MY BEST HOME

Information for designing the best homes for Cockburn's residents 50+

June 2019

Community Living	Multi-generational Living	House Share Familiar Relationship	Independent Living	House Share Unfamiliar relationship

Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**

AUDRC
Australian Urban Design Research Centre

City of **Cockburn**
wetlands to waves

The My Best Home project will improve the information available to residents, builders, designers, architects and real estate agents on how to design age friendly homes in Cockburn's most established suburban areas.

KEY THEMES

This report provides information to inform design briefs and priority housing characteristics for homes owners aged 50+ and wanting to right size in Cockburn. The detailed findings were gathered from 2 workshops undertaken in October 2018 and April 2019.

- Governance and relationships

- Design

- Common and shared spaces

- Safety and security

- Location criteria
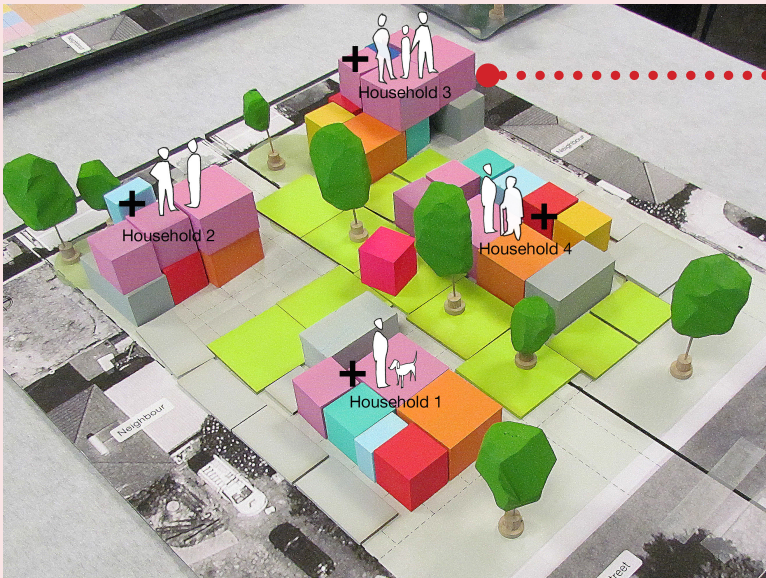
- Affordability

- Guidance and information

WHO IS THIS INFORMATION FOR?

This report is for residents and landowners when considering right sizing options. Importantly builders and designers will also find this information highly relevant to consider when designing new homes or modifying existing ones for residents 50+ in Cockburn.

Governance & Relationships

MY BEST HOME

Participant group design for the 'Community Living' + 'New Build 2+' housing option

Participant group discussing and prioritising the different patterns of living options

Composition and Governance of Small Community Living Environments

"A small number of units allows for easy negotiation of issues."

Overall there was a preference for small-scale shared or community living. For example, a group of friends or family coming together to convert a large existing family home or amalgamating two adjacent blocks to create two to four smaller dwellings with a mix of private and shared spaces.

Concern was raised about the ongoing governance and management of the residence and the communal/shared spaces. Additionally, the generational mix of the shared or community living environment was an important consideration. Although there was some apprehension around how different generations might interact. Ie. Intergenerational living vs seniors-only living.

Establishing and Maintaining Relationships

"You might lose a friend if you clash, but on the other hand you could meet someone new and make a friend."

