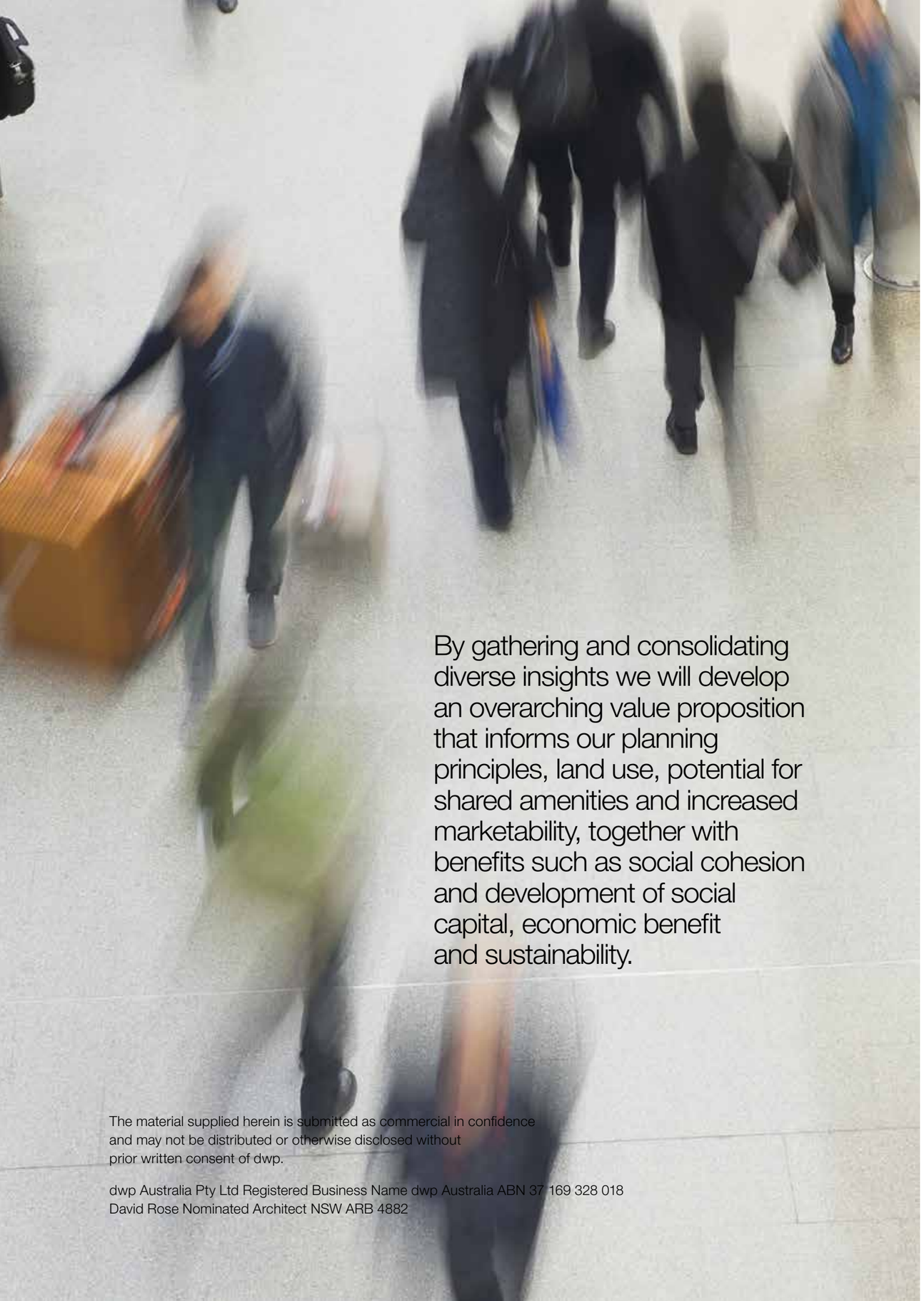
Community Futures

dwp



By gathering and consolidating diverse insights we will develop an overarching value proposition that informs our planning principles, land use, potential for shared amenities and increased marketability, together with benefits such as social cohesion and development of social capital, economic benefit and sustainability.

