

... to maintain a business as usual model of urban development is to condemn the future population and industry of that city to a sub-optimal living and working environment.

(Dr Peter Newton, *Reshaping the future of cities*)<sup>1</sup>

## Planning and settlement patterns

- 4.1 There is an increasing number of urban dwellers; however, this increased population is not homogenous. Rather, the increase in city inhabitants is accompanied by a diversification of lifestyle preferences, ranging from high density inner city apartment dwellers to the small acreage on city outskirts to self-contained village type suburban lifestyles.
- 4.2 In growing urban and suburban areas, a dichotomy of development is emerging that features both larger dwellings on smaller allotments and 'rural residential living' – both claiming lifestyle appeal. 'Empty nesters' and ageing communities continue to occupy large family homes and are reluctant to leave familiar neighbourhoods and valued services.
- 4.3 There are a number of possible planning scenarios that could shape our future cities. However, allowing cities to continue to grow without strategic forethought can only result in more dispersed cities characterised by economic stratification, high infrastructure costs, and inequitable access to and provision of public services.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Peter Newton, 'Reshaping the future of cities', *Ecos*, Jan-Mar 2004, p. 9.

## Recent trends – decreased household size and increased dwelling size<sup>2</sup>

- 4.4 Australia has a culture and an expectation of home ownership. With city growth inflating land and so housing prices in inner urban areas, the issue of housing affordability is relevant to discussions on creating liveable cities.
- 4.5 The strong desire for home ownership is not unique to Australia. 70 per cent of Australians either own their home outright (30 per cent) or are paying off a mortgage (40 per cent). This is a somewhat higher level of homeownership than the United States (67 per cent) and United Kingdom (69 per cent) but lower than New Zealand (71 per cent) and several European countries including Spain at 83 per cent. France (55 per cent), Germany (45 per cent) and the Netherlands (51 per cent) are significantly lower.<sup>3</sup> Despite the increased difficulty of entering the housing market (in some areas), housing preference studies indicate that close to 90 per cent of Australians aspire to owning their own home and that home ownership is an integral part of the traditional 'Aussie dream'.
- 4.6 The drift to urban fringe areas where land prices are lower makes possible for many the 'dream' of home ownership. The Productivity Commission reports that because of house price growth outpacing incomes, the affordability point beyond which houses are affordable for families on average weekly earnings has moved several kilometres away from the city centre in both Sydney and Melbourne.<sup>4</sup> These calculations of affordability, whether undertaken by economists or by potential home buyers, do not appear to take into consideration the longer term transport costs associated with life in some outer suburbs, where public transport is poorly provided, if provided at all.
- 4.7 However, aside from price increases, perhaps the most radical shift in home ownership profiles is the move to larger dwelling size and reduced household numbers.<sup>5</sup> This has the effect of further increasing the relative cost of home ownership.

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2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends 2003: Housing – housing arrangements: Home ownership across Australia*.

3 Productivity Commission, *Report on First Home Ownership*, Canberra, June 2005, Table 2.3, p. 33.

4 Productivity Commission, *Report on First Home Ownership*, Canberra June 2005, p. 25.

5 From 1991 to 2001, Australia's population increased by just over 10 per cent and yet the number of dwellings increased by more than 20 per cent. Further, between 1992 and 1999, the average house size of new private sector houses in Australia increased by around 15 per cent (from 187 to 215 square metres).

- 4.8 While the number of three bedroom houses decreased only slightly over the last 30 years or so (from 50.3 to 48.1 per cent), the change in dwelling size is demonstrated by four or more bedroom houses nearly doubling (from 13.3 to 25.7 per cent).
- 4.9 Over the same period, the number of households with five or more residents reduced by more than a third (from 33.3 to 10.6 per cent), and the number of one resident households nearly doubled (from 13.6 to 24.0 per cent).<sup>6</sup>
- 4.10 The effect of such a shift has been described to the committee as ‘under-occupation’ of houses. For example, Mr Karel Eringa of Shelter WA told the committee that in Perth, between 40 and 50 per cent of houses are under-occupied, meaning that they have spare bedrooms.<sup>7</sup>
- 4.11 The change in dwelling size and household numbers has not been accompanied by any marked change in (or preference for) the *type* of housing. There remains a strong preference (93 per cent describing it as either ‘very’ or ‘quite’ attractive) for ‘stand alone type’ housing on a separated block of land. This is despite a high level of support expressed for sustainable urban design. In the matter of home ownership, the low density suburbia model remains dominant and most attractive.
- 4.12 The committee stresses this data and settlement preferences as it indicates strongly the apparent contradiction between community support for sustainable living principles, and individuals’ preferences for settlement and housing options.

