

BEDP ENVIRONMENT DESIGN GUIDE**COHOUSING AND RETHINKING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT****Greg Bamford and Lea Lennon****Summary of****Actions Towards Sustainable Outcomes****Environmental Issues/Principal Impacts**

- Cohousing has demonstrated that a neighbourhood can be organised to develop community and improve aspects of home and family life through greater sharing and cooperation, without sacrificing the privacy of individual households or their dwellings.
- Social organisation and cooperation between households in such neighbourhoods helps to manage and reduce environmental demands and, importantly, to substitute social engagement for the excesses of material consumption in achieving quality of life.
- Since technological innovation is necessary but not sufficient for sustainability, while material appetites continue to grow neighbourhoods created or organised along these lines are especially important, not least because of their increased resilience.
- Cohousing will only appeal to or be realised by a minority of households, however, and a variety of other ways to build sociable, productive and resilient neighbourhoods need to be considered. From eco-villages and eco-neighbourhoods to community development initiatives and informal arrangements between neighbours, there are a variety of ways to a more sustainable lifestyle.

Basic Strategies

In many design situations, boundaries and constraints limit the application of cutting EDGe actions. In these circumstances, designers should at least consider the following:

- The space and resources of the immediate neighbourhoods where most people live are relatively impoverished, compared with any cohousing scheme. One valuable challenge, then, is to consider how housing and neighbourhood design can incorporate shared spaces that are both workable and wanted by their users, learning from the processes by which a cohousing scheme like Pinakarri or eco-settlements like Aldinga or BEND emerge.

Cutting EDGe Strategies

- Increasing housing densities and better transit-oriented settlement patterns are the principal strategies for combating urban sprawl, but such macro strategies will not of themselves make neighbourhoods better or more satisfying places to live, nor do much for sustainability beyond reducing travel demand. Local areas will need to be more varied, interesting and self-reliant places, at whatever density they are developed or however close to the nearest transit stop.
- Comprehensive neighbourhood space audits coupled with the recognition that neighbourhoods need to be resourced, that is learning to see (then value) the wood for the trees, would do much to highlight this deficiency. So, for example, in our cities a locally accessible network of commercial agricultural producers, community gardens, city farms and commercial growers across our cities might be one outcome. Such a network would do more than encourage local food production, environmental education and healthy outdoor activity: if oil doubles or trebles in price, this network would be an invaluable resource.

Synergies and References

- Aldinga Arts Eco-Village, <http://www.aev.net>
- Bega Eco-Neighbourhood Developers Inc. (BEND), <http://thebegavalley.org.au/bend.html>
- Crabtree, L, 2006, Sustainability begins at Home: An Ecological Exploration of Sub/Urban Australian Community-focussed Housing Initiatives, *Geoforum*, vol. 37, pp. 519-35.

BEDP ENVIRONMENT DESIGN GUIDE

COHOUSING AND RETHINKING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

Greg Bamford and Lea Lennon

Cohousing has proven to be a successful and influential housing type. The reasons for its success also highlight the limits of its appeal, however, and some of the obstacles to its more widespread application. There are few cohousing schemes in Australia, not least because of these obstacles. In this paper, a simpler way to cohousing is identified, described as 'found cohousing'. Cohousing is only one of a variety of ways of achieving the broad aim of more socially and environmentally sustainable neighbourhoods. The paper samples some of these ways in the Australian context, from eco-villages to community development initiatives, and comparisons are drawn with cohousing. This paper is a companion paper to DES 17: Cohousing - An Introduction to a Residential Alternative

NB: This note contains a glossary at its end.

Keywords

cohousing, cohousing for older people, community men's shed, eco-neighbourhood, eco-village, found cohousing, neighbour, neighbourhood, social housing, supplementary room, Sustainability Street

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In **cohousing**, a group of households come together to create a neighbourhood of a particular kind, one that aims to create 'community' without sacrificing the privacy of individual households. In addition to individual dwellings that are largely or wholly self-contained, common space and facilities are at the heart of cohousing, to foster the inter-household relations and activities on which community depends (McCamant and Durrett, 1994; Meltzer, 2005). The common facilities typically include a **common house** or common flat enabling cohousers to cook and eat together, often several times a week. Much cohousing is suburban, but cohousing communities are common in urban, small town and rural locations, as attached or detached houses or flats, and as new-build or retrofit (Meltzer, 2005). Cohousing communities range in size from a handful of households to 80 or more, with large schemes typically divided into smaller clusters. Most schemes are between a dozen and 35 households (McCamant and Durrett, 1994). A cohousing group may procure their housing themselves or negotiate its procurement with a social housing provider, so a variety of tenures are possible. The companion paper describes the origins and spread of cohousing, its characteristics and varieties, and the environmental contribution cohousing can make (Bamford, 2008).

In this paper the wider influence of cohousing is considered, followed by suggested reasons for its success and the limits of its appeal. Originating in northern Europe, cohousing has had only modest success in the English-speaking world with the exception of several parts of the United States; for example, the west coast, Colorado, Massachusetts and Vermont (see Cohousing Association of the United States). The constraints on cohousing and the obstacles it has faced in this Australia are discussed, which prove to be similar to those reported by groups in the UK (UK Cohousing Network). As suggested in the companion paper (Bamford, 2008), retrofit

cohousing may prove to be an easier path, and a further example is provided below which is described as 'found cohousing'. Cohousing is one prominent way in which people have re-imagined the conditions of home and neighbourhood in response to a range of social or environmental concerns of the late 20th century, but it is not the only way. This paper discusses housing or settlement types with similar aims, in particular, eco-villages and eco-neighbourhoods. Recognition also needs to be given to the variety of ways that ordinary neighbourhoods can be supplemented or rethought to 'green' or sociable ends, for example, establishing a city farm or community garden, a home visiting program or a humble play group. Two examples of this kind are briefly considered below – the Australian invention of the community men's shed and the community development initiative, Sustainability Street.

2.0 THE BROADER INFLUENCE OF COHOUSING

Cohousing is likely only to attract or be realised by a relatively small minority of households in any country, but its broader influence on housing, neighbourhood and urban design generally, has been significant, at least in Denmark.

