We're all in this together

Investigating the role of cohousing in addressing affordability and living conditions in Australia

By Michi Playford

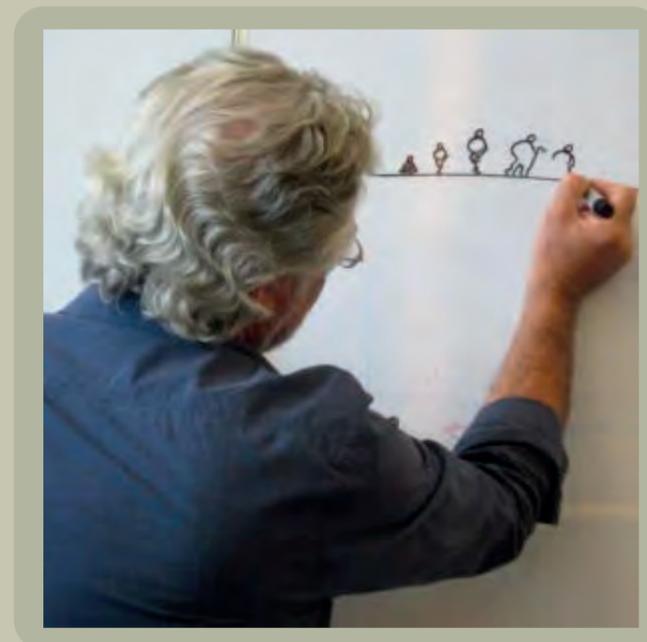# Contents

Foreword

1. – Introduction

1.1 Australia's housing crisis

The Australian housing system is currently in a state of crisis. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising interest rates, and several devastating natural disasters over the past few years have severely impacted the availability, affordability, and quality of housing across Australia.

The term "housing affordability" denotes the relationship between expenditure on housing and household income. Housing affordability has been in decline since the 1980s, with the increase in wage growth unable to keep up with the rising cost of house prices.[1] In 1984, Australians only needed to borrow 3.3 times their average household income to afford an average property.[2] In 2023, with the median Australian house price at $1,008,988, Australians now need to borrow 8.3 times their average annual household income.[3]

As a result, the large amount of housing debt Australians carry makes them more vulnerable to changes in interest rates, which in turn affects wages, inflation, employment, and economic growth. Rather than Australia being an equitable, merit based system, the way in which wealth is generated has changed over time, with location and inherited housing wealth playing a larger role in future prosperity.[4]

For those unable to afford to buy a house, renting also poses significant challenges. About one third (31 percent) of Australians were renting in the period between 2019-2020.[5] A national report published in 2023 has found that rental affordability has deteriorated rapidly over the past year, with Canberra and Melbourne the only capital cities with acceptable rental prices for average-income households (less than 25 percent of income being spent on rent).[6]

'Housing stress' is typically defined as being when a household is paying more than 30% of its income in housing costs (rent or mortgage repayments). According to a report by SGS Economics and Planning, 42% of all low-income households are facing housing stress . This rises to 47% for households in New South Wales and 58% for Australia's private rental market.[7]

The impacts of climate change have also played a significant role in the availability and affordability of housing. Climate change has resulted in more frequent and severe natural disasters over the past several years, including drought, bushfires, flooding, and cyclones.
These events have the ability to cause significant damage to infrastructure and housing stock, necessitating rebuilding efforts and exacerbating the issue of housing availability in areas which may already have been experiencing housing stress.
The increased risk of these events has also led to higher insurance costs, leading to greater financial strain in vulnerable areas and increases in housing costs. Increased demand in areas deemed 'safe' or at lower risk is a likely outcome as natural disasters increase in frequency, this will further fuel increases in rising property prices.[8]

Good quality, sustainable housing is also crucial in mitigating the effects of climate change by enhancing resilience and reducing environmental impact. This can be achieved though energy-efficient design, using renewable energy sources, and materials that reduce our carbon footprint, directly contributing to lower greenhouse gas emissions. [9] Additionally, sustainable housing can better withstand climate-related events, protecting residents and reducing long-term costs.[10]

[INFORMATION]
Figure 1 House prices and wages (full- time weekly earnings, index: 1970 = 100)
Source: Business Insider

[INFORMATION]
Figure 2 House price / GDP per capita
Source: Minack advisers

[INFORMATION]
Contents of flooded homes lie on the footpath in South Lismore. Photograph: David Maurice Smith/Oculi/ Guardian Australia

Traditionally, detached houses have dominated the Australian housing landscape, particularly in suburban areas. This trend has led to urban sprawl and challenges related to transport and infrastructure.

A lack of housing diversity means that current housing stock is failing to meet the many and various needs of the Australian population. To address this issue, greater variety must be provided not only in terms of dwelling size and typology, but also in terms of tenure. Financing and development models to meet the needs of Australians in terms of affordability, lifestyle needs and across age cohorts and household types. [11]

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated mental health challenges in Australia, with lock downs amplifying anxiety and feelings of isolation, particularly among those in inadequate or insecure housing. A study highlighted that people living in overcrowded or poor-quality housing reported higher levels of psychological distress due to the lack of personal space and secure environments.[12] Additionally, individuals in secure, well-designed housing with access to green spaces experienced less severe mental health impacts. These findings underscore the importance of housing quality and stability in mitigating the psychological effects of crises like the pandemic.[13]

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1.0 – Introduction

1.2 Report Aims

This report investigates the role of cohousing in addressing housing affordability and living conditions in Australia.

The report explores cohousing's potential to foster community, sustainability, and affordability through shared resources, participatory decision-making, and environmentally conscious design.

It explores how cohousing, as an alternative housing model, can provide solutions to the country's housing crisis exacerbated by factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, rising interest rates, and climate change-induced natural disasters.

It includes case studies of existing cohousing communities to illustrate these benefits and examines the legal, financial, and governance structures that support successful cohousing developments.

1.3 What is cohousing?

Cohousing is an alternative housing model that can address the challenges previously outlined by creating community-based living environments which prioritise social connections, sustainability, and affordability.

Cohousing is one of the best-known forms of collaborative living and has experienced a resurgence in the past decade due to increasing housing pressures globally.

While cohousing communities can vary greatly in terms of design typologies and financial and governance structures, there are several features which cohousing developments typically have in common:

1. Cohousing communities are **intentional communities** where individuals or families come together to form a neighbourhood with shared spaces and resources, while still maintaining their own private living spaces.

2. **Shared Resources:** Cohousing communities often have shared resources like gardens, tools, and equipment that are accessible to all residents.

3. **Participatory Decision-Making:** Cohousing communities typically involve all residents in decision-making processes, creating a sense of ownership and responsibility among all members.

4. **Sustainability:** Cohousing communities often have a strong environmental ethos, underpinned by the use of sustainable materials, passive solar design and low embodied carbon.

5. **Diversity:** Cohousing communities often attract people from a variety of backgrounds, creating a diverse and inclusive community.

[INFORMATION]
Sketch of Earthsong Eco-neighbourhood, located in West Auckland
Image: Architecture Now
https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/book-review-cohousing-for-life/

[INFORMATION]
Marmalade Lane Cohousing, located in Cambridge, UK
https://ml.qwirx.com/#gallery

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Canadian Cohousing Network, *What is Cohousing?*, https://cohousing.ca/what-is-cohousing/

2. – Historical context

2.1 History of cohousing

The modern cohousing movement was established in Denmark in the 1970s as a reaction to the bureaucratisation of housing under a welfare state [1] and a mismatch between a growing diversity of household types and homes designed for the typical nuclear family.