## Shaping our cities

- 4.13 As discussed in the previous chapter, shaping our future cities requires a national agenda of coordinated governance on sustainability.
- 4.14 The shape of our cities will largely determine the social connectedness of communities, the transport networks required, and the physical size of our cities. Researchers have modelled a number of possible planning designs for the future, including:
- The ‘compact’ city, which increases the proportion of high density inner city living. The inner city region remains the ‘hub’ for central business and development radiates out around this focus. This model has been

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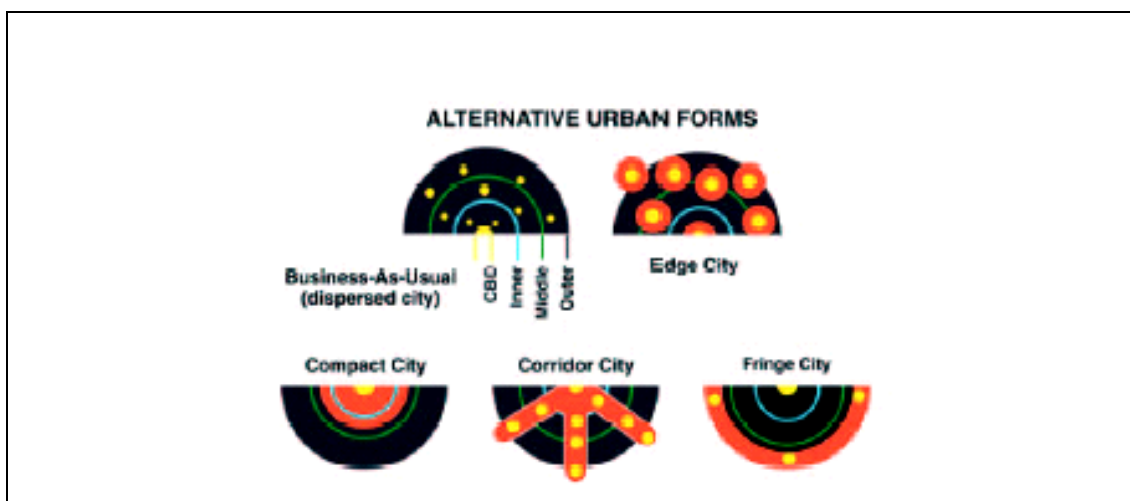
6 In the five years between 1996 and 2001, of the number of additional households, around one third (approximately 154,600) consisted of a single person.

7 Mr Karel Eringa, Shelter WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 March 2005, p. 54.

the traditional development pattern of most cities, with development (and services) becoming gradually less dense, the further from the central city area.

- The 'edge' city, which increases population density at selected outer nodes and increases investment in public transport and freeway networks to interconnect these nodes. This pattern has developed to a limited extent in some city regions where expansions have 'enveloped' what were once smaller regional towns (for example Dandenong or Frankston in the Melbourne area). The townships then become suburbs of the larger metropolitan area, but usually retain a central business and shopping area, and already have an established range of services and infrastructure. This model would see the development of these nodal 'townships' to form cities within cities. However, the 'townships' are not necessarily evenly spread around a city area and there may be limited scope for connections into the central city area.
- The 'corridor' city, which encourages nodal growth along city arterials and retains the inner city as the central hub with upgraded public transport radial links.
- The 'fringe' city, which expands to develop new centres on the outer regions of the city.
- The 'ultra' city which stimulates business centres in surrounding regional townships and provides high speed commuter linkages.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 4.1 Dr Peter Newton's Model of Cities



Source Dr Peter Newton, 'Reshaping the future of cities', *Ecos*, Jan-Mar 2004, p. 8.

8 These possible models are based on the six scenarios examined in the 2004 CSIRO study 'Reshaping Cities for a More Sustainable Future', *Ecos*, Jan-Mar 2004.

- 4.15 Integral to some of these designs are decentralised concentrations of residential and commercial developments, or 'urban hubs'. Urban hubs typically include a range of community and support facilities, recreational services, public spaces and residential complexes.
- 4.16 There are advantages and challenges to each model. To a large extent, it is the implementation, provision of services, and community development within each model that will determine the liveability of an area, its environmental sustainability, and its economic performance. Most large urban areas incorporate aspects of each model – cities within cities.