2.1 Housing and Urban Development

Housing with shared facilities predates cohousing in the countries where it originated, but the success of cohousing has supported the more widespread provision of shared domestic spaces. *Fuglsang Park* (1985) in Copenhagen is a large suburban attached housing scheme organised as a series of grassy courtyards, one of which is a cohousing co-operative and the remainder are social housing with common spaces – and everyone shares a football pitch, garden terraces and ponds. *Dianas Have* (1994) is one example of private rental flats with a common house. Both schemes are by Vandkunsten Architects who led design innovation in cohousing in Denmark, giving

form to the idea as it was emerging in the 1970s (Vandkunsten, 1994). Since the early 1980s an urban renewal program in Copenhagen's older inner-city blocks has concentrated on integrating the jumble of typically run-down outdoor spaces in these blocks, turning them into shared courtyards with facilities for more sustainable living such as bicycle sheds, recycling facilities and spaces for recreation and socialising with neighbours, regardless of the myriad property boundaries in these blocks (Lind and Lund, 2001: 127, 226-27, 284-85).

Egebjerggård is an urban district of over 25 hectares in suburban Copenhagen, completed in the mid-1990s, for which cohousing provided the template. Most of *Egebjerggård's* housing clusters have common houses (McCamant and Durrett, 1994: 146; Grönlund, 7; Colquhoun, 2004: 66; Meltzer, 2005: 159-60). In the urban development of *Trekroner* and the new town of *Store Rørbæk*, both west of Copenhagen, cohousing is or is intended to be a prominent housing option (Samuelson, 2003; Mazanti, 2007; Vestergaard and Ærø, 2006).

2.2 Managing the Demand for Domestic Space

Can a common pool of space in a housing scheme assist in satisfying the changing needs of individual households? In cohousing, a **supplementary room** is a spare room that a household with a short term need for more space can be allocated or rent (Coldham and Hartman Architects, Field Notes 1). For example, a household needing a study, a teenager wanting more privacy, or a family in the process of splitting up may find an additional room of this kind valuable. A supplementary room is accessed from a corridor or other common space, and the fact that it is remote from the household acquiring it need not be detrimental to the functioning of that household. A dedicated guest room is common in cohousing and is the most obvious application of this general idea. A supplementary room can also be used as a common room, if need be. The spatial needs of households typically vary over time. Supplementary rooms are a way of managing the demand for space by avoiding the need to build more space, and therefore can be seen to have an environmental benefit. Extensive use of supplementary rooms has been made in various **social housing** schemes, for example *Tinggarden II* (1985: 248) in Copenhagen has 14 supplementary rooms for its 91 dwellings and *Sibelius Park* (1987: 276) has 36 supplementary rooms for 191 dwellings.

2.3 Lessons for Elsewhere?

Can the environmental or social benefits of shared domestic space be successfully translated to other cultures, with different housing traditions and social mores? Optimism tempered with caution is needed here (Bamford 2007). Optimism is justified, however, for the general success of cohousing in the production of such space is to a large extent a product of its particular development process.

3.0 WHY COHOUSING WORKS ... AND THE LIMITS OF ITS APPEAL

3.1 Success Factors

Cohousing may be a 'good idea', but that is not sufficient to explain the extent of its success in its countries of origin or elsewhere. Two main reasons for this success are suggested, as follows.

3.1.1 Community Engagement with Household Independence

Cohousing has struck a workable balance between an independent, home-centred life and engagement with one's cohousing community, as well as between engagement with that community and involvement in the wider society. Cohousers are neither captured by their community to the exclusion of family life nor estranged from society because they happen to live in a community and choose to eat together. As mentioned in the companion paper, a young architect working with a group of older cohousers in The Netherlands remarked: cohousing is not "a way of living for alternative people" but "an alternative for ordinary people" (Bamford, 2004; Meltzer, 2005: 5-6).

3.1.2 Resident Initiated Development and Neighbourhood Management

A cohousing group is self-directed and democratic or non-hierarchical, and a cohousing project is inevitably relatively complex. So the planning and development process in cohousing is typically extended, and sometimes protracted. Importantly however, the structure and duration of this process is what allows prospective cohousers to come to a much better understanding of what they are embarking upon and decide whether or not the particular community they are shaping, or cohousing in general, is 'their cup of tea'. The process obliges them to externalise their housing and neighbouring preferences, to understand those of their prospective neighbours, and in so doing recognise the value in building community before they build their housing. Barbecues, bus trips to other communities and planning weekends away are thus common initiatives in this phase. The members of planning groups do pull out and some groups reluctantly fold or collapse, but to reach the building and occupation stage in cohousing is almost the mark of viability as a community. *Mariendalsvej* senior cohousing is a rare case of built cohousing that, on Charles Durrett's account (2005: 79-84), was undone by a defective process.

In occupation, cohousing builds an institutional structure of neighbouring and cultivates the inter-personal relations and sentiments on which such a structure depends. Communities cope or even thrive with changing memberships because of this enduring (but not unchanging) structure, as the example of N Street cohousing in the companion paper demonstrates. The discussion of Meltzer's theory of environmental praxis in that paper also illustrates one aspect of the effects of this thing called community that cohousing

builds (Meltzer, 2005; Bamford 2008). When problems arise in cohousing, as they do, the conditions for their resolution are to hand. Consider the teenager who has a party in the common house on the weekend and who leaves behind a mess, intending to clean it up later the next day since no common meal is planned. This teenager may nonetheless find he has 40 adults to answer to, rather than just one or two! It is easy to imagine how this state of affairs might not just be a minor irritation but could easily escalate into a major problem, without the conditions described above to make for its management or resolution (Field Notes 1).

3.2 The Limits of Cohousing

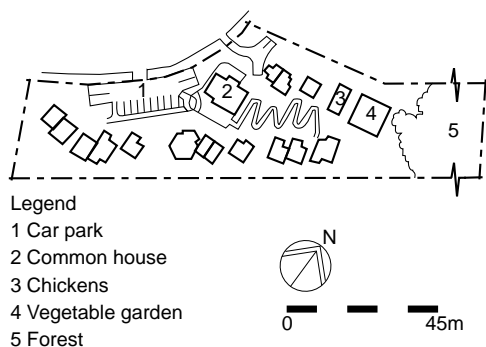
The strengths of cohousing identified above also define the limits of its appeal, even in countries where it flourishes.