Participants acknowledged that while shared or community living arrangements offer the potential for mutual social and practical support between residents, they also acknowledged that these living arrangements could lead to conflict; the management of which could become tenuous.
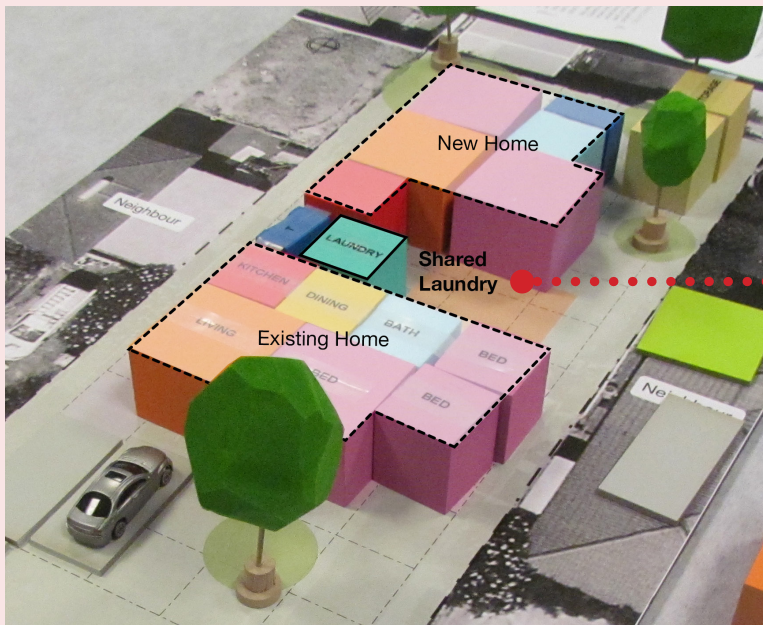
Sense of Community: Proximity to Neighbours and Friends

Participants expressed a strong attachment to their home and the immediate neighbourhood (family, friends, neighbours). There is a preference to remain where they currently live for as long as possible.

Key Theme:

Governance & Relationships

Group design for 'Multi-generational Living ' + 'New Build 1' housing option

Personal Space and Privacy

Loss or lack of personal space and privacy is a key concern for participants when considering a house share arrangement. Sharing some space is acceptable (i.e. kitchens, laundry, outdoor spaces) but additionally, participants value a sense of security, privacy, safety and the ability to control their living space.

Long-term Viability of Original Shared Living Arrangements

Participants were familiar with house sharing and envisaged this as a housing choice in the future. However, concerns were raised that if a resident required admission to an aged care facility, leaving the remaining person vulnerable at home.

Questions were raised about whether the house, share or community living arrangement would allow them the ability to age with dignity as their housing needs change over time. (i.e. requirement for residential carers, loss of independence)

Conversation about ongoing expenses such as maintenance, improvement or adaptions to the home, and the management of this.

Inflexibility of Strata Rules

"Strata arrangements are strict – can't do your own thing."
Despite favouring a community or shared living environment participants did not want to substitute their current living autonomy for inflexible strata rules and prohibitive fees.

Key Theme:

Design

Group design for 'Independent Living' + 'Adaption and Modifications' housing option

4.5 m

2 Bedroom + 2 Bathroom

Design Flexibility As Household Structures Change

Housing should be easily adaptable for the changing family or individual circumstances. More specifically the provision of future care needs. Can access to bathrooms or upstairs bedrooms, where necessary, be achieved? Universal design features were seen to be essential.

Independence and Separation In One Household

Adequate space and planning of the private and semi-private spaces (thresholds) was seen as imperative to preserve the privacy and autonomy of residents and mitigate the potential for any tension between residents. Multi-generational living should not mean a household member becomes free baby sitter or cleaner.

Rooms Sizes Should Accommodate Different Needs And Uses

"Rooms are not big enough. Where can we put a book shelf or study nook?"
Participants felt newer housing focuses on the number of bedrooms instead of the square meterage and practical usability of rooms. The participants agreed that bedrooms specifically had to be of adequate size to accommodate personal belongings, furniture, easy access and future flexibility. *"Create a second master suite with internal modifications which suits guests or makes it adaptable to potential house share arrangements."*

House Design Meets Individual Needs

Participants showed a desire to be involved in the design process. Accessibility and adaptability is a key concern regardless of living arrangement. The diverse values, interests and preferences of older people should be considered when designing for this demographic.

Design

Participant group design for the 'Community Living' + 'New Build 2+' housing option

Adequate Space and Land To Accommodate Community Living

There was a common perception that the typical block size (720sqm) would not allow sufficient space for private dwellings and shared spaces. This view is reinforced by the number of insufficient examples of successful shared or community housing developments.

Parking Concerns And Trade-Offs

Participants typically have a single or double garage and a driveway for extra parking. Most believed parking space would be reduced with shared or community living. Adapting to this change was seen as necessary but not easily embraced. Technological changes may help to mitigate these concerns.