### Densification or sprawl – responses

- 4.17 The inquiry has generated substantial debate about desirable levels of housing density in our cities, the creation of cities within cities or 'hubs', the provision of services to greenfield sites, the integration of housing types in newly developed areas, housing affordability, and how we develop communities rather than only build housing estates.
- 4.18 The variation of views on these issues was substantial, and comments ranged from citizen concern over changes to the character of a local neighbourhood to policy concerns linking urban form to economic wealth and social well-being.
- 4.19 Issues of urban infill and higher density housing in our cities are particularly emotive. Much evidence to the committee considered the move to higher density housing as detrimental to the liveability of a city, destroying the character of areas, and as leading to social isolation and a number of social problems.
- 4.20 This view appears to be related to earlier models of high density public housing that feature in many cities. Governments are now looking to move to more positive and integrated models of public housing that do provide opportunities for community involvement, incorporate public spaces and recreation facilities, and are well serviced by public transport, schools and employment opportunities. The committee notes that much of the community concern about higher density development relates to the traffic congestion occasioned by an increase in population (and consequently automobile) density. Increasing population density without improving the provision of public transport is a recipe for congestion. On the other hand, if greater density enables the provision of significantly improved public transport, the consequence may be a reduction in car use and, as a result, less congestion.

- 4.21 The committee recognises, in some of the community fears expressed, the desire not to repeat the mistake of this type of urban development that is often considered both a physical eyesore and the site of many social problems.
- 4.22 However, the committee believes it important to ensure that high density is 'uncoupled' from an association with this earlier form of high-rise housing.
- 4.23 An example of a modern approach to high density is Inkerman Oasis in Melbourne, a recently developed set of inner city apartments.

### **Case Study: Inkerman Oasis Development**

The Inkerman Oasis development is an inner city housing redevelopment site. It incorporates many sustainability features in terms of urban layout, design and solar orientation of units, natural ventilation, water treatment, and open community space. It is designed to integrate into the existing character of the neighbourhood and provide a mix of housing styles and affordability.

Port Phillip Council developed the site jointly with private company Inkerman Developments. A proportion of housing units developed are designated for community housing.

The project has recycled the architecturally significant 'Destructor Building' and includes ecologically sustainable design features, integrated art and public walkways. Constructed over a 4 year period, beginning in late 2000, as a \$50 million residential development, it consists of 237 units in 6 buildings of 3 to 5 levels. The project comprises 32 units of social housing, which are largely indistinguishable from the private apartments.

The project has the following sustainable design features:

- Orientation of most of the buildings to achieve optimum solar access to living areas for a majority of units (66 per cent facing north, 22 per cent facing east-west, 12 per cent facing south);
- Solar hot water for 16 of the community housing units located within one building;
- Solar communal lighting along public access walkways across the project;
- Roof gardens on top of the 240-car sub-basement car park. The car park includes bicycle storage areas;
- Non-mechanical ventilation of the sub-basement car park by natural air movement created by voids cut out of the sub-basement car park roof;

- Cross flow ventilation of units from louvered windows at each end of units and connected to internal passages and shafts in buildings to increase natural ventilation and minimise use of mechanical ventilation or air conditioning;
- Landscaping largely with native plants;
- Units designed to generally have an energy rating of 3.5-4.5 stars; and
- Two public pedestrian routes through the site to guarantee pedestrian permeability.

4.24 While many people are concerned that higher density inner city housing causes increasing social isolation, others favour those options as injecting a new community spirit or vitality into existing areas of older type housing, and also as meeting increasing housing demand while minimising sprawl into bushland or the development of remaining urban green areas:

Most cities are in need of an urban growth boundary. This not only protects significant bushland but stimulates re-growth in otherwise older defunct areas. It essentially re-vitalises older suburbs by re-developing with higher densities to accommodate the increase in population.<sup>9</sup>

4.25 The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) also suggests that the population increase of cities need not be at the expense of heritage buildings or bushland areas. Buildings may be of 'architectural and historic merit' and parklands are 'not pools of land waiting to be diverted to a more profitable use'.<sup>10</sup> The Trust supports higher urban densities to reduce urban sprawl:

... but only where this can be accommodated in an overall aim, that of maintaining and enhancing a varied and interesting urban, suburban and rural fringe environment. The preservation of heritage assets, including buildings, streetscapes, parklands, rural and bushland environments is a critical component of this process.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Mr Laurel Smith, *Submission 16*, p. 2.