3.2.1 Living Together on One's Own

An apt Dutch description of cohousing for older people is 'living together on one's own' (Bamford, 2004). Most households, however, simply prefer to live on their own. Many people will envisage the inter-household arrangements that are the bedrock of cohousing as intrusive, or an unwanted complication of domestic life. One older cohouser recounted, with a wry smile, a friend's puzzlement: "If you are man and wife why do you need to live this way?" (Field Notes 1). And even those attracted by cohousing may balk at the thought of leaving a meeting at work to come home to a community meeting about, for example, a disagreement over night lighting in the common outdoor spaces or external paint colours.

3.2.2 A More Complex Process

A housing process that is extended, complex and outside one's experience, let alone the experience of councils or banks, will deter many people even if, as is the case, cohousers themselves find the process rewarding (ABC Radio National, 1994). Land purchase or other development costs may be incurred well in advance of construction, occupation or completion. A community may need or decide to employ sweat equity (that is for residents to do some of the consultancy or building work themselves), as for example the residents of Cascade Cohousing in Hobart did when they built their own common house, another community building exercise (Meltzer, 2005: 101-103).



Site plan

Figure 1. Cascade Cohousing, Hobart

(Source: after Meltzer, 2005: 99; photo: Graham Meltzer)

The UK umbrella organisation for cohousing surveyed fourteen cohousing planning groups in the winter of 2006/7 and found that most of them faced considerable obstacles. The twelve groups responding to the survey had been in existence on average almost five years, and one had since disbanded. The major obstacle reported was the cost of land, but negotiating the planning process and securing finance were also significant, especially given the relative ignorance of planning and housing bureaucracies and financial institutions. One London group, Older Women's Cohousing, wearily reported a "nine year slog" in the "face of institutional apathy and bureaucracy". The groups also noted their own lack of skills and experience as housing developers as a significant obstacle, which they felt even more keenly in the absence of successful local examples of cohousing or a cohousing support organisation (UK Cohousing Network). The pioneering Merri Cohousing has been discouraged by rapidly rising land prices in inner north Melbourne (Ref., pers. comm.).

3.2.3 Pioneers, Starters and Joiners

Until cohousing is well established in a country, let alone a region or a town, prospective cohousers need to be pioneers. Once cohousing is established however, not only are things easier in general for those wanting to start a community, but prospective cohousers can choose instead to put themselves down on the waiting list of an existing community or join an existing planning group. Thus the pool of potential cohousers grows as cohousing becomes more common, as does the natural variety in cohousing communities, further broadening its appeal (McCamant and Durrett, 1994; Meltzer, 2005). Ten to fifteen years ago in Oakland County, California, for example, one had to be a cohousing pioneer, now there are four established communities and three more in the building or planning stage from which to choose (Cohousing Association of US).

4.0 ASPECTS OF THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE OF COHOUSING

4.1 Four Pioneering Cohousing Schemes



Meal outside the common house in summer

The four well known Australian cohousing schemes are shown in Table 1: Cascade and Cohousing Cooperative in Hobart are nicely described by Graham Meltzer (2005), as are Pinakarri and Christie Walk by Louise Crabtree (2005, 2006). These four pioneering schemes are relatively small, with the exception now of Christie Walk and all their development periods have been long by overseas standards. In Meltzer's sample of eighteen North American cohousing schemes (2000a) all communities in the first decade of development there, where the average size was 22 households, with some communities continuing to expand (2000b: 111, 116), and, significantly, the development period was on average only four years (compare development periods noted in Table 1).

4.2 Supply and Demand

What factors of supply and demand might explain the struggle of cohousing in Australia? Take demand first. Cohousing is still not widely known in this country, and the culture and ideology of housing are obvious checks on its development (Meltzer, 2005). Utopian traditions around sharing find expression largely in a rural context in Australia. The strong Australian preference for privacy and unvarnished autonomy, in the public housing flat as much as the owner-occupied, detached house and garden, defines the limits of the appeal of cohousing (Meltzer, 2005:148-49). The UK and Canada have likewise been slow to build cohousing, relative to their population size (UK Cohousing Network, Canada Cohousing). Such factors, however, explain only why there are not scores of cohousing schemes in Australia, rather than why there are not, say, at least ten or twenty to date. In Denmark where there are hundreds

of cohousing schemes, when there might easily be thousands, the preference for the private detached house and garden is also strong. In one Danish study, for example, it was "overwhelming" (Æro, 2006:10). For a fuller explanation of the relative absence of cohousing in Australia, the obstacles to supply need to be considered.

4.2.1 Ignorance, Institutional Inertia and Indignant Neighbours

Compare the experience of a cohousing planning group in Sydney in 1994 with that of *Ottrupgård*, a typical Danish cohousing community of 22 households, established two years earlier. *Ottrupgård* is on the site of a disused farm. A large barn was converted into the common house, twenty new houses were constructed, and a seasonal heat storage reservoir powered by a solar array was installed (Bamford, 1998, Figure 1, 2008). When *Ottrupgård* were looking for a site the local Council welcomed the prospect of a large influx of new residents, especially given the reputation of cohousers for involvement in their local community. Several banks competed for their custom and the bank they selected made a donation of roughly AUS\$11,000 to their project. *Ottrupgård* was also eligible for low interest Government loans (ABC Radio National, 1994). By comparison, although the Sydney cohousing group appeared to be well organised and three years into the planning stage in 1994, they could report only insincere or obstructive planning bureaucracies, and banks that were unwilling or uninterested in financing the project. One prominent bank suggested that they should grab any offer of finance, whatever the interest rate proposed (ABC Radio National, 1994).