Design Quality Is Of High Importance

Construction Quality And Thermal Performance

Properly constructed and insulated homes are important in terms of cost saving and well being.

Granny Flats Suitability For 'Rightsizers'
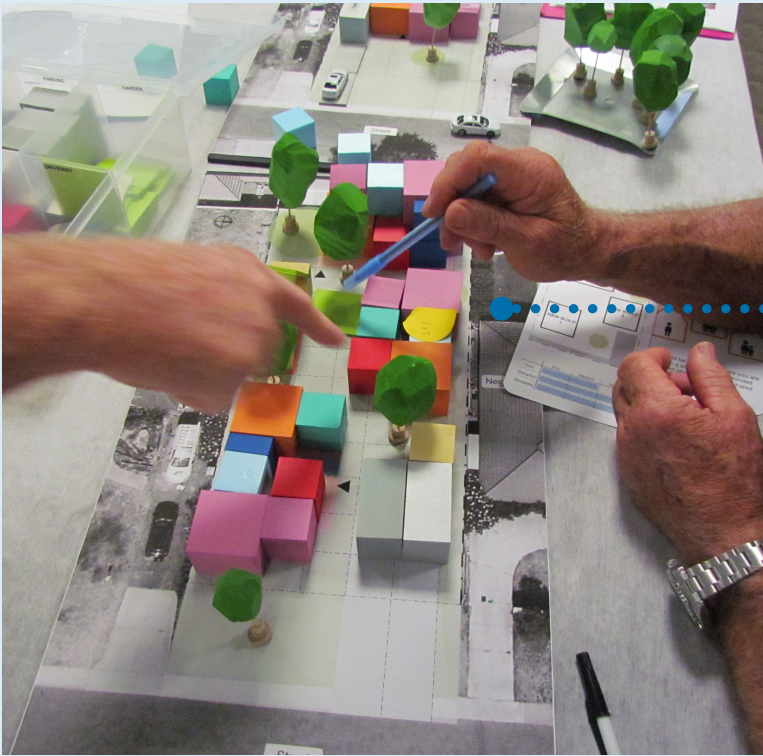
"Granny flats are too small."
Participants felt that they may be put at a disadvantage if they move into a granny flat. Not perceived to be a suitable alternative to their current living situation.

Common and Shared Spaces

Group design for the 'Community Living' + 'New Build 2+' housing option

Benefits of Shared Spaces

Shared spaces and facilities within the living environment were viewed as potential incubators for social interaction and connection. Participants were asked which space would they be willing to share. Their response was gardens, a laundry and to a lesser extent a common kitchen or guest facilities.
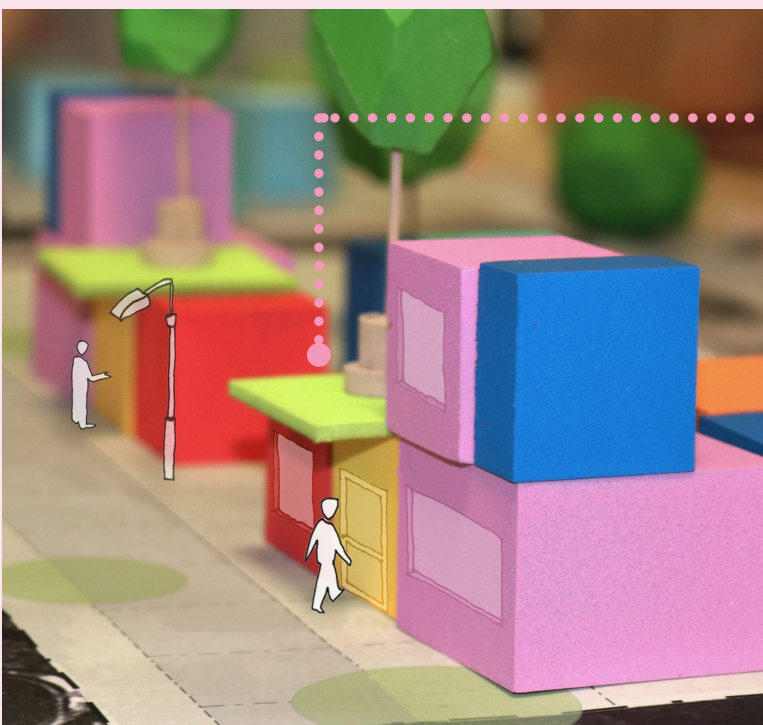
Maintenance of Shared Spaces

"Who is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of shared areas and how will this be managed?"
Participants were concerned that others might not "pull their weight" to maintain the shared spaces.