The catalyst for the movement was an article by Danish Architect Jan Gudmand Hoyer, entitled 'The missing link between Utopia and the Dated Single Family House' published in a national newspaper [2]. The article elicited numerous responses from like-minded families interested in living in the kind of community that Gudmand Hoyer had described. Concurrently, Bodil Graae gained publicity for her piece 'Children should have 100 parents', which attracted the attention of fifty families interested in forming a collective based on her ideas around communities where the common denominator was 'also for children'. [3]

These two groups joined forces in 1968 and secured two sites located just outside of Copenhagen. By 1973, the first two cohousing communities were created, known as 'Saettedanmen' and 'Skraplanet'.

Although the early cohousing (bofællesskab) movement continued to gain traction, it was still unable to attract the diverse mix of resident age and incomes that the founders had envisioned. [4]

A competition run in 1971 by the Danish Building Institute was extremely influential in terms of cementing what form cohousing communities should take. The competition called for low rise 'cluster' housing, and each of the winning designs featured common facilities and participatory design. [5]

By 1982, 22 cohousing developments has been established in Denmark, however financial barriers remained. In 1978, Goodman Hoyer founded a support association called 'SAMBO', roughly translated to 'live together', while in 1981 the government passed national legislation in the form of the 'Cooperative Housing Association Law', which made it less expensive to finance cohousing. [6] Since the passing of this bill, most cohousing developments in Denmark have been structured as limited equity cooperatives financed with government-sponsored loans.

The cohousing movement was introduced to North America in the 1980s by two architects, Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett. In 1988 the pair published a book entitled 'Cohousing: A contemporary approach to housing ourselves'. The first US cohousing community was Muir commons, situated in Davis, California. There are currently 308 cohousing communities registered with the Cohousing US community directory. [7]

The cohousing movement has since spread globally, with communities across Europe (known as 'Kollektivhaus' in Sweden and 'Baugruppen' in Germany), as well as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

2.2 Cohousing in Australia

Cohousing in Australia began to take shape in the 1970s, inspired by international movements promoting collaborative living. Early adopters sought to create intentional communities emphasising shared resources, sustainability, and social connection. [8]

The Whitlam government, which came to power in 1972, played a significant role in fostering alternative communities and the broader cohousing movement in Australia. Gough Whitlam's administration emphasised social reform, environmental sustainability, and progressive urban planning. This era saw increased support for cooperative housing models and intentional communities as part of broader efforts to promote affordable housing and communal living. [9]

One of the pivotal events in the alternative community movement was the Aquarius Festival held in Nimbin, New South Wales, in 1973. Organised by the Australian Union of Students, the festival attracted thousands of people interested in alternative lifestyles, counter-culture, and communal living. Following the festival, many attendees decided to stay in Nimbin, forming intentional communities focused on sustainable agriculture, communal decision-making, and self-sufficiency. [10]

In the 1980s, the cohousing movement began to formalise with The establishment of communities like Moora Moora in Victoria and Crystal Waters in Queensland. By the 1990s, cohousing gained more mainstream recognition as an innovative solution to urban housing challenges. Projects such as Cascade Cohousing in Hobart, Tasmania, and WestWyck in Melbourne emerged, blending cohousing principles with urban living.

In recent years, the cohousing movement in Australia has seen increased popularity and diversification. New models have emerged, including senior cohousing, intergenerational living, and affordable housing cooperatives. Notable projects include Murundaka Cohousing Community in Heidelberg Heights, Victoria, which focuses on affordability and social sustainability, and Urban Coup in Melbourne, which emphasises environmentally sustainable and community-focused urban living.

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3. –Methodology

A range of cohousing communities across Australia were used as case studies to evaluate the potential benefits of this housing model as an alternative to speculative development.

The research aimed to identify elements that enhance resident wellbeing through fostering community, sharing resources, participatory design, and sustainability.

The study also aimed to explore the procurement methods, financial and legal structures, and governance models of each case study to understand their replicability, affordability, and broader implications.

Case studies were carefully selected from various locations, community sizes, financial set-ups, and governance structures to offer a well-rounded view of cohousing in Australia.

For each case study, detailed desktop analysis was conducted on aspects like procurement, design features, governance, common facilities, sustainability, and planning to draw comparisons between projects.

Qualitative research methods, including site visits, surveys, and informal interviews, were employed to capture residents' experiences and assess the success of each development. A Qualitative approach was chosen to better understand the perspectives of those living in cohousing communities and gaining insights that may not otherwise be apparent.

Key questions that guided this research included:

- *What characteristics do cohousing developments share in common?*

- *How does a community's Governance structure determine the level of resident participation and cohesion?*

- *How do legal and financial structures impact the level of control that residents have over a development?*

- *What particular design features aid in facilitating community?*

- *Does the data suggest strategies that may improve planning, design or policy controls for these types of projects?*

- *How do financial and governance structures impact the affordability of cohousing developments?*

- *How can affordability be achieved through design elements such as the incorporation of shared resources?*

Data collection involved site visits to each case study site to collect primary data; including photographs, observations, and semi-structured interviews with residents.

A survey with 17 questions was distributed to each community (via electronic noticeboard/letter drop), covering demographic data, housing choices, mental wellbeing, design features, sustainability, community engagement, decision-making, governance, and overall satisfaction. Although only one out of four communities participated, the survey still provided valuable insights into the successes and challenges perceived by Wybalena Grove residents.

The survey also served as a foundation for semi-structured interviews with residents, offering further insight into governance, community planning, shared resources, and conflict resolution.

By comparing the results from both the standardised questionnaires and semi-structured interviews across the case studies, the research aimed to identify common factors contributing to community success and pinpoint elements that may hinder resident satisfaction.

There are several limitations to the research methodology which must be noted. The research model has some limitations, including a lower participation rate, with only one out of four communities contributing to the survey, which may affect the applicability of the findings. The intentional selection of diverse case studies introduces a degree of selection bias, which could influence the results. While the qualitative approach is valuable for understanding lived experiences, it might not fully capture quantitative data. Additionally, the study's focus on a limited number of case studies may not represent the full diversity of cohousing models in Australia.

Research timeline

MILESTONE NO. 1
Define thesis, scope of study
Commence Literature review
— JUNE 2023

MILESTONE NO. 2
Start getting in touch with cohousing contacts, organise site visits, interviews
JULY 2023

MILESTONE NO. 3
Design survey for residents
Case study 1 Site Visit (Wybalena Grove)
— AUGUST 2023

MILESTONE NO. 4
Commence report writing
Catch up with PPF board
NOVEMBER 2023

MILESTONE NO. 5
Report writing
Plan case study 2 site visit
DECEMBER 2023

MILESTONE NO. 6
Case Study 2 site visit (Narara Ecovillage)
JANUARY 2024

MILESTONE NO. 7
Submit draft report
Catch up with PPF board
— FEBRUARY 2024

MILESTONE NO. 8
Case study 3 (Nightingale Urban Coup) site visit
MARCH 2024

MILESTONE NO. 9
Write up Case study 3
Collate survey results
Prepare for Case study 4 site visit
• APRIL 2023

MILESTONE NO. 10
Case study 4 - Site visit (Cascade cohousing, Hobart)
MAY 2024

MILESTONE NO. 11
Finalise report
• JUNE 2024

MILESTONE NO. 12
Submit final report
JULY 2024

4.1 – Case Study 01

Wybalena Grove

Cook, ACT, Australia

Wybalena Grove is a cohousing development located in the suburb of Cook, Northwest of Canberra's CBD.

The development consists of 105 town houses arranged in 5 clusters, spread across 11.5 hectares of natural bushland. The town houses vary in size between 60m² for a one-bedroom unit to 180m² for a 5-bedroom unit. Most units are grouped into sets of two, three, or four units, and staggered to provide privacy and unobstructed views.

