Here's an infill strategy

STREETWISE

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Three years ago we wrote about our research into the potential of lots fronting busy roads to accommodate higher density housing as part of a future, transit-oriented, infill development pattern for Perth. We argued that traditional housing struggled to cope with the noise and air quality impacts in these locations and that there was an opportunity, with smart design, to imagine new forms of housing in these locations.

This work was subsequently incorporated into the Transforming Perth report, jointly written by the Australian Urban Design Research Centre, the Property Council of Australia and the Greens (WA) and launched by Senator Scott Ludlam in February 2013. This work was well received across the industry and identified that a large proportion of Perth's infill housing target could be accommodated in this manner. Importantly the study only considered those lots fronting the busy roads, recognising the increasing difficulty of achieving density in the protected interior of established suburbs through zoning and policy changes where local residents quickly mobilise against increased traffic and perceived threats to suburban character.

The transition of existing residential areas to higher density, whether in discrete targeted locations or part of a broader precinct approach, has implications for the local neighbourhood. Our research often comes back to the same two questions: What can be done upfront to create incentives for existing residents and potential buyers or residents to embrace infill housing?

Our investigations continue to suggest that different kinds of infrastructure are required if we are to support infill housing. To win people over, the design of successful higher-density precincts often requires localised high-quality public spaces and urban landscapes, exceptional public and active transport facilities and neighbourhood traffic management.

The second question is how is that to be achieved? At least as far back as the State Sustainability Strategy in 2003, there was information available about the substantial cost to the State of infrastructure for each lot developed on the urban fringe. The counter is that infill dwellings can build on existing infrastructure and cost less in the short and long term.

As we highlight, it also appears infill housing needs other types of infrastructure investment to be successful.

How can we get access upfront to the benefits from a future reduction in housing on the urban fringe?

When combined with localised revenue this could be used to establish the neighbourhood and infrastructure framework that is critical to supporting an enduring and attractive pattern of urban infill.

This seems a key element if we are to address urban sprawl and the problems this pattern of settlement is presenting for our future.

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