Key Theme:

Safety and Security

Surveillance and Safety of Rear Dwellings

Rear lot development should be designed to consider passive surveillance, potential issues with privacy, accessibility and provision of adequate lighting for safety. Additionally participants highlighted the need for well lit, covered walkways and minimisation of uneven surfaces and walkways and at points where the ground level changes.

Security and Surveillance of Community Living

Safety and security of individuals within their own home is a shared concern. Any development should not compromise resident's sense of security or safety.

Key Theme:
Location Criteria

Access To Parks And Greenery

Convenient and easy access to adequate outdoor green space is necessary to carry out activities that impact on participants well-being. Nature and the innate connection that people have with natural environments is a critical element to consider in any future development and is important in both public and private spaces.

Integrated Into Broader Community

Participants expressed the importance of being close to shopping, medical and health facilities, family and friends, social clubs and other community facilities; situated within an environment that was safe, pedestrian friendly and serviced by adequate public transport.

Key Theme:
Affordability

Opportunities to Share In The Cost of Maintenance and Utilities

Participants highlighted the benefits shared or community living could provide in reducing their daily living expenses and maintenance of their home

Affordability of Moving or Adapting The Home

On the whole participants who wish to move noted that they are presently unable to find suitable or affordable accommodation. At the same time the disruption and cost of adapting the existing home for changing needs is seen as a deterrent.

Guidance and Information

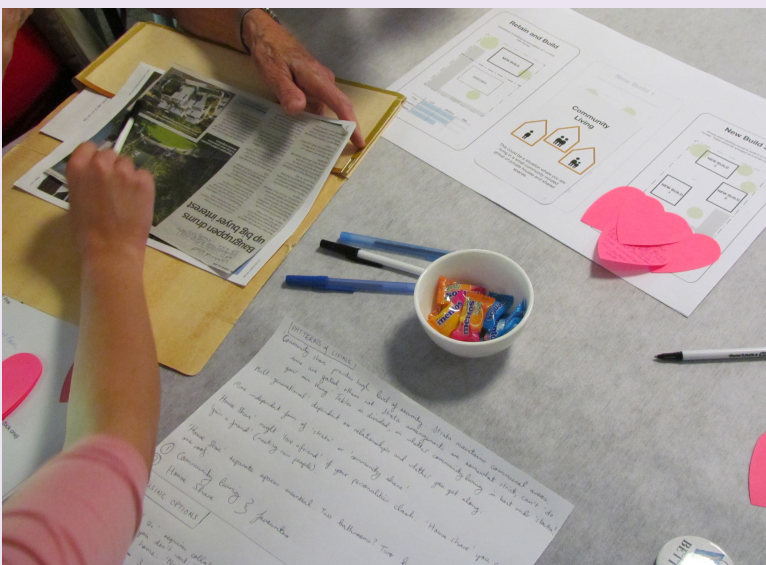Participant group discussing a newspaper clipping about 'Community Living'

Information Deficit And Perceived Disruption Of Additional Building and/or Extensions

Educate residents through free access to resource centres and information (online, print), to advise on conflict management, financing, building approvals and all aspects of shared or community living to allay fears.

Participants desire expert assistance to advise strategies for managing disruption during the adaption of the existing dwelling into shared housing. Ensure timely, accurate and guaranteed costings are negotiated into contracts to prevent future distress. Consider design flexibility to adapt the dwelling back to original purpose once older residents have moved out.