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David Rose Nominated Architect NSW ARB 4882

Projected population growth in our cities has the potential to adversely affect our communities and our lifestyles. This raises important questions around how will we provide enough housing, workplaces and green space, whilst we maintain and grow our productivity.

To extend our research into the development of robust communities, dwp brought together experts from health, education, work, sport, residential, retail and seniors living and discussed the value proposition around community collocation in a national series of workshops.

By gathering and consolidating diverse insights we have developed an overarching value proposition that informs our planning principles, land use, potential for shared amenities and increased marketability, together with benefits such as social cohesion and development of social capital, economic benefit and sustainability.

The questions we consider in this report are: Is increasing the density of our cities the answer? How can this be done so that our quality of life is protected in the future? The decisions we make now around the challenges of density and quality of life are important to all our futures.

I encourage you to consider our findings and to share your thoughts with us through the contact details provided. In this way we look forward to continuing and broadening the conversation on the future of communities.

Leone Lorrimer

CEO dwp

Royal Rehab, Sydney, NSW

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The Time to Change is Now

When will it become essential to make the change? Will the next generation accept that densification helps them have a place to live and work? The next generation is now having trouble accessing affordable homes in their preferred location.

However in Australia people don't have positive examples of dense living communities, with quality well designed precincts and dense living with access to open space. Australian developments don't currently approach the quality and appeal of high density environments found elsewhere for example in the Middle East and Asia.

The New Australian Dream

Hills Shire Council in Sydney is thinking about how to push the Australian dream beyond the single house on the single lot. But how do we translate apartment style living into a viable Australian dream? Looking beyond what houses look like now, apartment buildings and neighbourhoods have to include facilities that suit families. The apartment must not be a second rate dream, rather a positive lifestyle choice.

What critical mass is needed to succeed? Certainly it makes sense to create new housing developments centered around transport nodes. In terms of sustainability, this builds in long term resilience of developments, so we become more dependent on public transport. That makes good sense!

We should stop designing buildings that start with height limits. One of the problems with city planning is too much focus on height limits and FSR. But people don't live in FSR! Great cities start with great streets. Thinking internationally, in cities like Vancouver and Portland you don't notice the building heights because of the city layout and the quality of the streets.

So we need to start with community and not with height limits. Much better outcomes are likely when buildings are designed around communities with health and community facilities, parkland and other community space.

We have acres of the old walk-up flats. What can we do with aging buildings with complex ownership locked up in strata title deeds? Elsewhere, it's possible to get strata title owners to participate in new developments as part owners. In China, Taiwan and Japan, strata title holders are incentivised by being given opportunity in new developments. This gives people a chance to be part of a bigger deal and opens the door to improving old low density housing stock. People can see a future where they are part of a bigger deal.

This taps into the Australian dream too, we all want to own property. So we understand the psychology. The model works at a level of about 400 unit developments. In Singapore, if 75% of a strata body wants to renew a building this becomes an effective starting point and renewal can be forced onto the strata title owners.

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Densification

Many of the world's most beloved cities have a significant level of intensity. New York, Singapore and Paris come to mind. So bringing all the community and infrastructure elements together definitely adds value. As a local example of density, Melbourne's South Yarra is as dense as Berlin, yet it works and is a highly valued location. This is especially due to the valuable, large pockets of green spaces at South Yarra's edges.

However a recent proposal for densification in Brisbane has largely failed. Six sites were selected close to transport nodes; with the proposition of building a community around these nodes. Planning wise, high density was permitted if it could be demonstrated as viable and had mixed uses. The new planning framework was provided and it was up to developers to deliver the results. However the local residents, (who mainly live in one or two story residences) reacted against the idea. The community saw potential high rise development as a threat. Residents lobbied Council and blocked the push to increase density.

But what do people want next door? What was missing was a consultation process that allows the community to understand the benefits of increased density. Their prime consideration is 'what will happen to my land value?' They couldn't see the value of what they would get or how they would benefit. There is always going to be a net community benefit debate. Developers and communities must work together to agree on mutual benefits.