Crabtree (2005) details similar experiences to the Sydney group with both Fremantle's Pinakarri and Adelaide's Christie Walk projects, amplified by the



Cricket in the car free courtyard



Meal in the common house

Figure 2. Cohousing Cooperative, Hobart

(Source: Graham Meltzer)

Community	Location	Architect	Developed	Households	Tenure
Cascade	Hobart	Detlev Geard	1989 – 2001 site occupied, 1993	15	Private
Cohousing Cooperative	Hobart	Morrison and Breytenbach	1989 – 2000 co-op formed, 1991	11	Public
Pinakarri	Hamilton Hill (Fremantle)	Hammond and Green	1991 – 2000 site occupied, 1999	8	Private + Public
Christie Walk	Adelaide	Ecopolis Architects	1992 – 2006 Stages 1, 2 & 3 site occupied, 2001	27	Private

Table 1. Four Australian cohousing schemes

(Sources: Meltzer, 2005: 93, 99; Crabtree, 2005: 337; Crabtree, 2006: 528; Urban Ecology Australia: 4)

fact that these schemes proceeded to completion. Pinakarri had a strong social justice agenda, entering into a partnership with the State housing authority to provide affordable housing. According to Crabtree (2005:337-40) they faced concerted opposition from local residents and the housing authority resented the capabilities and expectations of the cohousers and their architect to negotiate the procurement process. Christie Walk had a strong environmental agenda, with the common facilities and the development of cohousing part of the final Stage 3 (see Table 1; Reid, 2005; Crabtree, 2005). The project encountered “suspicion and ignorance among government, real estate agents, the building industry and financiers”. The ambitious sustainability agenda led to cost over-runs in an industry geared to ‘unsustainability’, with building code requirements thwarting even the provision of a common laundry.

It is encouraging that the Victorian State Government development corporation, VicUrban (2008) has recently said that it is “investigating opportunities for co-housing projects” and there have been some indications of improvement in the attitudes or policies of Councils and financial institutions (Ref., pers. comm.). But there is an obvious need for research and policy development in this area. Compare, for example, the Norwegian State Housing Bank policy on financing cohousing from 1991, which concludes by asking: “What are we waiting for?” (Den Norske Stats Husbank, 1991: 95).

4.2.2 Affordability

Meltzer (2005:143-44) concluded that for his North American sample there was no evidence that cohousing was more affordable than conventional housing. In Australia, however, Hobart’s Cohousing Cooperative was built for under \$1000/m², though the original budget was stretched when more households joined the group and residents did contribute some sweat equity. Hobart’s Cascade project is harder to estimate, as it was built over several years and with substantial sweat equity, but it appears to have cost only about \$1100/m² (Meltzer, 2005:93, 99). The decline in housing affordability in Australia does not augur well for cohousing, given its novel and typically extended development process, but are there other alternatives?

4.3 Different Ways of ‘Living Together on One’s Own’

The companion paper describes two adjacent share-houses in the late 1980s in Davis, California that were edging towards cohousing, without realising they were doing so. Once they did however, they soon modified one of the share houses to provide the necessary common facilities and N Street cohousing was the result (Meltzer, 2005). Could this process be even simpler, and are there other ways in which, like cohousing, households might live together on their own?

Example 1: ‘Found Cohousing’, Brisbane

In 2000 a group of three households in suburban Brisbane fell even more naturally into cohousing than N Street when they purchased a small block of flats in order to all live closer together. The group recognised the potential in such an arrangement to enrich their existing strong inter-household relations and to provide a child friendly environment, but the distinctive move to cohousing came from taking advantage of the fact that the number of flats in the block exceeded the number of households by one. The block contained four flats and one flat was simply given over as a common flat, enabling common eating and easy socialising to flourish straightaway (See Figure 3). Informally organised, nightly common meals for whoever is home have continued.

The common flat in this scheme (No. 3) is linked by a walkway outside the kitchen to the adjacent external under-croft space, which has become their principal social space. This space was originally dedicated to car parking and cars have simply been excluded from the site. As is evident from Figure 3, this fortuitous configuration of flats on a sloping site, in concert with the points of access to the flats, locates this under-croft space and the adjoining common flat at the heart of the scheme. And the space is in daily use – for eating and socialising, as well as a children’s gymnasium! On Tuesday night friends join them for the evening meal, a practice that has grown up around the children’s networks and their activities.

Unusually, the block of flats has a frame structure, lending flexibility to its under-croft spaces, which also provide for common storage, workshop and craft activities. An original shared laundry has been retained and a large rainwater tank added, which effectively supplies all their household needs.

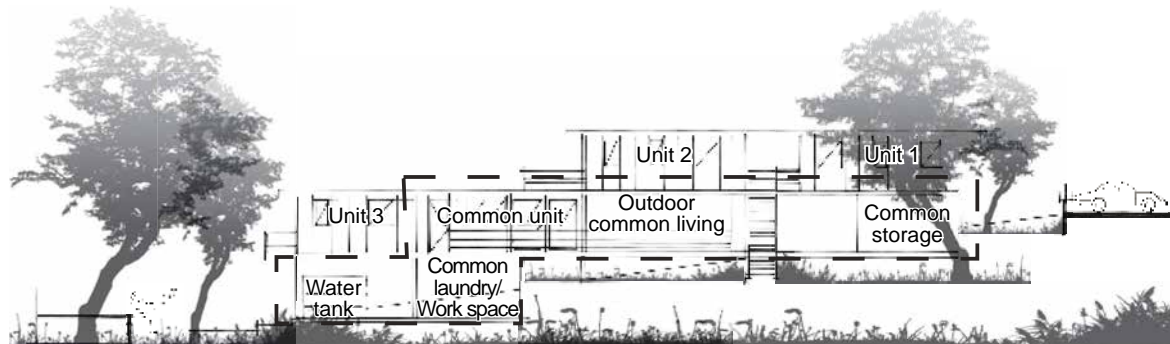


Figure 3. Found cohousing – a block of four flats, Brisbane

(Source: Lea Lennon)

Outdoors, art works abound, the backyard is used for social gatherings, a chook pen, compost heap and grey water treatment, and a common vegetable garden lies amidst the sub-tropical vegetation near the front of the site – all in contrast to the often sterile or unused external common spaces in medium-density housing. This block has been energetically retrofitted to the residents' social agenda and demonstrates how the effective sharing of space expands the prospect of living in flats that are smaller than 1 bedroom public housing units (Field Notes 2).

This group see nothing out of the ordinary in their daily lives, but what do their neighbours think? Apparently, that the group is “straight enough to fit in, but interesting enough not to be straight”. This tiny community, with only a handful of members which spans three generations, might be best described as **found cohousing**. They have found no need for a committee structure or even meetings, nor any formal allocation of communal responsibilities. This form of informal retrofit cohousing, by small groups of friends or relations (two of these households are related) indicate a simpler way for cohousing to develop, especially in countries like Australia. Indeed, a sister group has recently purchased a similarly small block of flats nearby, rescuing the block from likely demolition. In this case, without a flat to spare but with similar intentions, the group has set about building and landscaping the external spaces for community and sustainability, beginning with a large communal deck (Field Notes 2).