Wybalena Grove represents a unique concept in Canberra both in terms of its construction and residential environment. At the time of development, a high priority was placed on the preservation of remnant bushland. Flood prone land was set aside to become the Village Green. The design of roads was carefully considered to prioritise pedestrians, while also creating a 'spacious, park-like' feel. This consideration resulted in most units having shared parking rather than direct vehicle access.
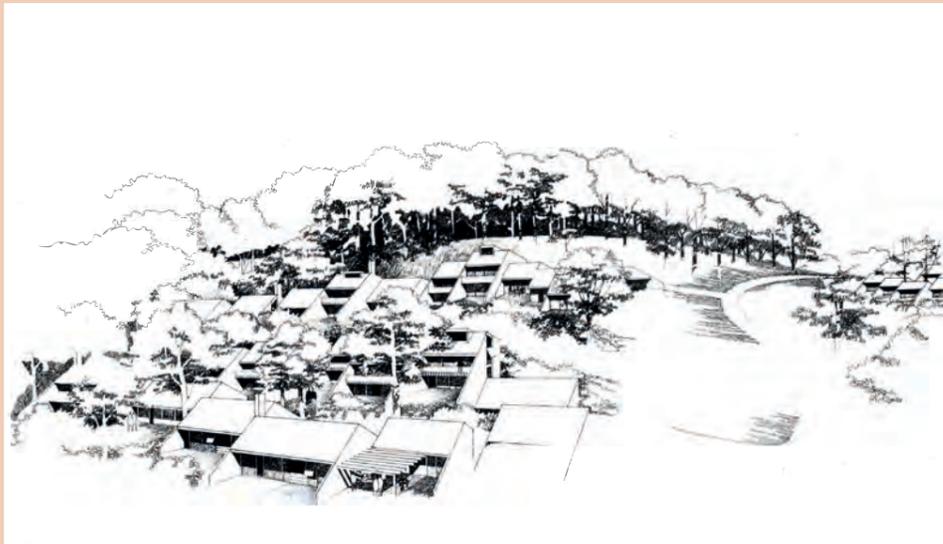
History / Procurement

Wybalena Grove was founded in 1974 by the Cook-Aranda Co-operative Housing Society (CACHS), a group of local residents who engaged Sydney architect Michael Dysart to design the development. The main drivers for the development were to reduce costs though economy of scale and explore the concept

of cooperative living while embodying the concept that 'houses should be in harmony with the natural surroundings'.

Unlike many housing schemes at the time, which were funded by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), Wybalena Grove is unique in that it was privately funded by a collective of individuals and designed by a private architect.
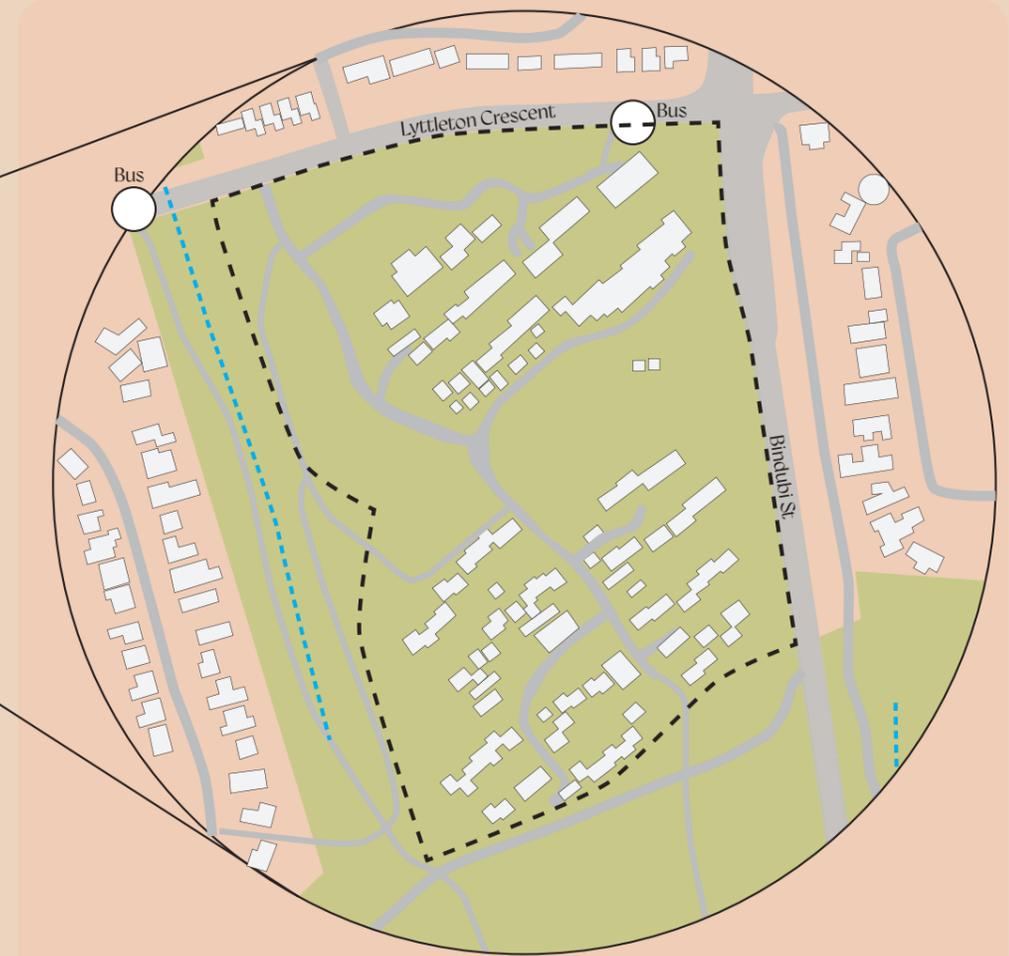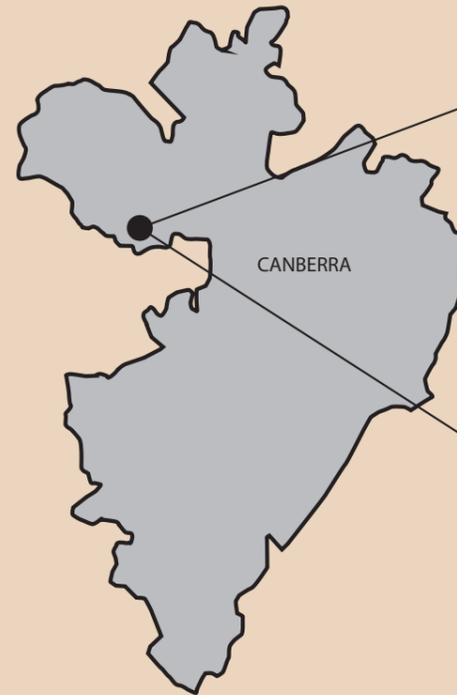
The development was made possible through a unique combination of social and legislative factors. Preceding the establishment of the Cook-Aranda Co-operative Housing Society, there were several groups exploring alternative living arrangements including Unity Housing, Maranatha, and Mala.

Dysart recalls, 'There were the elderly, whose sense of traditional community was high. There were the socially innovative, quickly labelled as the trendies, whose ideas centred on introverted, tightly knit developments, where people lived in each other's pockets. There was a strong group of professional pragmatic people, concerned with getting on with the job, and there was an evangelical group who wanted a little church on the hill'.[1]

A public meeting was held on the 28th of March 1974 with the Department of the Capital Territory (DCT) after persistent lobbying from these co-operative housing groups. At this meeting, the DCT announced that it would be making sites available to interested parties, with the aim that it would provide an opportunity for people to be involved in the planning, development, and ongoing improvement of their neighbourhood. It approached each of these groups, along with some motivated individuals to form an association to apply for the lease of a 30-acre site located between the suburbs of Cook and Aranda.

At the time, the development was the largest of its kind, costing over $3.5 million. Due to its innovative nature, it required legislative and policy changes, a new financing approach and the resolution of many legal and administrative problems.