There is currently a challenge in planning for population growth and community needs. After just 10 years of strong population growth we are already experiencing the pain of having infrastructure deficits. Ask any parents trying to get their children into kindergarten. Reacting to calls for densification, the locals complain 'I can't get on the train already', or 'My kid can't get into soccer in the local club'. These problems impact on people's attitudes including community attitudes to densification.

When will it become essential to make the change? Will the next generation accept that densification helps them have a place to live and work? The next generation is now having trouble accessing affordable homes in their preferred location.

Our political leaders have to lead the narrative to explain that 1.6 million people are coming. Quite simply, many Australians don't currently have positive examples of dense living communities in well designed precincts and access to quality open space. The question yet to be answered is how do we give people more experience of the positives of density?

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Walkability

A healthy society is not an easily politically measured outcome. The political cycle doesn't easily allow for the demonstration of results. Healthy societies are actually not about providing more hospital beds.

The onus is to provide green active healthy spaces and encourage walkability. Research shows that people who live close to green space are more likely to be physically active, and therefore healthier. The interesting thing is we still spend less on health prevention actions; Australia is the lowest spender in the OECD.

We aspire to principles of integration, because it maximises return on the dollars invested. But infrastructure can become expensive and overscaled. We must be cautious of ending up with a small number of very expensive lumps of infrastructure. Consequently these developments aren't walkable.

At a new residential development in South East Queensland, a range of uses is being considered. Workplace is an obvious focus with local retail, pop up retail and residential rounding out the mix. What the developers are looking at has evolved. As they get a feel for what works they determine how to 'salt' that into the community. You can't always assume what works. Community is always a work in progress.

Scalability is problematic. We need more small regional and local recreational facilities, and less of the large shiny facilities. Measured on dollars alone, these mega facilities only cost more over time. In an urban setting, rather we want a little bit of everything everywhere that is workable. Money is always a constraint so the challenge is to design more integrated facilities in a more affordable way.

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Intergenerational Communities

