEO Teen Takeover event at the Art Gallery. A total of 62 young people between the ages of 13 and 17 participated, responding to three questions.

### How teen friendly are festivals?

Young people told me that most festivals held in South Australia are not teen friendly or at least not marketed or costed for under 18s.

Young people have highlighted the importance of being able to attend events and festivals to engage socially, build relationships and participate in their community, thereby fostering their sense of belonging, as well as their overall health and wellbeing.

### If you could create/bring one festival to Adelaide, what would it be?

Food, music, performing arts, pride, sports, theme parks and Disney themed festivals are the kind of festivals young people want to see here in Adelaide. Specific examples provided by the young people were "queer fest", vegan food festivals, a medieval fair, vidcon, and a gaming and technology festival.

It is important that festivals curated for young people are mindful of the age limit set and that the content is relevant to young people:

*"I would make an all-age festival" – 14 year old*

*"[We want] something with more popular music amongst the teens" – 14 year old*

### What would put Adelaide on the world map for teenagers?

"More inclusive festivals" and expanding existing events such as Adelaide Film Festival, WOMAD and NEO Teen Takeover are seen as integral to putting Adelaide on the world map for teenagers.

*"[We need] a festival that is known to unite and bring together teens from all over adelaide" – 14 year old.*

## The features of places young people think are ripe for growth and renewal

### Green, climate resilient environments

Children and young people are deeply protective of their ability to be outdoors and want more parks and recreational facilities that take advantage of South Australian biodiversity.

They recognise the impact of climate change and pollution on their local community and highlight the importance of trees and green spaces to improve the appeal of their local area and address air quality issues and heat stress.

### Free child and youth friendly creative places and activities

Committing to providing child friendly and child safe environments for children and young people is not merely something that is 'nice to do'. It is a requirement under international conventions that are embedded in State legislation.

Access to speciality shops and precincts are a major reason for older teens to travel to specific localities, with many young people expressing the view that clustering fashion, music and coffee together is the best way to activate areas in which young people will gather.

Younger South Australians need to have access to youth specific and child friendly infrastructure close to their homes to support their development and wellbeing. This means creating places and spaces where they can gather, express themselves, be active, and see themselves being positively reflected. This kind of investment helps enable them to develop a personal identity, while also contributing to local community sustainability through their connections, confidence building, and creativity. Investing in youth specific infrastructure also sends children and young people the clear message that they are valued and important members of their local communities.

They want spaces that are well planned, have open borders, allow connections, virtually and physically, are open, inclusive, public, and welcoming. They also highlight the significance of seeing more colour, art and greenery, both from an aesthetic perspective, and in terms of the pride and optimism this generates.

When asked what a youthful place is, young people have told me that it is somewhere where 'anything is possible' where 'tribes' of young people can get together to try out new ideas, express themselves and just 'be young and hang out' without fear of being hassled, judged or moved on.

They said that having a local central hub where they can gather is critical to their needs. This hub would ideally be an all-weather structure, open and centrally located, with space to sit on the ground, as well as other seating, with interconnectivity, Wi-Fi and phone charging stations.<sup>v</sup> Creating spaces where groups of young people can coexist and connect but are also able to maintain their independence is considered critical. A

space that is neutral, communal and owned by young people has the hallmarks of an ideal youth hub.

Clean public toilets should be an essential feature of any community space, with handwashing facilities, soap, sanitary bins and free period products to ensure that those who menstruate feel comfortable in public places during their periods. Otherwise, we know that many girls avoid undertaking sport and social activities for fear of being caught short.<sup>vi</sup>

### **Access to high quality internet, free Wi-Fi and charging facilities is essential**

Access to fast and reliable phone coverage, internet and wireless connectivity is vital to almost every part of the lives of children and young people at home, at school, in the workplace, and everywhere they go. They have grown up in a world where their ability to maintain relationships, to be engaged in their education and communities, to access services, information, and study or employment opportunities, depends largely on their digital access.

Digital access is increasingly seen as an ‘essential’ utility that we rely upon with the same predictability as electricity, clean water, and effective sewage systems. Public health policy in many jurisdictions nationally and globally, including in South Australia, is increasingly recognising digital inclusion as a social determinant of health.