The development was carried out in two stages to facilitate finance and memberships, with Stage 1 completed in 1977.[2]

Financial and legal structures

Wybalena Grove was the first project in the ACT to use a staged 'release of title' procedure under the Land Titles (Unit Titles) Act 1970. This meant that the land was owned and developed by the co-operative, and when the unit was completed, the individual title was officially handed over to the member from the co-operative.

Despite negotiations that CACHS had with the NCDC over servicing costs, the group was regarded as a 'developer' and as such required to pay for services to the site, for which bridging finance was obtained. The Department of Taxation also treated CACHS as such, levying each unit with a 'sales' tax even though the group were essentially self-developing and not purchasing their homes from a third party. The group also faced challenges in arranging group finance, with banking institutions insisting that each individual obtain their own mortgage finance.

While successful in terms of resident participation in the development process and facilitation of community, the development was considered an economic failure, with the group declaring itself bankrupt with 20 units unfinished. The Cook-Aranda Cooperative Housing Society was dissolved in 1984, with the development essentially transitioning to a typical unit-titled development.

On the project's completion, key members of the group's leadership reflected on aspects which could have been improved and changed the economic outcome of the process. This included the fact that the NCDC had failed to acknowledge the group's lack of expertise and knowledge in terms of large-scale construction. Government policy also failed to provide any benefit for low-income earners. If the co-operative had been allowed to organise group finance over individual mortgages, the economic outcome may have been quite different.

Despite the shift to unit title, the cooperative ethos of Wybalena Grove has largely been preserved. The design of the development, emphasising shared spaces and environmental sustainability, continues to foster a strong sense of community.

Regular community activities and shared responsibilities help maintain the collaborative atmosphere originally envisioned by the founders.

Diagram representing 'Unit title'

[INFORMATION]
The communal vegetable garden

"The people who came in at the end were those who had no strong affiliation with any self interest group. They were the ones whose interest was in making it work for a wide range of people and lifestyles'.

– Michael Dysart

[INFORMATION]
An original advertisement for Wybalena Grove (February 1977)
https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/

Governance

The rules for the 105 units in Wybalena Grove are mainly outlined in the "Unit Titles (Management) Act (UTMA) 2011". This act governs the shared ownership of property and requires set rules for owners. All owners are members of an Owners Corporation, which is responsible for the common property. Each year, the Owners Corporation elects an Executive Committee to manage and maintain the property according to the UTMA, other relevant laws, and the Corporation's own rules. A Managing Agent (Strata manager) is employed to handle administrative tasks, and various contractors are hired for services like garden maintenance.

Design features

Characteristic of the 'Sydney school' of architecture which Dysart subscribed to, Wybalena Grove features a restricted material palette of earthy coloured clinker bricks and cedar cladding, steeply pitched gabled roofs, and dwellings nestled into their natural bushland setting.

The dwellings are arranged across the site in 5 clusters which slope gradually up the site, accessed from a main circulation road. Clusters A, C, D, and E each share communal parking areas, while cluster B features detached carports to each dwelling. Situated centrally on the site are the community facilities; including tennis courts, communal vegetable gardens, children's playground and pizza oven. There are 12 distinct dwelling types, half of which are free standing or attached on one or both sides in groups of two or three.

Most of the dwellings are split-level to accommodate the slope of the site, with attached dwellings offset from each other with separating wing walls in between to provide a degree of privacy while facilitating solar access. Each dwelling has a north and south courtyard, with at least one side designed to face bush rather than other dwellings.

The effect of the steeply pitched roofs and wing walls give the dwellings a distinctive pyramidal form, reminiscent of a 'citadel town'.
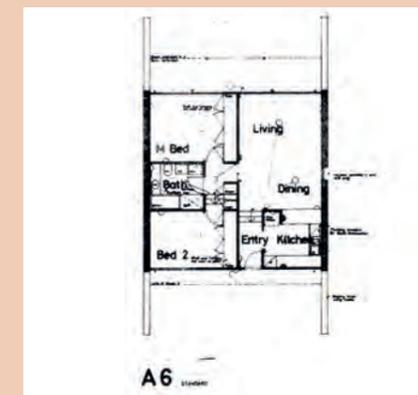
[INFORMATION]
Floor plans for Type 'A6' and 'A10'
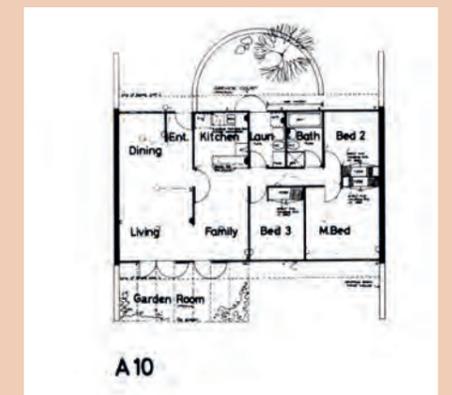
Unit boundaries and common property

Each unit has an entitlement of its own footprint plus courtyard areas to the north and south. Some units also have a 'unit subsidiary' for a carport which forms part of the Unit plan.

The land outside of the unit boundaries within the surveyed area of Wybalena Grove is common property. This is a shared resource, and the rights and responsibilities are set out in an information booklet provided to residents upon joining (buying into) the community.

Shared facilities include an Oval, tennis courts, barbecue area, wood-fired pizza oven, a communal vegetable garden, and children's playgrounds.

Sustainability

Environmental preservation
A significant portion of the 11.5-hectare development is preserved as natural bushland, maintaining the native ecosystem and biodiversity. Wybalena Grove is host to two distinct types of remnant native vegetation, Dry sclerophyll forest and Grassy woodland. Management of these areas aim to conserve their natural values and are carried out by grounds contractors as well as intermittent working bees organised by residents. Specific management actions include weed control, replanting, and reduction of fire hazard where appropriate.

Flood-prone land within the development is set aside as the Village Green, which not only prevents potential flood damage but also provides a communal green space for residents.

Wybalena Grove features a community vegetable garden as part of its communal facilities. This encourages residents to engage in permaculture practices and assists in waste reduction of food scraps and plant waste through composting.

Dwelling design
The original dwellings were designed according to passive solar principles, with most featuring north facing living areas and glazing. Unfortunately, many dwellings still in their original condition don't perform particularly well in terms of energy efficiency due to air leakage and thermal bridging from elements such as the double brick wing walls (as is the case for many buildings of the same era). In many instances, individual residents have elected to undergo renovations to improve the energy efficiency or modernise the layout, while also adopting sustainable practices such as the installation of solar panels and EV charging.

[INFORMATION]
The communal vegetable garden

[INFORMATION]
The shared pizza oven

[INFORMATION]
Pedestrian paths facilitate interaction between neighbours

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[INFORMATION]
Wybalena Grove - Site plan

Legend

1. Community facilities
2. Shared green space
3. Private dwellings and yard
4. Shared car park
5. Pedestrian paths

Aranda Bushland Nature Reserve

4.1 – Case Study 01
Wybalena Grove– Residents survey

Demographics

The highest number of respondents were in the 65+ age bracket (45%), followed by the 45-54 (25%) and 55-64 age range (20%). Those in the 35-44 bracket made of 10%, while there were no respondents under the age of 35.
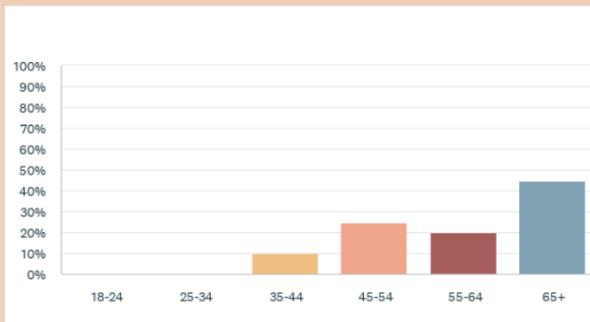
Duration of occupancy