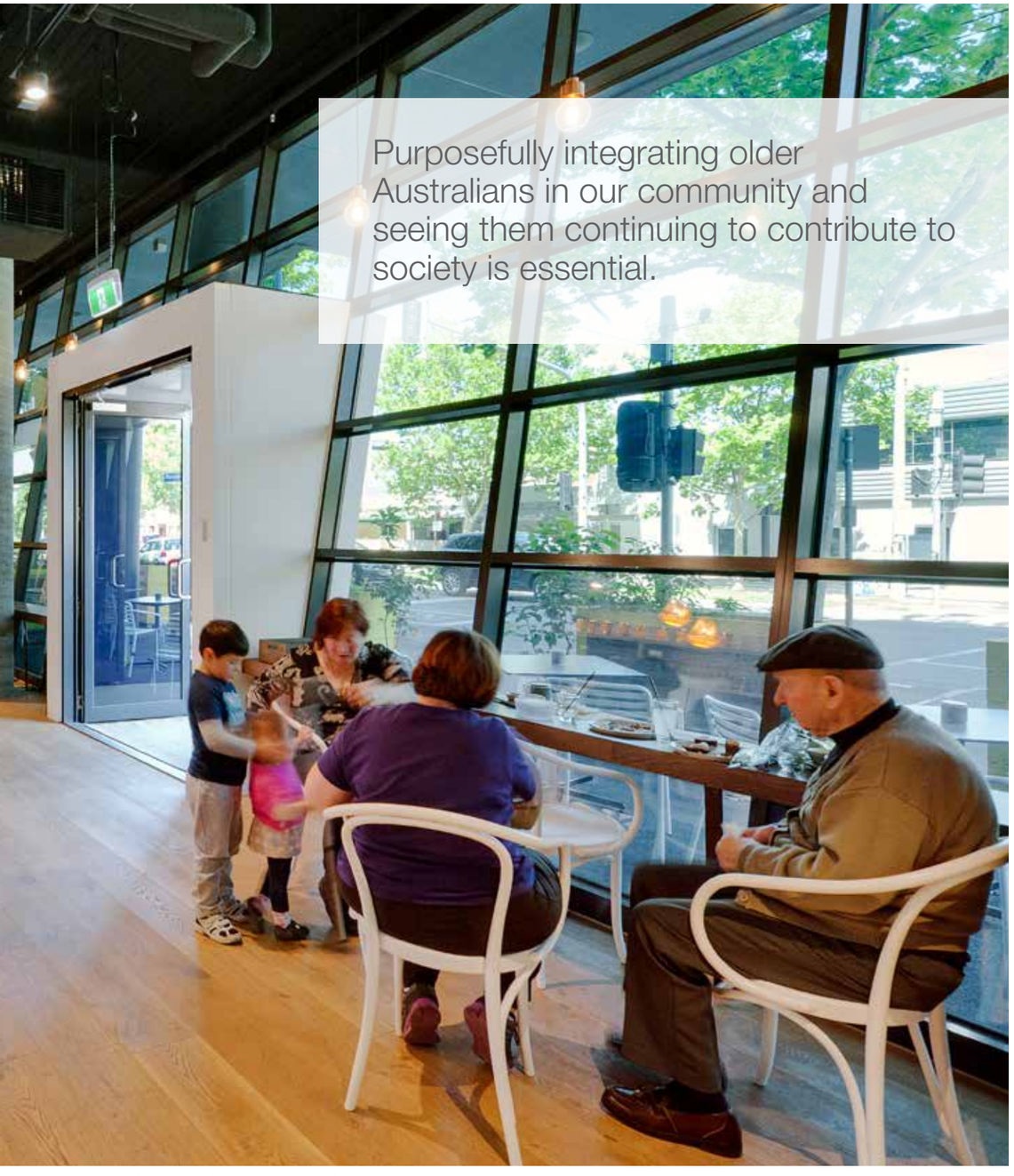
Intergenerational community is our vision; not pushing seniors outwards to the edge of towns. Purposefully integrating older Australians in our community and seeing them continuing to contribute to society is essential.

Being close to a hospital for example may influence the mix. The demographic of a community may be young, adolescent, middle aged and older. As we start to densify and build upwards we will still expect to find that mix of ages and people in a vertical setting.

A mixed use example that integrates aged care in a wellbeing centre is being planned in South Australia. The starting point is an aquatic centre. Thinking of this as a wellness precinct, prompted collocation of an allied health development to extend the community wellness offering. A residential aged care facility provides the final component. This evolution of a neighbourhood is possible because, three to four, like minded parties are working together, contributing their sector specific operating and development knowledge. We expect other elements are likely to emerge and add to the offer. Perhaps retail, landscape, crèche, gym, storytelling or education spaces and other flexible spaces can change and respond to community demands.

If we think of hospitals essentially as hotels with medical infrastructure, this opens up new thinking around health. There is mixing of uses with medical centres incorporated into retail developments. The private sector wants to build hospitals that access the right demographics. Will the hospital become a tenant instead of the building owner? There is no reason why hospitals cannot be used in other ways and connect with other users. Community can take some ownership of these assets and extract more value.

As the population is getting older we will need more hospital hours per person. As we age, we'll make more demands on the system, we will be visiting hospitals more often. The future is localised health visits that will be more preventative based, rather than the provision of centralised acute care. Health care will be offered in the hub and spoke model, with acute care provided at major centres and recovery facilitated in the local community.



Rathdowne Place, Melbourne, VIC

Central Hubs for Community

We need crossover and layering of sectors and interests, unlocking creativity from the collision of different ideas and connectivity. This crossover has occurred on university campuses across Australia with education and industry coming together.

Creating a thread horizontally that makes space for social opportunities. Working in a siloed way doesn't work anymore. Some industries are now working with their traditional competitors to make things work, for example the coming together of industrial and pop up retail and workplace and hospitality.