10 The National Trust of Australia (Victoria), *Submission 28*, p. 2.

11 The National Trust of Australia (Victoria), *Submission 28*, p. 2

- 4.26 The committee notes that the term ‘sprawl’ is usually applied in a pejorative sense and implies an unplanned and chaotic spread of homogenous housing, usually in fringe areas bereft of services or in gated-type communities. Higher density housing is often posed as the antidote to urban sprawl and, in some instances, vice versa – Greenfield urban expansion is considered the antidote to lifeless inner city apartment complexes.
- 4.27 The committee considers both views to be emotive reactions that do not allow for the possibility of planned developments – either in city expansion at the edges or through the densification of infill city areas. The committee is also of the view that there are many examples to be seen of both ‘worst practice’ sprawl and densification. However, these examples of worst practice should not be taken as automatic condemnation of any city expansion or densification. As our city populations increase, we will need to both expand the city fringe and to increase housing densities. The issue is to what degree this takes place and how these developments are managed to create sustaining communities and liveable cities.
- 4.28 The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) draws comparisons between the population and land area of Melbourne and London, and Australian trends to greater private car transport and decreasing household size. The Trust comments on the Australian preference for individual homes and private cars which has:
- . . . fostered the development of spreading suburbs and continuing encroachment of housing into the rural fringe around our cities.<sup>12</sup>
- 4.29 The Trust also quotes the 1996 Australia State of the Environment Report’s figures on the decline of the average household size as the other factor driving the city expansion, commenting that ‘there are more houses for the same number of people’. Melbourne, for example:
- . . . has a population density of 13-18 persons per hectare, compared to 54 and 160 in Europe and Asia respectively (Australia’s State of the Environment Report, 1996, p.3-10).<sup>13</sup>

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12 The National Trust of Australia (Victoria), *Submission 28*, p. 1.

13 The National Trust of Australia (Victoria), *Submission 28*, pp. 2-3. The Trust points out that Melbourne, which has a population of just over three and a half million people, occupies an area around the size of Greater London, which has a population of nine million. Melbourne will ‘inevitably grow’, given a further one million people are expected over the next three decades, needing a further 730,000 households approximately.



- 4.30 The committee is aware that there is some strong opposition in many communities to higher density housing options in cities. Save Our Suburbs NSW Inc, for example, refutes what it cites as the rationale for a shift to higher density housing, arguing that:

There is no developed high-density city in the world which does not experience extreme traffic congestion (even with highly developed public transport systems)... As typically only 40% of a city is comprised of residential areas the area saved by higher population densities (unless these are truly heroic) is negligible...<sup>14</sup>

- 4.31 On the other hand, research and consultancy firm Alexandra and Associates Pty Ltd advised the committee that:

... allowing further urban sprawl on the fringes of large cities generates a wide range of significant social and environmental impacts. ...poor planning decisions frequently result in isolated "poverty traps" on the periphery of our large cities, where transport costs are high and social infrastructure often poor.<sup>15</sup>

- 4.32 According to Alexandra and Associates Pty Ltd, urban consolidation and urban sprawl are currently occurring simultaneously, with large numbers of new fringe estates while high and medium density housing is being built in established areas. This suggests a failure of policy makers and planners to facilitate a consumer shift from the traditional 'quarter acre block', which 'remains the dominant model on the outskirts of Australia's major cities'.<sup>16</sup>

- 4.33 Mr Daniel Ouma-Machio also told the committee that development must be moderated within the greater framework of sustainable communities and serviced cities:

Australian cities could in this instance learn from the British approach where urban redevelopment and renewal programmes must result in improvements to the environment, the social services as well as the economic/employment opportunities and transport services of the targeted communities.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Save Our Suburbs NSW Inc, *Submission 23*, pp. 2-3. The submission comments on increased traffic congestion, which increases atmospheric pollution and mentions the high correlation between population density and concentration of exhaust pollutants. Further, it argues that multiunit housing costs 1 ½ to 2 more than a single residential housing and that higher density retrofitting does not save long-term infrastructure expenditure, because 'the existing infrastructure is then overloaded, necessitating expensive inefficient piecemeal upgrades'.

15 Alexandra and Associates Pty Ltd, *Submission 22*, p. 1.

16 Alexandra and Associates Pty Ltd, *Submission 22*, p. 4.

17 Mr Daniel Ouma-Machio, *Submission 65*, p. 3.

- 4.34 The committee has drawn two conclusions from the evidence. Firstly, there is no simple solution to the expansion or consolidation of our cities. Neither concept is in itself the answer to a more sustainable city, nor intrinsically an indicator of an unsustainable city.
- 4.35 Given that city populations are not static and substantial population increases are expected in some cities, it is to be expected that all our cities will need to plan for a measure of consolidation and expansion. However, the evidence received indicates strongly the need for local consultations, appropriate approval processes, and an approach to planning which has a holistic regard for building vital communities.
- 4.36 Secondly, current growth patterns (incorporating both consolidation and expansion) are to a large degree driven by consumer demand. Some sectors of the population are seeking large housing estates on the fringe of the city, because of the prohibitive cost of housing closer to central city areas or the sense of safety of fringe housing estates. Others seek high density inner city housing to reduce commuting time, achieve low maintenance type living, and reduce housing costs due to down-sized dwellings (although high density complexes can range from affordable to exorbitant depending on locality and features).