"It is easier to leave as is. Overwhelming to consider building or extending. Builders cannot be trusted." Stringent requirements and guarantees should be in place before this kind of development is undertaken, providing surety for owners

Financial Security And Tenure

Whatever the mode of accommodation, security of tenure is a priority. The cost of adapting properties that are leased or owner-occupied in order to allow 'aging in place' or changing needs may be prohibitive. Organisational assistance may be required to oversee the cost and disruption of adaptations.

Fully anticipating all of ones needs into the future can be a daunting task, making projections about emotional, medical and financial needs challenging.
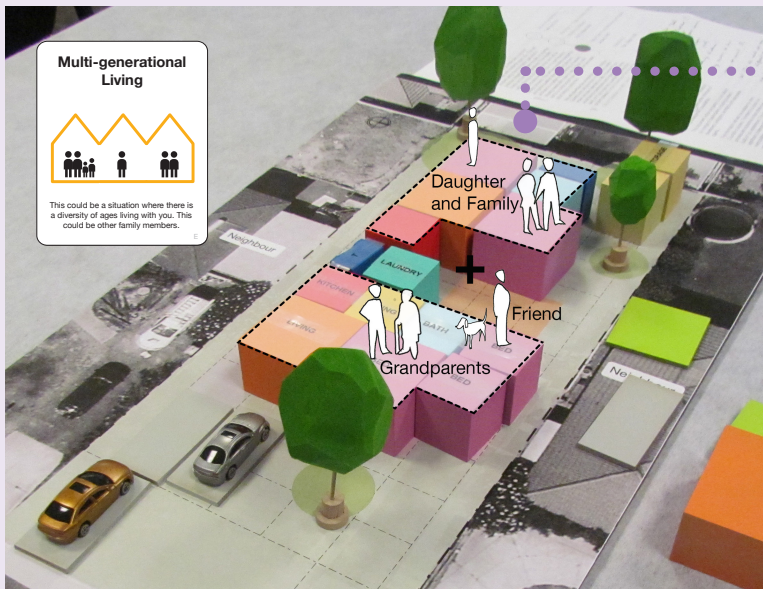
Participants showed a preference towards an owner-occupied model that ensured the stability and the longevity of the housing arrangement.

Guidance and Information

Group reflection and feedback
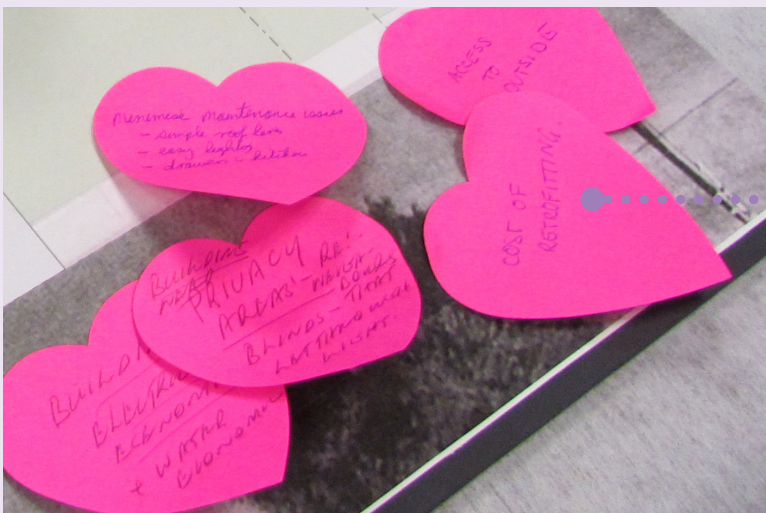
Knowing The Benefits Of Different Options

"Multi-generation living – possibly a good option with growing focus on in home care."
If the alternative housing options are seen as more favourable to their current living arrangement they will be more likely to move by choice.

Certainty Of Design And Cost

"Buy off the plan so you know what you are getting."
Demonstration or pilot projects expose older people to the benefits of best practice outcomes. This, coupled with fixed pricing gives certainty and confidence to the buyer.

Lack Of Forward Planning And Financial Resources

Participants were keen to look at housing options available to them going forward. Knowing that their council and community is invested in their future allows older people to realise their desire to age in place.