Example 2: The Compound, Melbourne.

In inner Melbourne's Carlton, Amanda Hooten (2000:26, 30) found four siblings, two with partners and children, living in three self-contained houses on two small adjoining lots, in an arrangement they refer to as ‘the Compound’. Like N Street, the “first thing” the Compound did was tear down the dividing fence between the two lots. Frequent common eating and impromptu socialising, both inside and out, has been the result. As in cohousing, conventions have evolved in these intimately shared spaces to signal a household's desire for privacy. The public/private or compound/household distinction may be indicated by a drawn blind at the entry or even within the private space of the dwelling as downstairs/upstairs.

Example 3: Van Lang Cooperative, Sydney

The Van Lang Cooperative in western Sydney is a social housing scheme whose tenants are all older Vietnamese migrants. They came to Australia originally to be reunited and live with their families but they experienced significant difficulties with family life under culturally different circumstances and were generally in poor health. A local health worker guided them in a bold plan to ‘leave home’ and live together as a community! The Van Lang housing cooperative was born. Residents retain their independence in individual units that open onto a common garden. But co-op meetings have to be held in the largest of their units as there is no common house, and social occasions spill over into each other's private spaces. With respect to social intention, development process, communal relations and resident management, however, Van Lang resembles cohousing for older people (Bamford, 2004, 2005). “Companionship and independence” are “universally valued aspects of living at

Van Lang” (McHugh, 1999:178). One resident remarked how she valued “speaking Vietnamese with my neighbours”, adding, “I consider neighbourhood a very important factor. It could save my life ...” (McHugh, 1999:178).

In lacking a common house or flat, Van Lang is no different from *Kyodo no mori*, the first cohousing scheme in Japan (Meltzer 2005:112). *Kyodo no mori* is a small, private purpose-built cohousing scheme in Tokyo for which a common flat proved simply unaffordable. (They have a common roof garden and terrace.) The residents understand themselves as cohousers and socialise (intensely) as such, utilising each other's flats for the purpose. Van Lang is thus little different from this Japanese scheme.

5.0 COHOUSING, ECO-VILLAGES AND ECO-NEIGHBOURHOODS

5.1 Eco-villages

Eco-villages are a diverse and important settlement type aiming to “integrate a supportive social environment with a low-impact way of life” (Global Eco-village Network). Robert Gilman (1995:12) defines eco-villages as “human scale, fully featured communities, both urban and rural, that are integrated harmlessly into the natural environment and can successfully continue into the indefinite future” (D Gilman, 1995:7).

5.1.1 The Nature and Extent of Community Involvement

Munksøgård in Trekroner in Denmark is an instructive example of an eco-village in the context of this discussion because all its housing is cohousing. The village has 100 households organised as five cohousing communities, with the membership of each community structured to achieve an appropriately wide range of income groups, household types and ages in the village as a whole. When occupied in 2001, the waiting list for *Munksøgård* was twice the population of the village (Samuelsson, 2003:1). “The settlement has all the practical, technological and economic advantages of a large, diverse and socially cohesive ‘village’”, according to Meltzer (2005:158), “but within each cluster residents enjoy closer sharing and more intimate interaction with like-minded people” (Durrett, 2005).

Many prospective eco-villagers, attracted by the environmental technology or organic food, and the prospect of living in a neighbourhood where others share their environmental values, may nonetheless balk at the “closer sharing” and the “more intimate interaction” cohousing entails. Currumbin Ecovillage, behind the Gold Coast, includes the question on its web site: “Do I have to participate in community events, working bees or jobs?” to which the reply is, “Your degree of participation in any community activity will always be your choice.” By contrast, a founding member of *Munksøgård* remarked: “We divide up community tasks according to our abilities” (Samuelsson, 2003:2, 4). Cohousers do choose the nature and extent of their participation in common activities, but some such participation in cohousing is both anticipated and

desired. But there is thus likely to be a broader appeal for eco-villages not expecting such involvement, making them in turn a more attractive prospect for many people and thus lower risk for speculative developers.

5.1.2 Eco-village Planning

Density

Currumbin Ecovillage and Crystal Waters Ecovillage near Maleny, also in south-east Queensland, each emphasise that only a small proportion of the overall site will ever be developed, but they do offer large lots on which to build detached houses. Crystal Waters was developed in 1987 at a much higher density than would otherwise have been permitted in rural Queensland at the time, but lot sizes average around an acre or 4,000m² (Lindegger, 1995:18). Currumbin Ecovillage offers sites from 600m² to 8,000m² (The Ecovillage at Currumbin; Crystal Waters Ecovillage; Hollick and Connelly, 1998). Aldinga Arts Eco-village south of Adelaide has much smaller average lot sizes, some small lot and attached housing development as well as a cluster housing site which would suit cohousing, but so far no takers (Aldinga Arts Eco-village; JM, pers. comm.). Cohousing typically develops at higher densities than such eco-villages, even in rural locations or in the uncommon case that the housing is detached, because of the way the neighbourhood is conceived as an extension of the everyday domestic realm (Meltzer, 2000b, 2005).

Cars

In all three eco-villages above, as in conventional suburban development, the spaces between the dwellings are not free of vehicles and cars are accommodated on individual lots, which is uncommon in cohousing (Figure 1). In the planning stage for *Otturupgård* cohousing, the group was surprisingly divided over whether or not to corral the cars at the edge of the site. Those in favour of doing so made it a necessary condition for their continued involvement in the project, and the remainder of the group accepted this condition. Within weeks of occupation, the latter realised it would have been a mistake not to have done so, given their aims and the fact that the majority of households were young families and the housing was clustered (Field Notes 1, Bamford 1998).

5.2 Eco-neighbourhoods

An eco-neighbourhood is cut from the same cloth as an eco-village but is more modest in size and does not aim to be a “fully featured” or stand alone settlement type.