## Coastal cities

- 4.37 The committee did not receive many submissions from coastal areas addressing the particular concerns that may affect coastal city sustainability. The committee notes, however, that Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), with financial assistance from the Australian Government, recently undertook a survey of coastal councils.<sup>18</sup>
- 4.38 A quarter of all Australians live within three kilometres of the coast, and this proportion continues to increase. The survey found that 87 per cent of coastal councils experienced population increases over the last five years and of these, over 60 per cent have experienced annual growth rates of three per cent or more. This massive population influx makes planning and provision of infrastructure and services difficult for many councils. These communities are also attracting and retaining a very high percentage of older Australians. Many coastal communities already have more than 25 per cent of their population aged over 65; the percentage of over 65s Australia is projected to have by mid century.<sup>19</sup> This movement to non-metropolitan coastal communities has been described as the 'sea

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<sup>18</sup> Australian Local Government Association, *Coastal survey report*, February 2005.

<sup>19</sup> See ABS Population Projections for Statistical Local Areas 1999-2019, Catalogue Number 3220.0.

change' phenomenon and has been the subject of several conferences and studies aimed at developing a national approach to managing and co-ordinating coastal development and infrastructure.

- 4.39 In addition, 67 per cent of coastal councils reported experiencing increased pressure from tourism over the last five years. For instance, on average, coastal shires in Victoria must plan for their population to increase two and a half fold during peak tourism periods.
- 4.40 Coastal councils' environmental challenges are a consequence of the rapid growth and demographic composition of their population. Often, inadequate endeavours have been made to maintain high quality urban design which preserves biodiversity and natural beauty. Water management is a major issue, both in terms of ensuring water supply is adequate and in managing run-off and stormwater.
- 4.41 The committee is aware that another issue of concern to coastal communities is the encroachment of unsustainable and inappropriate developments and the absence of Australian Government guidelines in these areas.
- 4.42 Along these lines, with significant population pressures, coastal areas of Australia often lack the infrastructure, such as transport and public health, that their growth in population demands. Consistent with recommendations relating to outer urban areas, the committee views settlement patterns and our response to them as integral to the creation of more sustainable cities.
- 4.43 The committee concludes that problems experienced in coastal areas may be more acute than those in the major cities. However, the same principles apply - if change in the types of consolidation and expansion is to take place, then there must also be a shift in consumer drivers to value developments that plan for and incorporate the features of a sustaining community - whether these be greenfield or infill type developments, and medium or high density housing.
- 4.44 The committee notes the existence of the National Sea Change Task Force and believes that work carried out by this organisation in the areas of governance, infrastructure funding, planning and urban design responses to population pressure will further address the issues discussed above.

## A national population policy?

4.45 A number of submissions received to the inquiry argued the need for a national population policy. Submissions referred to a range of reasons for a population policy, including the need to limit cities to an optimal population size, promoting regional settlement to counter urban drift and limiting immigration numbers in order to control population growth.<sup>20</sup>

4.46 Sustainable Population Australia (Canberra Region) identified its central concern as population size and growth, and the impact of resource constraints in Australia and worldwide, noting that these issues are frequently overlooked in debate on public policy:

More people, more demand for goods and services, greater and greater pressure on limited and diminishing resources - that is the reality of our world.<sup>21</sup>

4.47 The organisation regards the point that Australian cities will continue to grow in numbers as an assumption, which it would expect, given the 'explosive growth' in the size and number of cities and 'the projection of future population increases for Australia' to 2025:

Further growth, however, will add to the challenge of maintaining existing standards, let alone improving the efficiency of cities.<sup>22</sup>

4.48 Sustainable Population Australia (Canberra Region) concludes that further growth will exacerbate the problems:

Unless humanity becomes far less wasteful of the world's precious and limited resources, our very survival is not assured. The more of us there are, the more difficult the challenge becomes to live within the earth's capacity to sustain us.<sup>23</sup>

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20 See for example Sustainable Population Australia (Canberra Region), *Submission 49*; Mr Gordon Hocking, *Submission 26*.