The majority of respondents have lived at Wybalena Grove for over 10 years (65%).
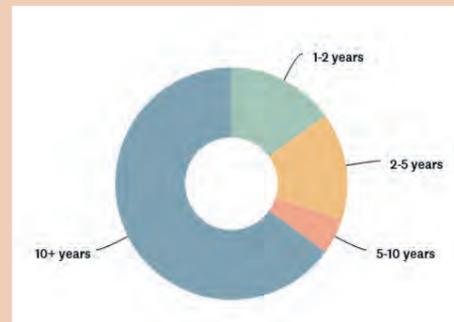
"To truly have neighbours is magical. We have developed strong relationships with many members of this community"

Community choice

The main driver for residents to join the Wybalena Grove community was location and proximity to services, followed by strong sense of community and shared values with others.
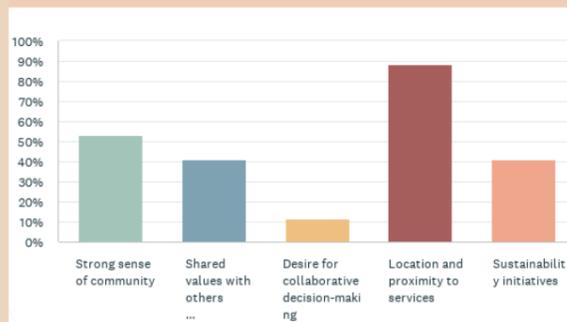
Mental Wellbeing

The largest factor contributing to mental wellbeing was an improved sense of belonging, followed by reduced feelings of isolation. Thirteen percent of respondents said that living at Wybalena grove had not affected their mental wellbeing either way. Four out of nine respondents who left comments mentioned that being in nature contributed significantly to improved mental wellbeing, using words such as gardening, wildlife, bushland, landscape,and environment in their responses.

Are there specific activities or aspects of community life that positively impact your health?
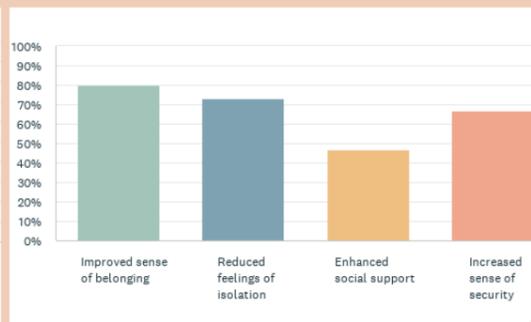
"I tell people we live in a nature reserve. Being a terrace house you would hardly know that there are 104 other units around you"

Design features

The design features valued the most by residents were 'Green spaces and outdoor areas', with common areas, privacy considerations, and sustainable and eco-friendly features each valued equally to a lesser extent.

In terms of improvements which could be made, residents suggested a meeting hall (this was noted in the original plans but likely removed due to budgetary restrictions).

Sustainability

Seventy-eight percent of respondents answered 'somewhat important' or 'very important' in relation to the importance of sustainability in joining the Wybalena community. Residents felt that 'Landscaping and permaculture' was the most significant way in which the community contributed to sustainability, followed by energy efficiency and shared resources. When asked which sustainability practices they felt were most effective/impactful, the most commonly recorded words were 'community garden', 'green area', and 'house'.
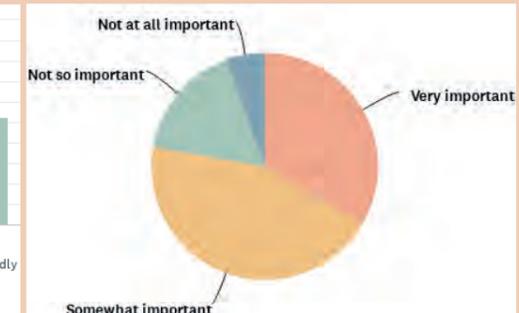
4.2 – Case Study 02

Narara Ecovillage

Narara, NSW, Australia

Narara Ecovillage is an intergenerational residential community located on the Central Coast, NSW.

The community aims to create a demonstration village that promotes awareness of our interconnectedness with others and the natural world, thriving within the Earth's ecological limits. It draws on Indigenous wisdom while fostering regenerative environmental, social, and economic practices.

'Narara Ecovillage Cooperative' plan to create a community of 300+ people and over 150 homes over three stages. Stage 1 is currently in progress, comprising 42 standard blocks and 18 town houses. Stage 2 is currently in the planning phase, and will consist of approximately 45 lots ranging in size from 450 to 700m²

The 63-hectare site includes an existing dam and creek and is surrounded on three sides by the Strickland state forest.

[INFORMATION]
An early artist's impression of what Narara Ecovillage might look like conceptually
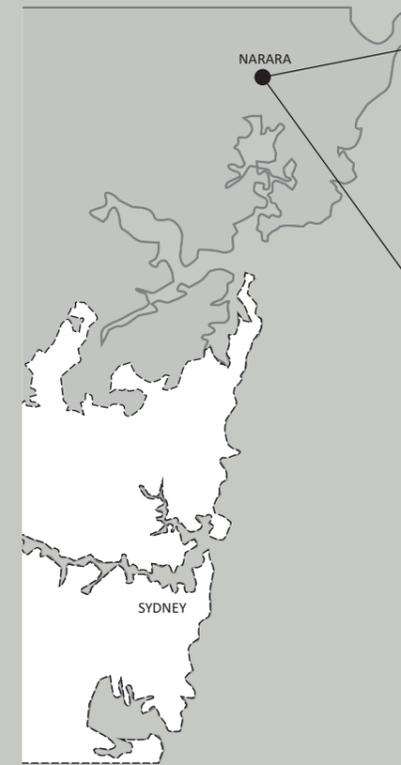
History / Procurement

Narara Ecovillage founder Lyndall Parris was inspired to begin researching alternative ways of living when two of her friends became widowed around the same time, leaving them to raise teenagers alone. This led her to wonder if they could all live together, in a community where they could support each other and age in place.

In 2004, the Sydney Coastal Ecovillage (SCEV) Incorporated Association was set up with a website to attract other interested people (being close to Sydney and the coast were key criteria).

In March 2008, the Sydney Coastal Ecovillage group, in partnership with a developer, put forward a $9.65 million dollar bid to secure the site. Unfortunately, 2008 signalled the Global Financial crisis, causing the developer to go under and Lyndall and her supporters were forced to withdraw their tender.

In 2012, the property came back on the market and the group began new negotiations with the State government. They put forward a new Tender bid of $5 million, however in order to put forward a 'clean bid' with no conditions placed on it, they were required to raise $4 million.

The Stage 1 DA was submitted in 2013, approved 2014. Construction commenced in 2018, with the first families moving in 2019.

Financial and legal structure

Narara Ecovillage operates under a co-operative model and has a well-defined financial and legal structure. The Narara Ecovillage Co-operative Ltd is the main entity, and all members must hold membership in this co-operative to own land within the ecovillage. Membership involves an investment of $30,000 and ongoing monthly contributions. The co-operative model ensures that all members participate in the work of the co-operative, whether through manual tasks, administrative duties, or management roles. Members must contribute a minimum of 52 hours a year to assist in these tasks.