Certainly education institutions want to integrate; especially with industry. What is highly valued on education campuses is a seamless exchange of professionals, academics, researchers and students. The essential point is connection; when there are no fences or physical barriers on campus this breaks down old notions of them and us.

Drivers in education range from rural to inner city settings. People moving back into the city create different expectations and timeframes, especially around transport. Education has had a push towards large projects. However now we are moving to smaller refurbishment projects and making the most of what we have. This extracts greater value from existing assets and is a sustainable solution that maximises limited budgets.

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Integrated Communities

A university's 'typical day' is becoming a 24/7 day. It's interesting to see that students are on campus year round.

At James Cook University planning has moved from traditional to mid-rise buildings. They plan to go upwards as opposed to spreading out and are contracting out space as a private landlord. Now it has greater diversity with a five story building with supermarket and BWS and a dental school that offers the community low cost dental care. The Woolworths attracts everyone not just students, so it's not just a student enclave. They see this as a fundamental shift; in essence they seek to connect themselves back to the community.

Queensland University of Technology's (QUT) main campus was once closed and fenced, but it's now an open community asset with a lively pedestrian precinct, connected to the river. QUT's Kelvin Grove campus is a vibrant urban village; with retail, residential and workplace as well as education.

Being an education institution that is integrated into a community precinct, as seen at QUT's Kelvin Grove campus, offers other advantages: the university doesn't need to specifically provide shops and local services. The students shop with community and the local village benefits too. But many universities in Australia are still fenced; they either obliquely or actually say others are not welcome here. Must it take another generation to change?

Many public entities essentially had free land gifted to them. Now they are realising the value of that land and choose to build upwards on a smaller footprint.

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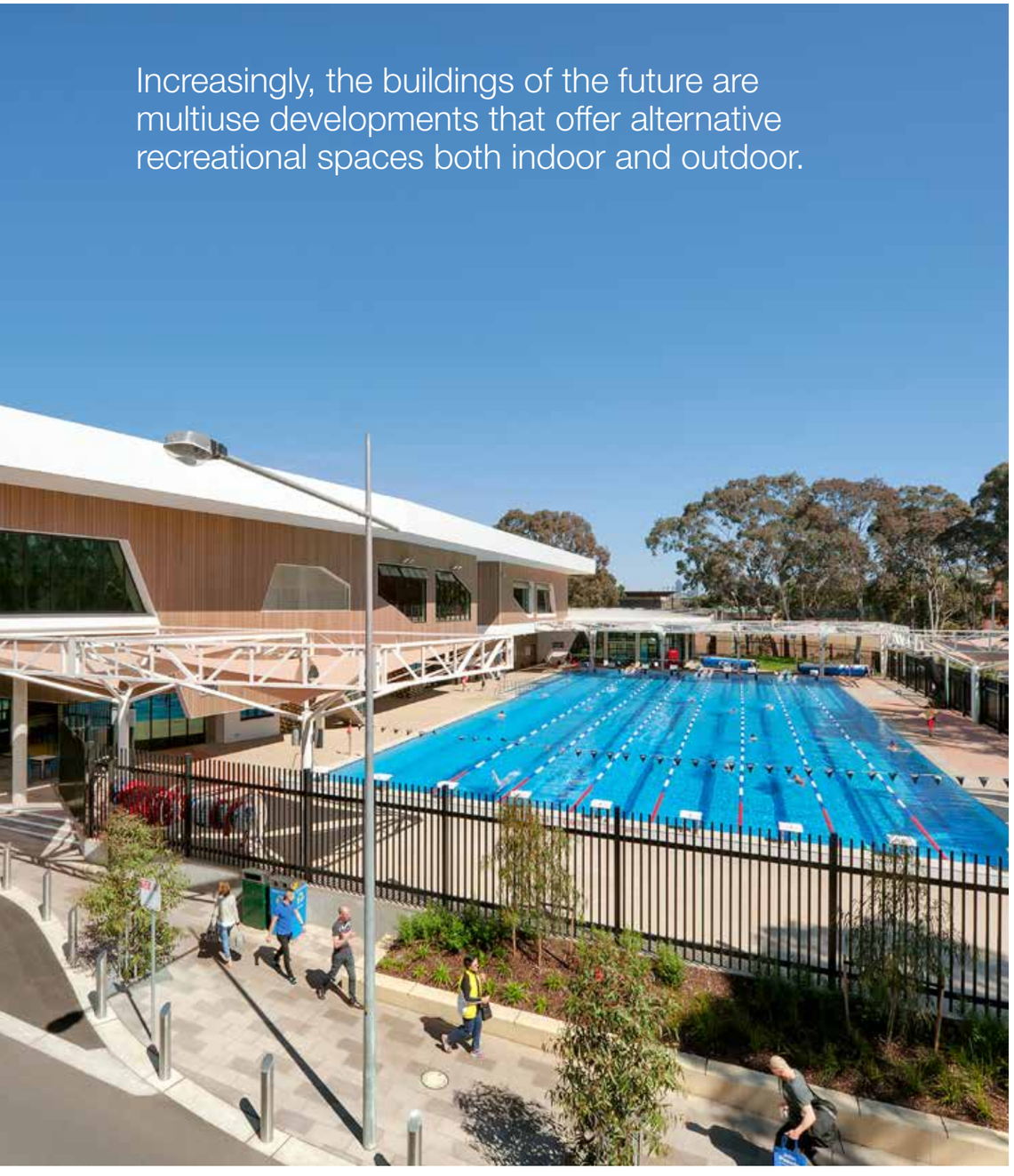
Queensland University of Technology H Block and auditorium, Brisbane, QLD