21 Sustainable Population Australia (Canberra Region), *Submission 49*, p. 45.

22 Sustainable Population Australia (Canberra Region), *Submission 49*, p. 451.

23 Sustainable Population Australia (Canberra Region), *Submission 49*, p. 452.

4.49 Similarly, Mr Gordon Hocking comments that sustainability cannot be achieved without limits to city growth and population numbers and points out that:

... sustainability is about limiting the demands of society on environmental and material resources in order to maintain a predictable and sufficient yield from those resources.<sup>24</sup>

4.50 The committee notes that Mr Hocking's concerns about the growth of particular cities are widespread, but recognises that in a free society, it is simply not possible to prevent people from living in a city if they choose to do so. Restricting development in a city, with a view to constraining population growth, runs the risk that lower income earners are simply priced out of the city. This is not only indefensible in terms of social equity, but fails to recognise that every city needs workers at ever income level in order to function. A city cannot function if nurses, teachers, labourers and waiters cannot afford to buy a home. As discussed in a subsequent chapter, a large part of the answer lies in swift, reliable and affordable public transport.

4.51 While the terms of reference, direction of the inquiry, and the majority of the evidence received did not address issues of population policy, a concern of the committee is the shaping of settlement patterns across Australia. The committee expects that a future sustainability charter would address issues of population and settlement policy.

## **Building communities**

### **Population health**

4.52 The committee received a substantial amount of evidence on the importance of developing integrated and connected communities within our cities. As cities grow, it was suggested that people will identify more with the local area than with the larger city, and so local connections and community interactions are critical in establishing a sense of well-being and identity.

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24 Mr Gordon Hocking, *Submission 26*, p. 148.

- 4.53 The committee was made aware of research relating to Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).<sup>25</sup> CPTED strategies focus on the design and management of the built environment towards creating safer, more liveable and sustainable urban communities.
- 4.54 Health professionals and researchers stressed the importance of urban design to ensure the health and well-being of urban populations.<sup>26</sup> The committee heard that in the past, the emphasis had been on a responsive health care approach to treat illness. The challenge for the future is to halt the growing incidence of preventable diseases and conditions, many of which are regarded as a direct result of urban living patterns.
- 4.55 Obesity, diabetes, heart conditions, depression, mental illness and high blood pressure have increased markedly in the last few decades, in particular in urban areas where the rate of physical activity is reduced and social isolation is increased.
- 4.56 The key message from health professionals is that sustainable cities are a population health issue. Designing urban areas with recreational spaces, and scope for a variety of safe and accessible active transport options encourages a fit and healthy population.
- 4.57 Further, communities with a sense of identity and social support encourage more active lifestyles and social interaction. This can provide vital support and is an important element in the social well-being of urban residents.<sup>27</sup>
- 4.58 Health professionals stressed the need for public spaces where communities can share ownership of the facilities – whether these are community buildings or open park spaces. Local shopping areas also serve a vital social role, particularly for the elderly and young families.

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25 See Dr Paul Cozens, *Urban Sustainability and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) in Western Australia*. Paper presented at the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary State Conference: Western Australian 2029 – A Shared Journey. See also ‘Sustainable Urban Development and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design for the British City. Towards an Effective Urban Environmentalism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ in *Cities: The International Journal of Urban Policy and Planning*. Volume 19 Number 2, pp. 129-137.

26 Dr Steven Boyages, Western Sydney Area Health Service and Dr Anthony Capon, Western Sydney Area Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 27 January 2004, pp. 26-37; see also Ms Helen Jones, Sydney South West Area Health Service and Dr Anthony Capon, Western Sydney Area Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 April 2005, pp. 20- 22.

27 A particular example of an organisation providing a sense of identity and social support is Celebrate WA; see [www.celebratewa.com.au](http://www.celebratewa.com.au)

4.59 The committee also notes that city expansion has the potential to create locational disadvantage, including lack of employment opportunities, transport difficulties and social isolation. Mrs Marilyn Horgan, from the Perth Area Consultative Committee, told the committee that:

Social issues were particularly pertinent in the outer metropolitan area: isolation, marginalisation, youth employment and dissociation issues reflected high levels of concern, as well as low incomes, high welfare dependency and low school retention rates ...<sup>28</sup>

4.60 Consideration of population health is therefore a key issue in building sustainable cities. In addition to the importance of open spaces and urban layouts which encourage physical activity, health professionals also raised accessibility (in both cost and availability) to fresh produce as a key issue for future population health.

4.61 As cities grow and land prices increase, house allotments become smaller and apartment or townhouse style living becomes more prevalent. This makes households less able to support the traditional 'backyard vegetable garden' and more reliant on the purchase of fresh fruit and vegetables. 'Time poverty', due to increased travel time, is also cited as a reason for the decline of the individual vegetable garden. This greater reliance on the purchase of fresh produce can impose greater living costs on families and affirms the need for affordable available fresh produce in urban areas.