The co-operative owns and manages the land, and each member's investment contributes to the collective ownership. Members can either hold individual memberships or joint memberships, and companies or trusts can also be members. This structure provides a balance between shared ownership and individual responsibilities, ensuring that all members have a stake in the community and its governance

If a member leaves, their share is repurchased by the co-op and their property can be sold to anyone (if they buy a share in the co-op).
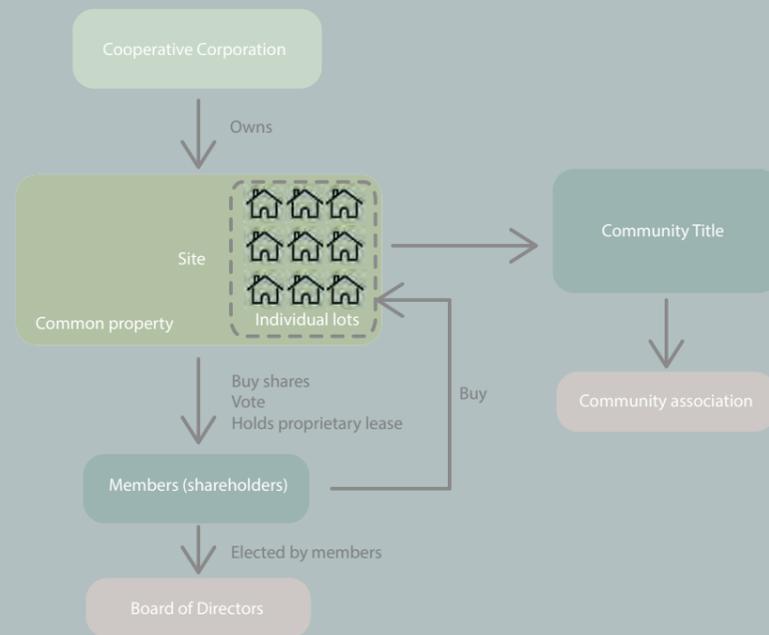
Property titling

Narara Ecovillage utilises a Community title property structure. Under this model, the cooperative owns the land and members hold individual unit titles for their properties. This approach allows for private ownership of homes while maintaining communal ownership and management of common areas and resources.

Community title is similar to Strata title in that it allows for both individual ownership of private property and shared ownership of common property. It is typically used for larger developments such as housing estates and mixed-use developments and may include a number of property types. While Strata title is often limited to a building and its immediate surroundings, within a community titled development common property can include roads, parks, recreational facilities, and other shared amenities within the community and is managed by the Community association.

[INFORMATION]
Town houses completed during Stage 1

[INFORMATION]
Site section of Narara Ecovillage
(Phillip Thalis Architects)

[INFORMATION]
A Queenslander house which was transported to the Narara Ecovillage site

Design features

Narara Ecovillage is sited on 64-hectare site bordered on three sides by the Strickland State Forest. 12 hectares is zoned for residential development, with a further 12 reserved for agriculture and commercial gardens. The remaining land is dedicated to conservation.

For the past 100 years, the site was home to the Gosford Horticultural Institute, and comprises over 50 existing buildings, including greenhouses, outbuildings, and workshops. Many of these buildings have been repurposed for the Ecovillage, providing a member's hall and lounge, as well as a triple span greenhouse for food propagation.

The higher part of the sloped site has been zoned for housing and communal facilities, while the lower portion of the site is dedicated to agricultural uses and partly covered by flood plain (where swales have been constructed to direct the flow of water).

The homes within the Ecovillage are varied in terms of form and construction techniques, however they each share a strict adherence to internal NEV building regulations, which promote sustainability and the use of recycled and locally sourced materials where possible.
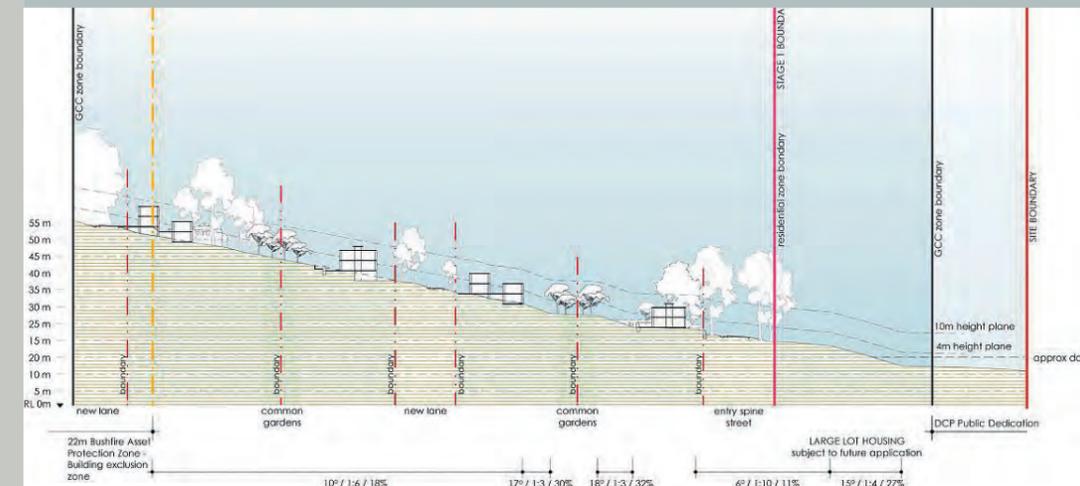
Sustainability

Sustainable living is a key part of the lifestyle at Narara Ecovillage , and is apparent at both a macro and micro scale.

Smartgrid: Through a 1.2 million grant provided by the Australian Renewable Energy Agency the ecovillage was able to fund a solar smart grid, They currently produce 7x more power than they need.

Water management system: Narara Ecovillage obtained a water utility license under the NSW Water Industry Competition Act legislation to manage their own drinking water, recycled water and sewage treatment systems

The development re-purposes over 50 existing structures, including two residential dwellings, a visitors centre, offices, greenhouses, sheds, garages, and workshops.

All new buildings at the Ecovillage are constructed in accordance with stringent sustainability standards.

Conservation: Two thirds of the site is zoned as conservation forest (E2), and Narara Ecovillage is committed to preserving the sites environmental heritage and natural ecosystems.

Sustainable homes

All homes in the Ecovillage are reviewed according to internal building regulations, in addition to being subject to local council regulations. These include meeting design benchmarks which are then reviewed by a 'Design review' process prior to being submitted for development approval.

The standards encourage residents to build small, inexpensive houses designed to provide thermal comfort, low water use, and low energy consumption. They also seek innovation from community members, encouraging the use of recycled and locally sourced materials where possible.

Among the designs of completed homes include a Hobbit house, an earthship, a hemp house, and several tiny houses. Most homes are 7 stars, while one achieved a NatHERS rating of 9 stars. In comparison, the National average NatHERS star rating was 6.4 stars in 2023.

Governance

Narara Ecovillage operates under a governance structure based on sociocracy, which is a system of governance that aims to ensure effective decision-making and equitable distribution of power among community members. In sociocracy, decision-making is decentralised, with circles or teams formed to focus on specific areas such as finance, infrastructure, or community activities. These circles operate autonomously within their domains but are connected through a series of linked circles that enable information sharing and coordination. This structure fosters transparency, inclusivity, and collaboration, allowing Narara Ecovillage to govern itself in a way that reflects its values of sustainability, cooperation, and community empowerment.

Common facilities

Co-op members have shared ownership of land beyond lot boundaries, and the residents have aspirations to develop further common facilities including cafés, a members lounge, and learning, business, and wellness centres. Current shared facilities include:
• Members lounge
• Hall
• Coffee cart
• The 'Village heart' (admin block)
• Camp kitchen and camp ground
• Paperbark house (visitor facilities)
• Dam, swimming hole (jetty)
• Village pantry/ food buying group

CLaN (Collaborative Living at Narara)

CLaN was set up by a group of members who are exploring collaborative living models within Narara Ecovillage. Several shared living arrangements have already formed, include separate households in separate dwellings sharing a single site, to individuals who are co-living within a single building. Motivations for collaborative living include reducing housing costs, lowering one's carbon foootprint and seeking a greater sense of community through shared living arrangements.

[INFORMATION]
Geoff's house (hempcrete construction)

[INFORMATION]
Diagram representing the 'circle' structure in place at Narara Ecovillage

References:

Narara Ecovillage. "Narara Ecovillage Official Website." Narara Ecovillage, https://nararaecovillage.com/.