Increasingly, the buildings of the future are multiuse developments that offer alternative recreational spaces both indoor and outdoor.



Hawthorn Aquatic & Leisure Centre, Melbourne, VIC

Quality of Recreation Spaces

The value of investing in recreation and quality of life facilities is not always appreciated. Our focus on heavy infrastructure can blind us to the importance of 'quality of life' infrastructure. Funding new recreational facilities is always hard. So often we baulk at spending $45m on an integrated aquatic centre, but to spend that on a section of dual highway would not raise an eyebrow.

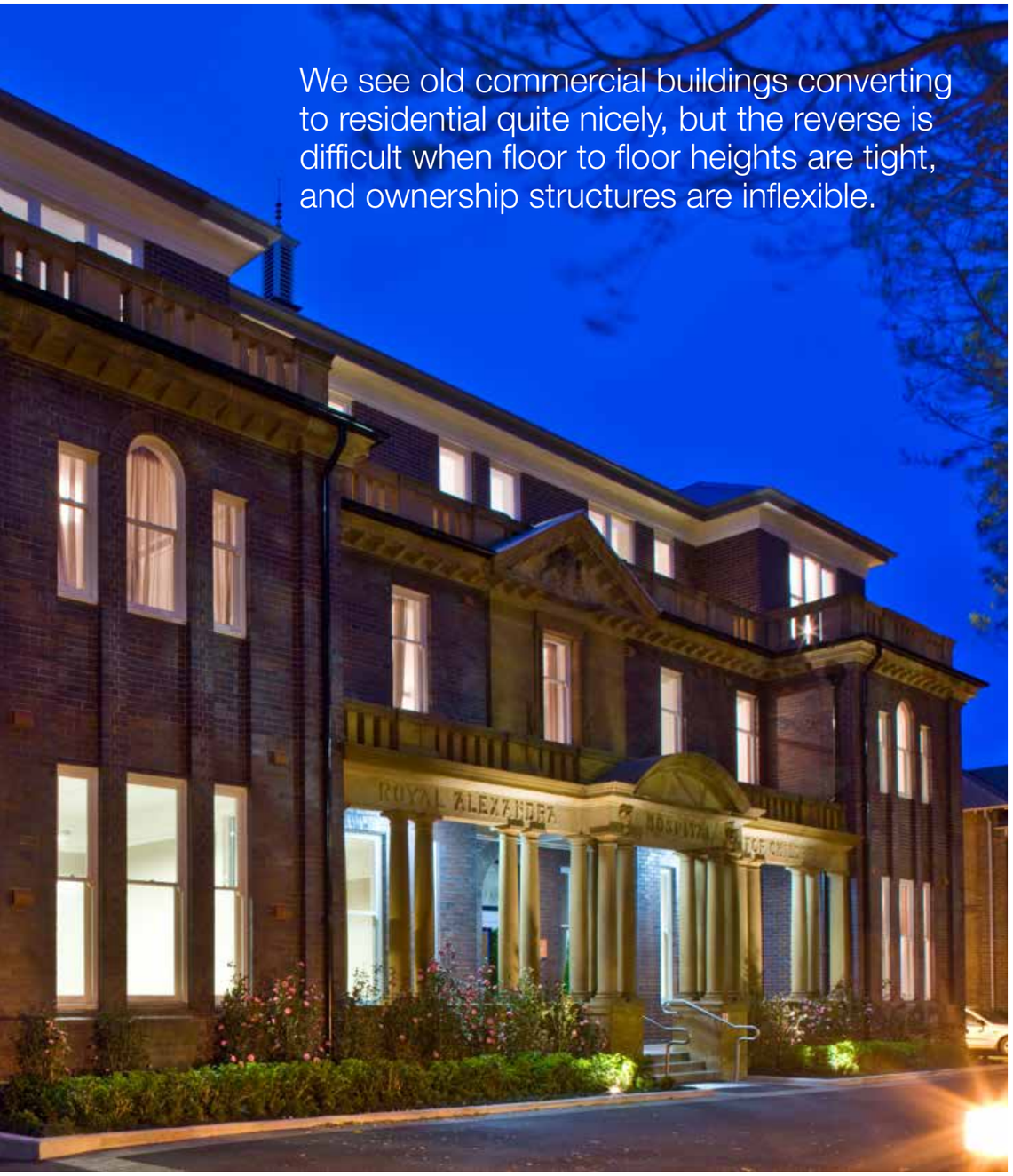
An interesting concept was put to a Sydney community about five years ago, via a new model for community consultation. The proposed project was a new $28m recreation precinct in Turramurra for three new sports fields and parklands at an old golf course. The project needed approval for a rate variation to fund it. Community consultation was via a random phone survey asking constituents 'Would they accept a 3.8% rate rise to get the facility? The response was an amazing 78% in support. Result: the rate increase was approved without the usual outcry and the community valued what they received in return.

There has been criticism of 'goldplating' when sports facilities get too large. Should we break large facilities down so that they are smaller? What about unlocking the use of existing recreation assets? It makes sense to use school and hall facilities more on weekends and after school hours, actively encouraging wider community use. Existing schools are usually not designed with this in mind but if this can be integrated into the masterplan, then this can be a happy marriage.

A recent partnership between Council and Chatswood High School gave the school community funding to convert a playing field to a synthetic surface in exchange for out of hours use. The mixed funding means the school has the upgraded field to use in school hours which the community now uses out of hours.

In Brisbane when the Mater Hospital wanted to build a new carpark, they did a contra deal with an adjacent school to build their playing field on top of an eight story carpark. So the school received a new playground and the hospital has the new amenity – everyone wins. It took some levels of government and private organisations and willpower to put together and carry that deal.

Increasingly, the buildings of the future are multiuse developments that offer alternative recreational spaces both indoor and outdoor. By including socialising spaces, retail, recreation and health these new developments attract a wider demographic including residents, clients, customers and workers.



City Quarter, Sydney, NSW

Adaptive Reuse

Brisbane currently has obsolete industrial areas that are undervalued. Kurilpa is an old industrial area, which is now obsolete and could be a location for new communities with a bright future. There are many other examples of places ripe for renewal. What is the trigger to open up these underutilised areas?

Change has typically been a question of natural progression. However it took 150 years to transform Southbank to the lively, positive place it is today. An investment focus is needed and the financial arrangements are important to promote change. How long can we allow these areas to remain stuck?