Many young South Australians rely on free public Wi-Fi in public shopping centres, fast food outlets, and libraries to complete homework and important ‘life admin’ tasks. These tasks include organising transport, accessing online banking, taking or swapping shifts at work, and booking health or other appointments. Children and young people describe using public Wi-Fi ‘wherever I can’.<sup>vii</sup>

Access to high-quality free Wi-Fi and phone charging stations are seen as essential features of public spaces for young people. Even simple solutions, like Wi-Fi and charging facilities at bus, train and tram stops can make a real difference.

‘Data dead zones’ are a common concern for young people who complain about areas where there is no Wi-Fi access in parts of Adelaide. Where public Wi-Fi is available, it’s often not fit for purpose, being unreliable, slow, or having poor security, meaning connection to important services such as mobile banking apps is restricted.

Without a reliable connection, children and young people describe feeling ‘lost’ and ‘unsafe’. They may be ‘caught out’ without money if they cannot access online banking to transfer money from their savings to their spending account. They may not be able to plan their public transport journey without access to bus timetables, or the option to recharge a MetroCard online.



## **Well-connected places where you can walk or cycle to school, university, work and activities, or safely, easily and cheaply get direct public transport**

### Fit for purpose public transport infrastructure

Wherever Adelaide grows, it must provide regular, safe public transport links. Transport is one of the top five issues young people across the State have raised with me repeatedly. The major challenges young people identify as barriers to having their transport needs met are cost, accessibility and safety.<sup>viii</sup> Almost 1 in 5 of all Adelaide Metro patrons are primary or secondary students.<sup>ix</sup>

Transport is central to how young people experience their community which impacts their capacity to participate fully in almost every aspect of their lives. There are strong links between children and young people's mobility and their overall social inclusion and wellbeing. Children and young people are among the most transport disadvantaged members of their community. Without alternative modes of transport (such as having a driver's license or parents, friends, and caregivers to give them a lift), children and young people can become socially excluded or isolated.

Transport disadvantage has a demonstrable impact on school attendance, gaining and maintaining employment, as well as on a child or young person's capacity to make and maintain their social connections. This is further exacerbated for those who have a disability or low socio-economic status.

Planning is one of the tools the City Council has which it can use to improve the lot of those who are least well off to improve equity and fairness. By adopting public health and wellbeing as key principles in how planning is undertaken the positive impact of any new growth and the expansion of existing areas can be optimised.

### Walkability

We cannot expect children to play outside and run around if there is nowhere safe for them to go that they can get to without a car.

The Global Observatory of Healthy and Sustainable Cities found that Adelaide 'does not appear to have transport planning policies incorporating health-focussed actions or air pollution policies related to transport or land use planning.'<sup>x</sup> Only 54% of residents have nearby access to public transport stops with regular services, and no neighbourhoods in Adelaide have the population density levels recommended by the World Health Organisation to increase physical activity.<sup>xi</sup>

South Australian children and young people are some of the most obese and least active in the world: According to the 2021 South Australian Population Health Survey 12.6 per cent of children are obese.<sup>xii</sup> The Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines recommend that children aged 5–17 years should do at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intense physical activity every day<sup>xiii</sup> - in 2021, a quarter of children aged 5–17 years reported meeting this level.<sup>xiv</sup>

Physical activity in children and young people is vital - childhood is the most sensitive period of human development in which to promote long-lasting health-enhancing

behaviours. The benefits of regular exercise include better health and fitness, better mental wellbeing, improved physical literacy, and the long-term prevention of chronic disease.

Active travel to school and other activities are easy ways for kids to be physically active as part of their daily routine. However, poorly designed infrastructure, inadequate planning, lack of safe footpaths and road safety concerns are all barriers to walking and cycling around Adelaide. These issues should be addressed as a public health priority.

Fear of road accidents means parents are reluctant to let their children outside by themselves – a look at their local area will often lead them to conclude that it is not safe for children to play, cycle or even walk there. In Australia, transport injuries are the most common cause of death and the second most common cause of injury resulting in hospital admission for children aged 0-14 years.<sup>xv</sup> Across SA, there 218 road crashes in 2020 resulted in a pedestrian casualty, of which 38 were under the age of 18.<sup>xvi</sup>

#### Improve traffic and road safety

It is essential that the City Plan includes improvements to the walkability, cycle-ability and safety of neighbourhoods, particularly around schools, childcare facilities, university campuses, playgrounds, parks, shops, and sporting facilities.