4.62 As the physical size of our urban areas increases, the distance between agricultural growing areas and retail outlets also increases, resulting in increased transport costs and an increased risk of spoilage (additional costs passed on to the consumer). Timely and cost effective freight networks (considered in chapter 5) are important.

4.63 The committee also heard evidence on the possibility of utilising otherwise 'unusable' space (such as rooftops) for produce growing, and also evidence on the social benefits of community allotments for vegetable gardening. Roof top gardens can serve as dual purpose as they 'provide building insulation and extend communal green space'.<sup>29</sup> They should be 'routinely designed into high rise buildings'.<sup>30</sup>

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28 Mrs Marilyn Horgan, Perth Area Consultative Committee, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 March 2005, p. 20.

29 Urban Ecology Australia Inc, *Submission 63*, p. 3.

30 Australian Farmers' Market Association, *Submission 174*, p. 8.

- 4.64 The committee also sees great benefits in community gardening or cooperative neighbourhood allotments for fresh produce and enhancing social networks.
- 4.65 The committee urges local governments to consider mechanisms to provide seed funding to initiate projects of this type, or access to local government owned land for community gardening projects.

## Master communities

- 4.66 'Master communities' are large new home communities that typically feature parks, recreational areas, schools and community shopping.
- 4.67 The committee visited some master community developments that incorporated innovative approaches to biodiversity (through the protection of threatened habitat areas), storm water recycling, recreation spaces and considered future public transport options.
- 4.68 The developments are planned and sold as master communities – implying that community development is an integral element of the holistic construction of the area. However, it appeared that, in many instances, they provided largely homogenous housing with few facilities in proximity, or opportunities for neighbourhood or community development.
- 4.69 The committee observed several weaknesses in the approach to such master communities, due to a failure to integrate master communities with surrounding community infrastructure. Local government often does not have the resources to properly regulate and respond to master community developments. Often the disparity in resources between local governments and developers capable of undertaking master community development leaves local government unable to negotiate on equal terms. The committee is concerned that these master communities may increasingly take on the form of gated communities.
- 4.70 The committee recognises that each spatial location will bring its unique set of challenges and constraints; however, as a vision for what will create sustaining and healthy communities, it is productive to clearly establish what are seen as our goals in terms of community needs. How these needs are factored into the construction of an area will necessarily vary and the committee has no intention of setting down prescriptive requirements.
- 4.71 Development companies should integrate research about future communities and excel at what we regard now as best practice in certain areas of sustainability (such as water management, or biodiversity). Companies must take a greater initiative in directing potential buyers to



value the long term benefits of community developments, to provide developments which are amenable to changing family needs, and cater to a range of housing affordability options.

## Consultation processes

- 4.72 Most submissions to the inquiry endorsed the need for the conservation of biodiversity and the preservation of green and open spaces within our urban areas. However, few submissions provided detail about how this should be achieved or how green our cities should be.
- 4.73 One issue which did receive some comment was the use of green zones or green wedges placed around metropolitan areas to curtail further development or conserve remnant bushland.
- 4.74 The strength of personal concerns raised in a number of submissions drew the committee's attention to the importance of consultation processes and facilitation to provide a 'fair hearing' and to ensure that reasoning behind decisions made is communicated effectively to those affected.<sup>31</sup>
- 4.75 Another example of polarisation and scepticism about consultation processes occurred during a committee public hearing in Canberra, where demonstrators from the 'Save the Ridge' group disrupted the evidence being given by the National Capital Authority and the Australian Capital Territory Government. The Save the Ridge representatives wished to register their opposition to the clearing of bushland in order to extend a connecting roadway through to the suburb of Gungahlin.<sup>32</sup>
- 4.76 Without offering an opinion on the issue, it is clear that the process of community decision-making can not be said to have succeeded in this case- different community and local government groups were 'at loggerheads'.
- 4.77 Such divisive situations are no doubt detrimental to the vision of vibrant communities and local governments working to achieve a sustainable future.
- 4.78 The committee was impressed by Professor Valerie Brown, who outlined a comprehensive consultation and negotiation process in regard to community planning and decision making. Professor Brown made the point that, through discussions and facilitation, the seemingly divergent views of developers, planners and policy makers, and local community

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31 An example of a lack of such processes was related to the committee by the residents of Park Orchard, reaffirming to the committee the sensitive nature of planning decisions. See Ms Beverly Olsson, *Submission 10*.