The extraction of industry to other areas makes sense. Many large manufacturers want to relocate but have to find a feasible business model; finding an alternative location is very marketing driven. Manufacturers that are close to the CBD have huge costs to relocate out of inner urban areas. Plus it's important to have employment in growth areas early because that creates jobs, and a community base with amenity. There needs to be a balance of growth.

Looking at the broader picture is important. An example is a project which mapped the deficiency of childcare places in a local neighbourhood. Conversely, it was found that in the same area, office buildings are underutilised. Can this be solved by marrying child care into commercial buildings? Does planning prevent this?

Surely we can open up entrepreneurial opportunities and conversations across sectors? In another example, a building vacant for three years is in a commercial 2 zone, so can't they use it for other purposes like aged care, where there is currently high demand.

Increasingly medical centres are non-inpatient, with high turnover. In China and Asia, based on large populations, they are inserting day hospitals into large buildings to service the working populations of the buildings. This leads to refurbishing old buildings and is changing the nature of the delivery of health services.

When commissioning new developments, flexibility is important. All educational institutions have been burnt by inflexible building, so adaptability is now considered essential, especially when it comes to ceiling heights.

We see old commercial buildings converting to residential quite nicely, but the reverse is difficult when floor to floor heights are tight, and ownership structures are inflexible. A more standardised approach when planning structures would lend itself to flexibility when it comes to adaptive reuse.

Community is Quality of Life

Get the community right and the quality of life is right. It is very important. Understanding different ethnicities is essential; what people value and like to do; then make the community around people's ethnic interests. By starting with broad community consultation you build something that people have bought into already.

At the Community Future forums there is a vision that we're trying to realise together, rather than a combat zone. We would really like to see us plan neighbourhood and community together in a long term plan.

There is a psychology to developing understanding that density has to happen. It's the spaces in between that become important in developments. It is important to show the landscape areas. People should be able to step outside their front door and see the value of living in a denser city. That is the type of value that unlocks the psychology.

From the beginning this concept was understood in the Sydney suburb of Parramatta. You have to work with the things you have. Parramatta Council has a laneways project to improve street activation and intensification. It occurs Friday nights and is starting to work. 70,000 people come to work at Parramatta, just 1,000 stay on after work. So the project is getting people to stay on Friday night. It will eventually be a daily effort.

We have to build up over time that notion that we have created a nice place to come to. You need place managers who work on the street to make everything safe and open places up to the community.

By starting with broad community consultation you build something that people have bought into already.

Attendees

dwp extends a warm thank you to all workshop participants, who gave so generously of their time, thoughts and ideas.

Tim Tait of Bupa, Kate Day of Willoughby Council, Wayne Golledge of Impact Group, Michael Edgar of Hills Shire Council, Lauren Cassar of Stockland, Lauren Kajewski of Stockland, Professor Ed Blakely of Blakely Global, Ceinwen Kirk-Lennox of Mosaic, Peter Gulson of Richard Crooks Construction, Michael Kirkby of Artazan Property Group, Roger Faulkner of Ku-ring-gai Council, Lindsay Turner of Public Works, Prue Miller of Goodman, Luke Farr of Green Building Council of Australia, James Goodson of RCP, Cameron Clelland of Lend Lease, Andrew Frowd of QUT, John De Angelis of Lutheran Community Centre, David Mason of Strategic Leisure, Matt Leyshon of Grocon, Tim Greenaway of Pepper Property Group, Mark Courtney of Colliers, Peter Hyland of Urbis, Tim Piper of Brisbane Marketing, Cameron Perkins of Place Design Group, Terry Conway of Devine, Jodi Sneddon of Metropolitan Planning Authority, Andrew Stevenson of Healthscope, Don Burns and Steve Lupton of DEECD, Jeff Finney of Japara, Mike Cahill of Sports & Recreation Victoria, Peter Burns of YMCA, Sean McGarrety of ISPT, Michelle Hyams of Schiavello, Lachlan Cameron of GPT, Paul Tzamalis of CBRE, Alicia Brown of New Doors, Lee Robson of City of Greater Dandenong, Justin Ray of Co Make, Andrew Russell of Swinburne University of Technology.

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