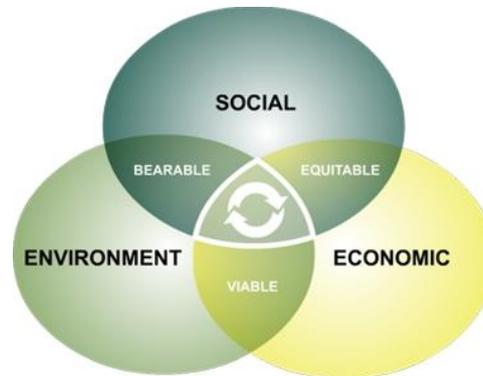


Sustainable urban density – does it really exist?

Residential densities are on the increase in many areas across Sydney at present, and you would be hard pressed to not notice that Lane Cove is part of this process. Whether this is good or bad is certainly a polarising argument with many different factors.

Over the next few months I will provide an overview of the pros and cons of ‘densification’ and its relationship with the so-called pillars of sustainability in this diagram – to which I would add cultural.



Sustainable density has been referenced frequently in recent media articles and on-line discussions, and has an important role in also helping to bridge the gap in housing supply and affordability given the right incentives and management. In my view the definition of sustainable density is *development that can deliver more proximity for more of the population to critical jobs, infrastructure, amenities and recreation space* - not necessarily in order of priority.

Such development does mean change in urban structure to increase equitable share and access to the resources critical to sustainable urban life, and goes beyond just the physical product or economic outcomes to the community, cultural and environmental outcomes as well. But this does not have to occur

Sustainable density can be woven into existing urban fabric by integrated design, utilizing the latent or supplemented potential of current community networks and infrastructure. This approach enables growth where benefits can be best realised, relieving pressure on sensitive open space, bushland or heritage areas, and avoiding need to keep pushing metro boundaries out into areas that require expensive new ‘greenfield’ development, extend travel times and eat into our peripheral but important agricultural lands.

What does it look like? Olympic Park (high rise – high density) at one end of scale and at the other? Lane Cove hopefully when new infill is complete - but key issues are to ensure we have well founded structure plans with initial community input, implementation by design excellence using competent and respected professionals, and quality review panels to ensure that the interpretation and implementation follows intent (often not the case).

In the online blog The Fifth Estate (thefifthestate.com.au) there is a recent edited extract from Professor Peter Newman of Curtin University in WA on his yet-to-be-published *Density, the Sustainability Multiplier: Some myths and Truths*.

With particular reference to Perth, Prof Newman debunks myths and offers some timely advice on benefits of sustainable urban density, while attracting a significant commentary on both sides of the argument.

<http://www.thefifthestate.com.au/archives/64481/>



[Peter Newman: the top 10 myths about high density - The Fifth Estate](#) « [The Fifth Estate](#) By Professor Peter Newman, Curtin University 9 July 2014

Comments:

Perhaps the biggest problem we face with designing and building affordable high density housing in Australia is the assumption that the car parking needs to be accommodated on the same site. Accommodating the geometry of the car, and the cost of building it its own little 35sqm studio apartment in the basement kills affordability and precludes many forms of low rise high density forms that would otherwise be financially viable.

Rod Simpson

AND I must point out that there are also weaknesses with some high-density and high-rise housing developments. Not all contribute to residential satisfaction, as post occupancy evaluations often reveal..... So let's have more evaluation so that we can confirm the contributors to resident satisfaction. We need EVIDENCE. What some research has revealed is that what neighbours and others fear is quite different from what the actual RESIDENTS experience.

Wendy Sarkissian

Along with continuous bullying to accommodate high rises, and the stress of losing our natural spaces, our wildlife, our freedom, our gardens, natural shade and sunlight, we sadly experience continued loss of real opportunities to participate in our political future. Planners have taken over government and they seem to care more about propaganda than democracy. It is really shocking to see this happening and try to stop it in the face of the machine of developer propaganda.

Nero Canidis

So density raises many different issues and perceptions, and calls for evidence based research. Another recent article refers to a case study from Arlington, USA where the origins of density increase started back in the 1960's while the freeway rollout was at its peak – and suggests that they have a model which is worth investigation.

http://www.salon.com/2014/07/06/the_suburb_of_the_future_is_here/

Why it's worked is because there was community consensus back in the '60s," explained Robert Brosnan, the director of Community Planning, Housing and Development in Arlington."

That lesson has spread to neighboring counties in the D.C. metro, which recently earned the top rating in a study of "walkable urban places" conducted by Leinberger and Patrick Lynch, of the George Washington University School of Business.

"What has happened in this region, which I have never seen anyplace else, is as other suburban areas begin to urbanize, neighborhood groups around them have organized to demand the county triple the density that's allowable," said Leinberger. In Fairfax County, where the Metro continues in the median of Interstate 66, planners and residents now seek to emulate Arlington's success.

I think Lane Cove has the potential to develop an exemplary model of sustainable density if ways can be found to deal with many of these challenges, and no doubt a few that are not mentioned. If any readers are interested in contributing to a forum on this subject please contact me.

Jon Johannsen 15/7/14