32 *Transcript of Evidence*, 4 March 2004, p. 14.

were able to discover common goals and achieve an uncontested planning decision. Referring to one particular case, Professor Brown explained that the protracted process of consultation was more than rewarded by the community development that took place and the planning outcomes and local support for appropriate changes which was achieved:

... after a process that brought these people together so that they heard each other they put in a structure plan which allowed farmers to remain where they were, estate agents to make a profit and young people to earn a living.<sup>33</sup>

4.79 The committee strongly encourages local government to consider these innovative types of approaches and to view consultation not as a process to seek agreement to proposed changes, but as an opportunity to negotiate towards amenable outcomes, while engendering community spirit and support.

4.80 Dr Andrew Montgomery of the Western Australian Government also gave evidence that the planning process is becoming more inclusive:

The old days of technical- or professional-led planning – the ‘have we got a plan for you’ type of thing – have really rolled right out, and now we are talking about a lot of the processes rather than the plans. We want to develop processes, frameworks and policy strategies which are more flexible rather than to say, ‘This is the plan; we have got the final plan and we will sign off on a particular date.’<sup>34</sup>

4.81 The committee believes it is important to stress to local governments in the strongest possible terms the importance of achieving agreed outcomes wherever possible, and the virtue of investigating facilitated decision making models (such as that espoused by Professor Brown). While the physical outcomes of planning decisions are often dramatic, potentially more damaging may be the cost to a community.

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33 Professor Valerie Brown, ANU School of Resources, Environment and Society, *Transcript of Evidence*, 12 February 2004, p. 3. Professor Brown pointed out that only six objections to the structure plan were received, as opposed to the usual 300.

34 Dr Andrew Montgomery, Western Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 March 2005, p. 7.

## Development Assessment Forum

- 4.82 Development assessment and approval processes were raised by some as a flawed decision-making process and not conducive to the effective planning for future cities.
- 4.83 The committee is aware that this is an area in which a number of reforms are under way. The Development Assessment Forum (DAF) was established in 1998 in response to a review on compliance and paperwork burden imposed on small business, and in recognition of the need for regulatory reform in development building approval processes.
- 4.84 DAF was formed to bring together stakeholders in the development sector to reach agreement on ways to streamline development assessment and approval processes, and includes representatives from the Commonwealth, each State and Territory, local government, industry associations and professional associations.<sup>35</sup>
- 4.85 The committee notes the achievements of DAF to date and the cooperative manner in which DAF is coordinating the three tiers of government, communities and industry. Mr Peter Verwer, Chair of DAF and Chief Executive, explained the role of DAF:
- [DAF] is a process. It is a content-free zone because it is really the community, local councils and state governments which should decide what the planning policies are. DAF is just a better way of making decisions about whether a project conforms with criteria – whether it be environmental criteria or heights or whatever ...
- DAF separates the role of policy making – which is the proper role of the local parliament, the council – from development assessment ... It is a complete kit which is designed to speed things up.<sup>36</sup>
- 4.86 A number of focus groups have been run by DAF around Australia and the committee supports both the reforms proposed through DAF and the consultation process regarding the proposed model for a uniform development assessment system. In particular, the committee sees merit in the separation of the three stages of development approval into policy-making, assessment and regulation.

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35 Development Assessment Forum, *Submission 138*, p. 1.

36 Peter Verwer, Property Council of Australia (and Chair and Chief Executive of DAF), *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 March 2004, p. 19.

- 4.87 While DAF refers to community values and impacts on built and natural environments, the committee suggests a reframing to make overt that leading practices are based on sustainability principles.
- 4.88 The committee also notes that State and Territory governments are represented by departments responsible for planning, infrastructure and environmental issues, while at the federal level, representation comes from departments that are more focused on business and regulatory requirements.<sup>37</sup>
- 4.89 The committee considers that extending membership of the forum to the Department of Environment and Heritage and to the CSIRO would be beneficial in bringing national concerns and expertise regarding sustainability and urban design into DAF discussion.

#### **Recommendation 4**

- 4.90 **The committee recommends that the Department of Transport and Regional Services raise with the Development Assessment Forum the proposal to extend membership of the forum to representatives from the Department of Environment and Heritage and the CSIRO.**
- 4.91 The committee believes the Australian Sustainability Commission could usefully promote an informed understanding of, and debate about, sustainability. This would be achieved by regularly publishing studies of the way in which sustainability is being affected by developments in cities. This would be done with a view to creating a national database where Australians are able to track actual sustainability outcomes against initial forecasts.

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37 Commonwealth representatives are the Department of Transport and Regional Services, the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources and the Australian Building Codes Board.