I recommend that the City Council works with the State Government in a coordinated approach to improving traffic, road safety and infrastructure around schools and all places around the city where children move around, by working with school communities, children, young people, and families to understand local concerns and potential solutions to improve road safety and ease of access.

Children regularly tell me that they currently do not feel safe when arriving at and leaving schools due to the traffic at those times, and they have suggested many solutions to make this experience safer. They want cars to slow down, traffic crossings, and safer footpaths and separate bike lanes. Governing Councils have also raised this as an issue requiring an urgent inter-agency response.

I recommend that the City Plan includes the provision of safe footpaths, separated cycle paths, and pedestrian crossings, within the immediate area of all schools, shops, sports facilities and parks, with good street lighting, effective signage, and speed restrictions in line with those recommended by the World Health Organisation.<sup>xvii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> K Smith and C Kotsanas, 'Honouring young children's voices to enhance inclusive communities', *Journal of Urbanism*, 2014, 7(2): 187-211, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2013.820211>

<sup>ii</sup> Campbelltown City Council, *Community Plan 2024*, accessed 6 March 2024, [https://www.campbelltown.sa.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0034/862945/Community-Plan-2024.pdf](https://www.campbelltown.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0034/862945/Community-Plan-2024.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> UNICEF, *Child Friendly Cities Initiative website*, accessed 6 March 2024, <https://www.childfriendlycities.org/>

<sup>iv</sup> *Youthful Adelaide: What young people have said will make Adelaide more youthful*, 2019, <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Youthful-Adelaide.pdf>

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- <sup>v</sup> My Digital Life: Understanding the impact of digital poverty on children and young people (2020), Commissioner for Children and Young People, <https://www.ccyp.com.au/publications/my-digital-life-2021/>
- <sup>vi</sup> Menstruation Matters: The impact of menstruation on wellbeing, participation and school attendance, CCYP, March 2021, <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Menstruation-Matters.pdf>
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- <sup>ix</sup> Department for Infrastructure and Transport. 2021- 2022 Annual Report. Available at [https://www.dit.sa.gov.au/about\\_us/governance\\_reporting/annual\\_report/dit-annual-report-2021-22-online-version](https://www.dit.sa.gov.au/about_us/governance_reporting/annual_report/dit-annual-report-2021-22-online-version)
- <sup>x</sup> Healthy and Sustainable City Indicators Report: Comparisons with 25 cities internationally: Adelaide, Australia, Global Observatory of Healthy & Sustainable Cities, 2022, [https://rmit.figshare.com/articles/report/Adelaide\\_Australia\\_Healthy\\_and\\_Sustainable\\_City\\_Indicators\\_Report\\_Comparisons\\_with\\_25\\_cities\\_internationally/19614009](https://rmit.figshare.com/articles/report/Adelaide_Australia_Healthy_and_Sustainable_City_Indicators_Report_Comparisons_with_25_cities_internationally/19614009)
- <sup>xi</sup> ibid
- <sup>xii</sup> SA Health, 2021. South Australian Population Health Survey 2021 Annual Report – Children. Available at <https://www.wellbeingsa.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/SAPHS/SAPHS-2021-AnnualChildren-Report.pdf>.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Department of Health. 2019. Australia’s Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines and the Australian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines. Available at [Physical activity and exercise guidelines for all Australians | Australian Government Department of Health](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/physical-activity-and-exercise-guidelines-for-all-australians)
- <sup>xiv</sup> SA Health, 2021. South Australian Population Health Survey 2021 Annual Report – Children. Available at <https://www.wellbeingsa.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/SAPHS/SAPHS-2021-Annual-ChildrenReport.pdf>
- <sup>xv</sup> Car and Road Safety, Kidsafe, <https://kidsafe.com.au/car-road-safety/>
- <sup>xvi</sup> SAPOL data, Data SA, <https://data.sa.gov.au/data/dataset/road-crash-data>
- <sup>xvii</sup> Streets for Life campaign calls for 30 km/h urban streets to ensure safe, healthy, green and liveable cities, WHO, 17 May 2021, <https://www.who.int/news/item/17-05-2021-streets-for-life-campaign-calls-for-30-km-h-urban-streets-to-ensure-safe-healthy-green-and-liveable-cities>