Courtyard housing has potential

It’s time to rethink our infill strategy, says Julian Bolleter and Dinis Candeias

Over the past 30 years, the densification of Perth’s middle ring suburbs has been achieved through the subdivision of typically quarter acre lots into three, four or more semi-detached “village” lots. 

Through the subdivision of typically useless residual areas, is that the amenity and ecological performance of our suburbs has been compromised — no wonder many communities are resistant to densification. At the lot scale we have identified, two main issues contribute to this detrimental situation.

Firstly, in a typical subdivided villa development, up to 30 per cent of the original lot is taken up by driveways which contribute little to the amenity or ecological function of the built environment. This desire to drive our cars up to, and into our houses, was inherited from the last half century of single-dwelling suburban development.

Despite the well-known environmental and health related problems associated with cars, having a secure double garage attached to the dwelling is still highly regarded by the property market.

Secondly, the direct application of minimum lot setbacks required by the current planning legislation produces residual private open space along fence lines — space which typically does not contribute to the amenity of the dwelling itself and is usually inhabited by the air conditioning unit.

In the Australian Urban Design Research Centre, one of our key agendas is developing new housing typologies to help achieve Perth’s densification targets. We believe there are genuine quality alternatives to the pattern of infill development. Our proposal for courtyard housing is one such alternative, but it requires that we question our preconceived notions of private parking and building setbacks.

Rather than car parking adjacent to the individual dwelling units, in our proposed courtyard housing model a communal parking court is at the front of the lot, above which could be a useful communal space. Further to this, allowing building to the lot boundary results in the reduction of typically useless residual private open spaces. In essence, our housing model trades off residual areas and expensive driveway surfaces for spacious, well-designed, private courtyards.

Recent studies in Perth have shown how highly we value our private outdoor spaces, as such this is a trade-off we believe many people will be willing to make.

The “detailed” issues of building setbacks and the provision of private car parking may appear relatively benign when viewed at the lot scale, however when multiplied many thousands of times across our rapidly densifying middle ring suburbs, the resulting detrimental effects are potentially huge.

In this context that we believe a courtyard housing typology offers a new dream for semi-suburban living in the 21st century — one in which density and amenity and ecological performance are not mutually exclusive.

Dr. Julian Bolleter and Dinis Candeias are from the Australian Urban Design Research Centre, Perth.

NEW APPROACH

PROPERTY

Exit opens up opportunity

A move by manufacturing and distribution group OneSteel has opened up a rare leasing opportunity in the tightly held industrial enclave of Kewdale. Located at 23 Chisholm Crescent, the property offers 330sqm of office and 870sqm of warehouse space, with 27,900sqm of hardstand. It is zoned general industry, opening it up to use by a wide range of industrial operators.

The site is available immediately with a minimum three-year lease term, plus option, at a rental of $800,000 per annum, plus outgoings.

Colliers International executive industrial sales and leasing Andrew Fife said he expected the property to be snapped up quickly.

“This property is superbly located with excellent access to major transport networks, including Roe and Toekin highways, and multiple entry and exit points to and from the site,” he said.

BAR Systems has extended its multimillion-dollar contract onshore and at the Australian Marine Complex.

The defence and security company signed a 17-year seven extension which included a 25-year lease for its shorefront land, ensuring it will continue to be a major player at the AMC until at least 2038.

According to Landcorp and the Department of Commerce, the extension was a vote of confidence for the complex and the WA economy.

Since its establishment, BAE and other local businesses have contributed to more than 400 major projects worth $1.6 billion delivered at the AMC since it opened in 2003.

Department of Commerce general manager John O’Hare said as part of its lease commitment, BAE Systems would invest more than $20 million in upgrades, including a new office building, shiplift upgrades and additional rail facilities, which will help the company grow its business.

Landcorp said BAE’s resources and energy contracts and commercial and defence ship repairs would continue to expand, adding to the already strong workforce across the AMC.

MMJ Real Estate WA is selling the commercial building at 345 Charles Street in North Perth.

Located near the Scarboro Beach Road intersection, the 870sqm site has two titles and a two-storey, 1350sqm building with covered parking.

The building’s features include a hydraulic goods lift connecting the warehouse and showroom areas.

The property will be sold via expressions of interest which close on March 5.

Alessandrina Property Group is marketing commercial space at the Currambine District Centre at $6000/sqm, plus GST, for sales and leasing rates of $4000/sqm, plus outgoings and GST, for tenants.

“Tenants already committed include a Dome cafe, dental surgery, restaurant, hair and beauty salon and an orthodontist, as well as professional offices,” Alessandrina Property Group’s director of commercial sales and leasing, Anthony Morabito, said.

“We are currently accepting expressions of interest for stage two, which contains 3600sqm of office, showroom and restaurant space, meaning that we have the flexibility to offer up to 3800sqm of commercial space in the one building.”

Tony Brooks, managing director of Alessandrina Property Group, said

Well-designed: A view of the courtyard housing typology. The typical three-villa development on the right is characterised by residual, and often unusable open space. Picture: The Australian Urban Design Research Centre