Collaborative Housing Australia. "Stories: Narara Eco Village." Collaborative Housing Australia, https://www.collaborativehousing.org.au/stories-narara-eco-village.

Hill Thalis Architecture + Urban Projects. "Narara Ecovillage." Hill Thalis Architecture + Urban Projects, https://www.hillthalis.com.au/projects/narara-ecovillage.

Legend

1. Visitors Centre
2. Community centre
3. Scribbly Gum Food Forest
4. Workshops and common building materials
5. Campground
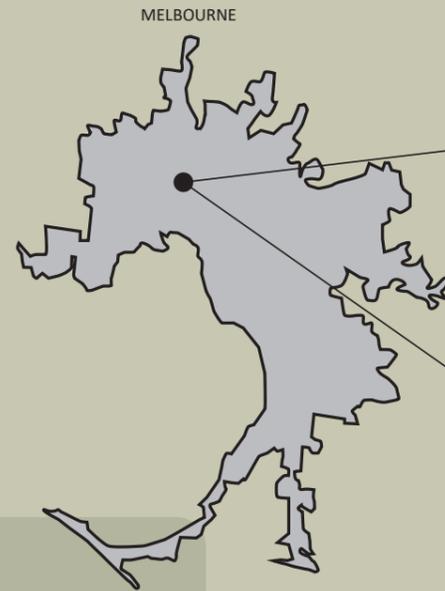6. Greenhouses (Triplespan)

Stage 1

Stage 2
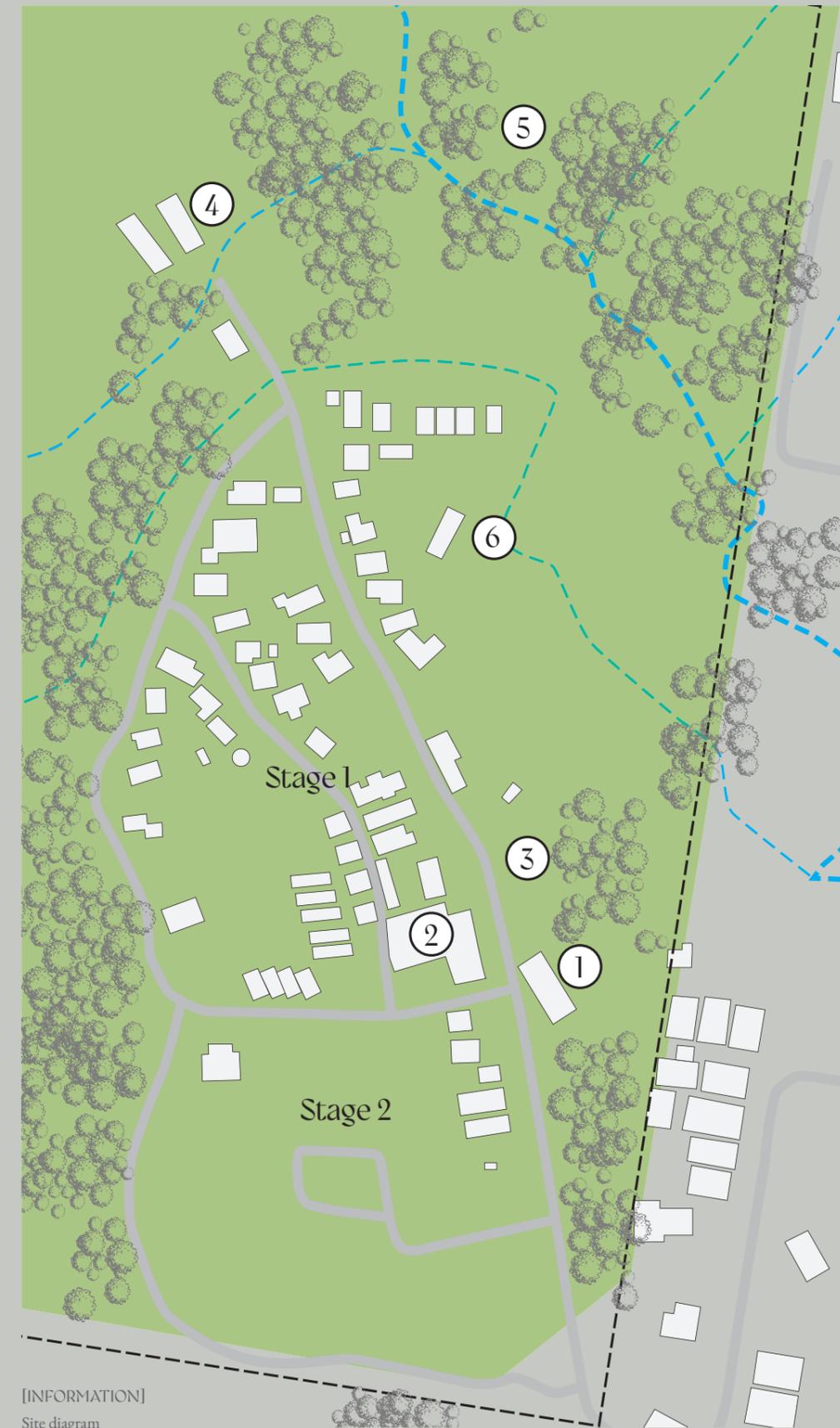
[INFORMATION]
Site diagram

4.3 –Case Study 03

Urban Coup

Hope St, Brunswick, VIC, Australia

ANSTEY STATION

Bulleke-Bek Park

NIGHTINGALE VILLAGE

Duckett St

NIGHTINGALE URBAN COUP

Hope St

History / Procurement

Urban Coup is a resident-led cohousing initiative founded in 2008 by a small group of people interested in creating an intentional community in Melbourne. The initial idea emerged informally around a kitchen table and quickly attracted wider interest. The group expanded to approximately 80 people in its early stages and began meeting regularly to explore how a cohousing project could be realised in the Australian context.

Shortly after the inaugural meeting, the group developed a constitution and several policies to guide decision-making, communication, conflict resolution, and processes for joining or leaving the group. In June 2010, Urban Coup was formally registered as an incorporated association.

Over the following years the group held regular meetings, social gatherings, and consultations, while also visiting other cohousing communities and researching different development models. Members came from a wide range of professional backgrounds, including healthcare professionals, teachers, engineers, artists, writers and architects.

During this period the group began searching for development sites in Melbourne's inner north and inner west. However, they found it difficult to compete with speculative developers in the open property market. As a result, the group explored different strategies for securing land, eventually splitting into two

sub-groups

with different priorities: a "Near and Tall" group interested in a higher-density urban development, and a "Far and Wide" group exploring opportunities further from the city.

The "Near and Tall" group ultimately partnered with Nightingale Housing in 2015 to deliver their building as part of the broader Nightingale Village development in Brunswick. Urban Coup existed prior to this partnership and engaged Nightingale Housing to act as the project developer.

Urban Coup therefore differs from other buildings within Nightingale Village in that the resident group was formed prior to the design phase and acted as a collective client throughout the development process. This enabled residents to work closely with architects Breathe Architecture and Architecture Architecture to develop a building aligned with their shared values and community aspirations.

The development process took approximately ten years from the formation of the group to completion of the building in 2022. During this time the community developed strong social relationships and shared governance structures, which members identify as a key factor in the project's success.

[INFORMATION]
Urban Coup's street frontage to Hope St

Design features

Urban Coup is an eight-storey residential building accommodating 29 households in a mix of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments.

During the design process Breathe Architecture were responsible for the external built form, while Architecture Architecture developed the internal spatial planning and apartment layouts. The Urban Coup community prepared a detailed project brief which guided the architectural process. Design development involved a series of workshops in which residents discussed priorities for shared spaces, sustainability outcomes, and apartment configurations.

Unlike conventional speculative apartment

developments, where apartments are designed for an unknown future market, Urban Coup was designed for a pre-existing group of residents. This allowed the design process to respond directly to the needs and preferences of the community.