Example 4: Bega Eco Neighbourhood

The Bega Eco Neighbourhood Developers Inc. (BEND) is a community-based organisation formed in 2002, with a charter aiming to improve residential environmental and social sustainability in the development of their neighbourhood. BEND make a point of claiming no expertise in land development, but they have recently purchased and begun developing a site on the edge of Bega, a town on the New South Wales south coast. Most of the site is dedicated to conservation and agricultural uses; the neighbourhood

consists of 21 building lots, ranging from roughly 600m² to 900m², with one third of the lots set aside for affordable housing. One further lot is reserved for a neighbourhood house. There is some provision for dual occupancy and eight lots are car free, with allocated parking in bays nearby on site (Bega Eco Neighbourhood Developers Inc.).

BEND is similar in size to a typical or medium-sized cohousing scheme, which McCamant and Durrett (1994:160) define as between one dozen and 35 households. An eco-neighbourhood like BEND could turn out to be scarcely distinguishable from cohousing in occupation if, for example, the projected neighbourhood house were to morph into a common house with regular or frequent common meals.

5.3 Cohousing and Eco-settlements Compared

The eco-settlements above differ from cohousing in the nature or extent of the intended communality. The common facilities in cohousing are principally geared to bringing residents together around the everyday – from cooking and eating to clothes washing – and so redefining the domestic realm in a way that these eco-settlements, their community orientation notwithstanding, do not attempt to do. Individual lots with detached houses, vehicle access and private car accommodation are thus much less common in cohousing. These eco-settlements are closer to convention, at least in these respects, and would seem more likely to have a broader appeal than cohousing as a consequence. Sustainability ambitions aside, these eco-settlements are a form of land development with constraints on individual house building, whereas (intentional) cohousing entails the production of the housing and a built form more expressive of communality.

Such differences aside, eco-villages developed from the grass roots like cohousing can have similarly long lead times. Aldinga, for example, took fifteen years, and for much the same reasons of complexity, institutional unfamiliarity with such projects, and the difficulties of producing a workable financial model and obtaining finance. BEND has undergone a similarly intensive and extended planning process to cohousing, but as a smaller initiative may prove to have a shorter development period (Aldinga Arts Eco-village; LL, pers. comm.; see also Jackson, 2003:4-5, UK Cohousing Network).

6.0 HOME EXTENSIONS: RETHINKING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

6.1 Living beyond the Boundaries

However many cohousing schemes, eco-villages or eco-neighbourhoods are built in Australia in the coming decades, the vast majority of people will live in conventional housing. A range of simpler ideas or practices for becoming increasingly green and sociable in both new and existing neighbourhoods is therefore

clearly needed. Figure 4 shows one of several rows of narrow streets of modest 19th century terrace houses with small gardens in inner Copenhagen, nick-named 'Potato Rows'. The residents of Potato Rows have simply captured portions of their one common space, their streets, for more sociable ends. Some car parks have been replaced with tables and benches, barbecues and even sandpits for children's play – an invitation to neighbourly interaction.



Figure 4. Reclaiming the street

Car parks are replaced by tables and seats, a barbecue and children's sandboxes – 'Potato Rows', Copenhagen (Source: Greg Bamford)

Example 5. Cooperative Neighbours, Melbourne

In Melbourne's Thornbury, John Baird (1984) discovered four neighbours who had taken down their dividing fences to create a continuous common garden. The residents formed a co-operative and share a rumpus room, household and workshop equipment, and pets. Bulk purchase and storage of food is also undertaken by the cooperative, partly with the aim of improving the organisation of domestic work, as with cohousing originally. Meltzer (2005:167) confirmed the continued existence of the group, with six neighbours now involved.

Undocumented examples of small groups of neighbours, often perhaps as friends or family, taking the initiative to diffuse the home/neighbourhood distinction in such ways are likely to be common (ABC Radio National, 2008).

Rethinking the neighbourhood can take many forms, however, and the following two cases illustrate how we might finesse our housing traditions or build on neighbourly mores to more sustainable ends.

6.1.1 Men's Sheds

Under the auspices of a community organisation, a **community men's shed** provides a space for typically older or middle-aged men (and sometimes women) to engage in manual activities of the kind ordinarily undertaken in private, in back yard sheds. The men involved "particularly enjoy the opportunity to 'get out of the house', and almost all 'feel at home' in the shed", engaging in wood-working or other similar pursuits (Golding et al, 2007, p. 8). Only a small minority of men have lost a back yard shed. The principal motivation is the activities themselves, conducted in the companionship of other men and bolstered by the public recognition of the men's skills and interests, which such

a community building embodies. Harnessing an idea that works with the grain of Australia's traditional gender divisions in the domestic use of space, the sheds have produced a new form of neighbourhood communality built around an aspect of domestic life, and so in this modest regard bear comparison with cohousing. There are at least 125 sheds in this country and they are a peculiarly Australian phenomenon. There are no community men's sheds in Denmark, apparently, or anywhere else where cohousing flourishes (Golding et al, 2007, pp. 7, 37, 40; 'community men's sheds'!

6.1.2 Sustainability Streets

'Sustainability Street' is a community development program designed by Vox Bandicoot, a Melbourne based environmental education organisation. The program aims to improve sustainability in both the home and neighbourhood ('street' is a metaphor), by bringing residents together as a group to learn, plan and practice, celebrate and educate one another about sustainability. Neighbours discover one another's skills and interests ("It's a village out there"), and begin sharing and cooperating towards more sustainable ends, from organising a water use audit to swapping produce or creating a meal roster and organising informal child care to assist a mother with a new baby (Mitchell, 2007:20). Sustainability Street appears to be achieving some of the community and environmental gains found in cohousing or other eco-developments, without requiring a distinctive material form or novel social organisation. Vox Bandicoot reports the development of over 100 groups nationally since 2001 and the adoption of the program by several local Councils (Vox Bandicoot; Mitchell, 2007; Winefield, 2005:19-20; Wollongong City Council, 2005: 29-30).

7.0 CONCLUSION

Most new housing, like most existing homes and neighbourhoods, needs rethinking too if they are to be more sustainable. Technological innovation is necessary but it is not sufficient. The research and anecdotal evidence that neighbourhood social engagement may be substituted for excessive material consumption in achieving quality of life is timely (Trainer 1985; ABC Radio National, 1994; McCamant and Durrett, 1994; McHugh, 1999; Andresen and Runge, 2002; Durrett, 2005; Meltzer, 2005; Crabtree, 2006; Mulder et al, 2006; Golding et al, 2007, Mitchell, 2007). Cohousing is one way to make this substitution but there are many others, and we would seem to need all the help it can get.

REFERENCES

ABC Radio National, 1994, *Life Matters*, Cohousing, 22 July. [Copy held by author.]

ABC Radio National, 2008, *Life Matters*, There goes the Neighbourhood, 4 April. <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/lifematters/stories/2008/2207454.htm>

Aldinga Arts Eco Village, <http://www.aev.net>

Andresen, M, and Runge, U, 2002, Co-housing for Seniors experienced as an Occupational Generative Environment, *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, vol. 9, no. 4 (November), pp. 156-66.

- Bamford, G, 1998, Where do I live? Growing up, Neighbourhoods and Environmental Reform, in J Birkeland, ed., *Designing Eco-solutions: Proceedings of Catalyst '97 Conference*, pp. 318-27. University of Canberra, Belconnen, ACT. <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view.php?pid=UQ:8620>
- Bamford, G, 2004, 'Living Together on One's Own': Cohousing for Older People – An Example from Denmark and The Netherlands. Paper presented at *Queensland Shelter Housing Conference*, 15-17 June, Gold Coast International Hotel, Gold Coast, Queensland. <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view.php?pid=UQ:13687>
- Bamford, G, 2005, Cohousing for Older People: Housing Innovation in The Netherlands and Denmark, *Australasian Journal of Ageing*, vol. 24, March, pp. 44-46.
- Bamford, G, 2007, The Rules of the Game, *Landscape Architecture Australia*, Issue 115 (August), pp. 46-47.
- Bamford, G, 2008, DES 17: Cohousing – An Introduction to a Residential Alternative, *BEDP Environment Design Guide*, Issue 53-1 (February), RAlA, Melbourne.
- Bega Eco-Neighbourhood Developers Inc. <http://thebegavalley.org.au/bend.html>
- Canada Cohousing, <http://www.cohousing.ca>
- Cohousing Association of the United States, <http://www.cohousing.org>
- Coldham and Hartman Architects, Supplementary Rooms, <http://www.coldhamandhartman.com/whitepaper.php?id=43>
- Colquhoun, I, 2004, Designing out Crime: Creating Safe and Sustainable Communities, *Crime Prevention and Community Safety: An International Journal*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 57-70.
- 'Community men's sheds', Google search, 31 January 2008.
- Crabtree, L, 2005, Sustainable Housing Development in Urban Australia: Exploring Obstacles to and Opportunities for Ecology Efforts, *Australian Geographer*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 333-50.
- Crabtree, L, 2006, Sustainability begins at Home: An Ecological Exploration of Sub/Urban Australian Community-focussed Housing Initiatives, *Geoforum*, vol. 37, pp. 519-35.
- Crystal Waters Ecovillage, <http://www.ecologicalsolutions.com.au/crystalwaters/index.html>
- Den Norske Stats Husbank, 1991, *Boliger med nogo attåt: nye bofellesskap I historisk perspektiv*. Husbanken, Oslo, Norway.
- Durrett, C, 2005, *Senior Cohousing: A Community Approach to Independent Living*. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, California, USA.
- Field Notes 1, 1992, 1995 and 2002, by Greg Bamford.
- Field Notes 2, 2008, by Lea Lennon and Greg Bamford.
- 'Fuglsang Park', 1985, *Arkitektur DK*, vol. 29, no. 5/6, pp. 198-205.
- Gilman, D, 1995, Eco-villages and Sustainable Communities: Models for Sustainable Living in the 21st Century. In J. Conrad, ed., *Eco-Villages and Sustainable Communities: Models for 21st Century Living*, p. 7, Findhorn Press, Findhorn, Scotland.
- Gilman, R, 1995, Why Eco-Villages? in J. Conrad, ed., *Eco-Villages and Sustainable Communities: Models for 21st Century Living*, pp. 11-13, Findhorn Press, Findhorn, Scotland.
- Global Ecovillage Network, <http://gen.ecovillage.org>
- Golding, B, Brown, M, Foley, A, Harvey, J, and Gleeson, L, 2007, *Men's Sheds in Australia: Learning through Community Contexts*, NCVER, Adelaide. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1780.html>
- Grønlund, Bo, n.d., Egebjerggård from a Social Point of View. <http://hjem.get2net.dk/gronlund/BoibyUK.html>
- Hollick, M, and Connelly, C, 1998, *Sustainable Communities: Lessons from Aspiring Eco-villages*, Praxis Education, Quinns Rocks, Western Australia.
- Hooten, A, 2000, I've come about the Room, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Good Weekend, 12-13 February, pp. 22-23, 25-26, 30.
- Jackson, H, 2003, Ten Years of the Danish Ecovillage Network, *Communities Magazine*, Issue 117, pp. 4-5. <http://www.communities.ic.org>
- Lindegger, M, 1995, Crystal Waters Permaculture Village, in J. Conrad, ed., *Eco-Villages and Sustainable Communities: Models for 21st Century Living*, pp. 18-19, Findhorn Press, Findhorn, Scotland.
- Lind, O, and Lund, A, 2001, *Copenhagen Architecture Guide*, rev. ed., Arkitektens Forlag, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Mazanti, B, 2007, Choosing Residence, Community and Neighbours - Theorizing Families' Motives for Moving, *Geographiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, vol. 89, no. 1, pp. 53-68.
- McCamant, K, and Durrett, C, 1994, *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves*, rev. ed., Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, California, USA.
- McHugh, S, 1999, *Shelter from the Storm: Bryan Brown, Samoan Chieftans and the Little Matter of a Roof over our Heads*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- Meltzer, G, 2000a, *Cohousing: Towards Social and Environmental Sustainability*, PhD thesis, The University of Queensland, Brisbane.
- Meltzer, G, 2000b, Cohousing: Verifying the Importance of Community in the Application of Environmentalism, *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, vol. 17, Summer, pp. 110-32.
- Meltzer, G, 2005, *Sustainable Community: Learning from the Cohousing Model*. Trafford, Victoria, Canada.
- Mitchell, L, 2007, How Green is your Alley?, *The Sunday Age*, M, 30 December, pp. 19-20.
- Mulder, K, Costanza, R and Erikson, J, 2006, The Contribution of Built, Human, Social and Natural Capital to Quality of Life in Intentional and Unintentional Communities. *Ecological Economics*, vol. 59, pp. 13-23.
- Munksøgård Eco-village, <http://www.munksoegaard.dk>
- Reid, L, 2005, 'Christie Walk eco-dream an incredible journey', *Lumen*, Summer. Adelaide. <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/lumen/issues/8861/news8883.html>
- Samuelsson, L, 2003, Not Just Eco-Technology, *Communities Magazine*, Issue 117, pp. 1-3. <http://www.communities.ic.org>
- 'Sibelius Park', 1987, *Arkitektur DK*, vol. 31, no. 6, pp. 271-78.
- 'Sustainability Street', Vox Bandicoot, http://www.voxbandicoot.com.au/sustainability_street.html
- The Ecovillage at Currumbin, <http://www.theecovillage.com.au>
- 'Tinggården II', 1985, *Arkitektur DK*, vol. 29, no. 5/6, pp. 242-49.
- Trainer, E, 1985, *Abandon Affluence!* Zed Books, London, UK.
- UK Cohousing Network, Survey of Co-housing Groups, http://www.cohousing.org.uk/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=7&Itemid=115

Urban Ecology Australia, Christie Walk Ecocity Development, 5pp. <http://www.urbanecology.org.au/christiewalk>

'Vandkunsten 1969-1994', 1994, *Arkitektur DK*, vol. 38, no. 4/5 (whole issue).

Vestergaard, H, and Ærø, T, 2006, New Town in the Øresund Region - housing potential in the new town next to Frederikssund, Paper presented at ENHR Conference, *Housing in an Expanding Europe: Theory, Policy Participation and Implementation*, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2-5 July 2006, 14pp.

VicUrban, 2008, Community Well-being, p. 1, <http://www.vicurban.com/cs/Satellite?c=VPage&cid=1168844488462&pagename=VicUrban%2FLayout>

Winefield, J, 2005, *Recommendations for Behaviour Change Programs to Reduce Greenhouse Impacts in SA*, December issue, Conservation Council of SA, Adelaide.

Wollongong City Council, 2005, *Sustainability Begins at Home: Evaluation Report*, March issue, Wollongong.

Ærø, T, 2006, Residential Choice from a Lifestyle Perspective, *Housing, Theory and Society*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 109-130.

GLOSSARY

Cohousing: a housing type that originated in Denmark and The Netherlands almost 40 years ago. In cohousing, a group of households come together to create a neighbourhood of a particular kind, one that aims for community without sacrificing the privacy of individual dwellings. Common space and facilities are important in cohousing to develop the inter-household relations and activities on which community depends, and this importance is often reflected in the site and building design. Individual dwellings are private and largely or wholly self-contained, according to preference. Cohousing schemes vary in size from a handful of households to 80 or more. Regardless of tenure, cohousers control or negotiate the planning and management of their housing themselves (McCamant and Durrett, 1994; Meltzer, 2005).

Cohousing for older people: A housing type with no essential difference from cohousing except for the restriction on age of entry, which is usually 55 years. Differences between a cohousing scheme for older people and age-unrestricted cohousing are the product of the differences in the respective interests, abilities or preferences of the cohousers, and the two types are otherwise remarkably similar (Bamford, 2005; Durrett, 2005).

Community men's shed: Under the auspices of a community organisation, a community men's shed brings men together to pursue craft activities, for example, wood working, which they would once have pursued as individuals in their own back yard sheds. The men (and sometimes women) are usually older or middle aged. The sheds are, apparently, uniquely Australian, and have a number of documented benefits both for the participants and the local community (Golding et al, 2007).

Eco-neighbourhood: Similar to an eco-village except that an eco-neighbourhood is not a 'fully featured' settlement type. The Bega Eco-neighbourhood (BEND) is similar to a medium-sized cohousing scheme, which McCamant and Durrett (1994:160) count as comprising between one dozen and 35 households.

Eco-village: Robert Gilman (1995:12) defines eco-villages as "human scale, fully featured communities", which can be either urban or rural, "that are integrated harmlessly into the natural environment and can successfully continue into the

indefinite future" (D Dilman, 1995: 7). The Global Eco-village Network says that an eco-village aims to "integrate a supportive social environment with a low-impact way of life". It is an open question as to what should count as 'fully featured' in such a village.

Found cohousing: A term introduced by the authors to capture the idea that a group of households intent upon closer social relations may find accommodation and 'practice cohousing' without realising that they are doing so.

Social housing: An umbrella term for housing with a social purpose, as opposed to private or for-profit housing. In Australia, social housing includes public housing, community housing and indigenous housing but it is not clear whether it need be limited to these housing types.

Supplementary room: A spare room in a cohousing or social housing scheme that a household with a short-term need for more space may be allocated or rent (Coldham and Hartman Architects). In what are typically relatively small dwellings in cohousing or social housing, a household with more than one member engaged in study, for example, or a family in the process of splitting up can have a pressing need for another room. A supplementary room is accessed from a corridor or other common space in the housing scheme and the fact that it is remote from the dwelling acquiring it need not be detrimental to household functioning, as these examples suggest. A dedicated guest room is common in cohousing and is the most obvious instance of this general idea, and may be its origin. Studios or supplementary rooms dedicated or given over to young people, sometimes from outside the community, can be found in European cohousing (Field Notes 1, see also Sibelius Park). Unfortunately, no evaluations of their effectiveness are available.

BIOGRAPHY

Greg Bamford is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at The University of Queensland, with a PhD in Philosophy. He teaches people/environment studies and design studios. His research interests include cohousing and the social aspects of housing generally, housing density and urban form.

Lea Lennon is a final year student at the University of Queensland currently completing a Masters of Architecture by course work. Research into alternative housing models in medium density urban contexts is currently being explored through her final year urban master planning and design project in Brisbane's West End.

The views expressed in this Note are the views of the author(s) only and not necessarily those of the Australian Council of Built Environment Design Professions Ltd (BEDP), The Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) or any other person or entity.

This Note is published by the RAIA for BEDP and provides information regarding the subject matter covered only, without the assumption of a duty of care by BEDP, the RAIA or any other person or entity.

This Note is not intended to be, nor should be, relied upon as a substitute for specific professional advice.

Copyright in this Note is owned by The Royal Australian Institute of Architects.