The building is organised around a central courtyard, with circulation provided by an external stair rather than an internal atrium. This configuration allows natural light and ventilation to penetrate deep into the building while encouraging informal encounters between residents.

The design also reflects the broader Nightingale approach of prioritising building performance, spatial efficiency and durable materials over unnecessary finishes or decoration.

Common facilities

Urban Coup incorporates a wide range of shared facilities that support both practical needs and social interaction.

The ground floor includes the communal kitchen and dining space, which acts as the primary social hub of the building. Shared meals are prepared by residents and served twice each week, amounting to approximately 100 communal meals per year. Meals operate through a token system, with residents purchasing tokens for approximately $5 each to cover food costs.

Other shared facilities include guest accommodation, a music room, flexible multipurpose spaces, a roof garden, and a communal laundry. Some spaces were initially delivered as "cold shells", allowing the community to determine their eventual use over time.

The building also includes a workshop located in the basement level.

Two commercial tenancies are located adjacent to the Hope Street entry. One of these spaces was collectively purchased by Urban Coup residents during the development process and is rented to external tenants. Rental income from this tenancy is used to offset Owner's Corporation fees.

Urban Coup residents are also part of the wider Nightingale Village precinct. Shared infrastructure across the village includes a basement parking hub that accommodates bicycle parking, a limited number of private car parks, and shared car-share vehicles available to residents and the public. The development is connected to surrounding public spaces including Bulleke-bek Park, Duckett Street laneway and the Upfield shared path.
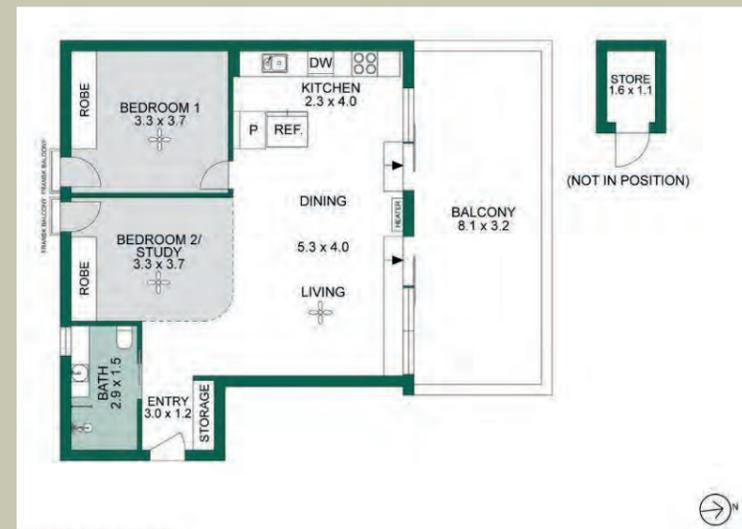
[INFORMATION]
Two bedroom apartment plan
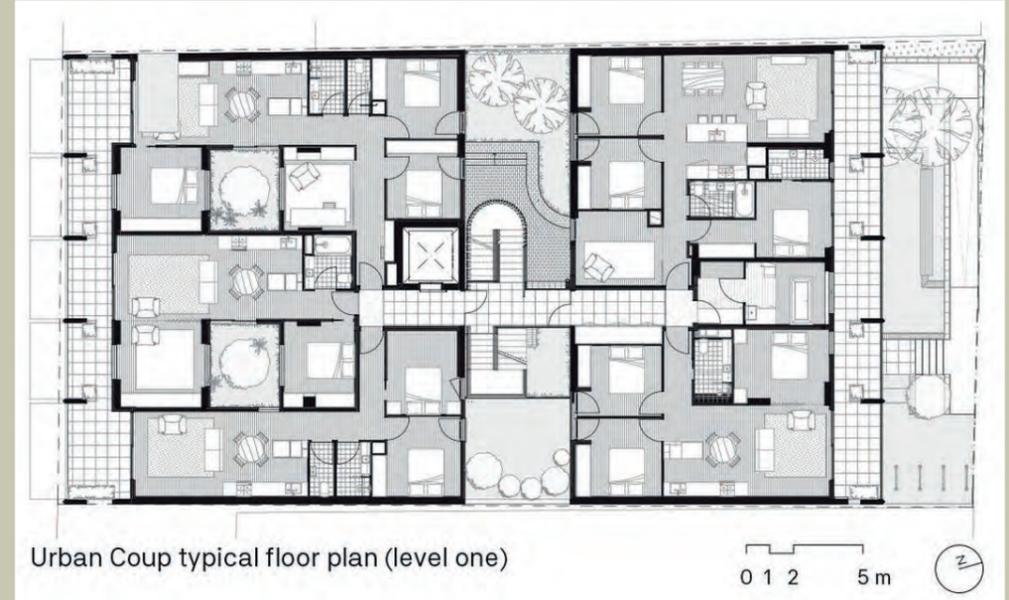
Urban Coup typical floor plan (level one)

0 1 2   5 m

[INFORMATION]
Typical floor plan (level one)
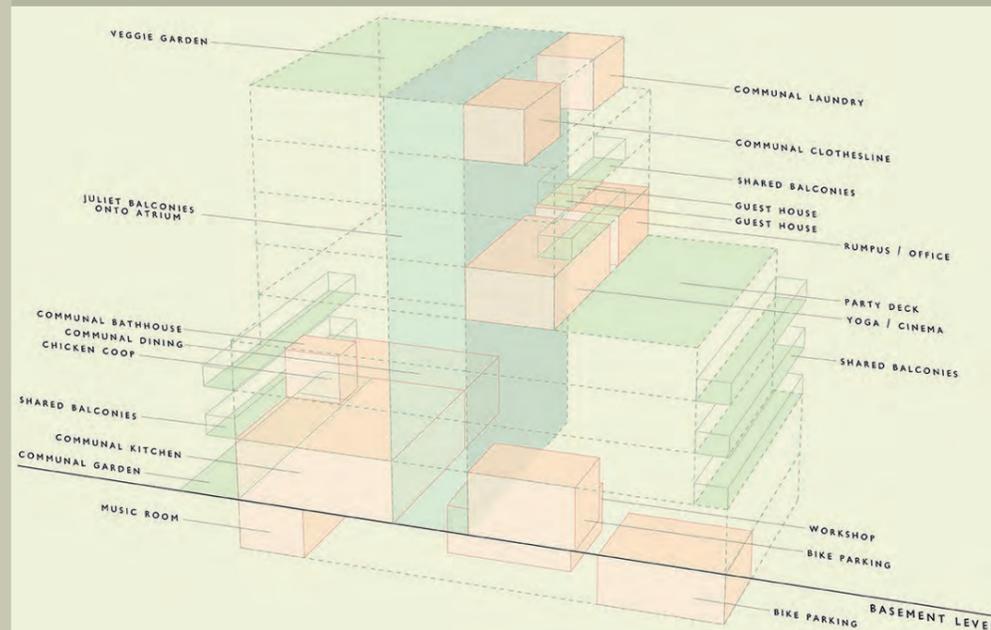
[INFORMATION]
Early concept diagram of communal spaces

[INFORMATION]
Urban Coup's communal dining room.

Governance

During the development process the Urban Coup community used a modified consensus decision-making model. This approach aimed to reach outcomes that all members could accept, rather than relying on simple majority voting.

Given the size of the group, representatives were nominated to interface directly with the architects and developer during key phases of the design process. These representatives coordinated feedback from the broader group and helped streamline communication with the project team.

Members emphasise that the success of this governance model relied heavily on the strong social capital developed within the group during the lengthy development process. Spending many years working together before moving into the building helped build trust and shared commitment among residents.

Urban Coup is currently transitioning towards a sociocratic governance structure and has undertaken training with Sociocracy for All. The intention of this transition is to support more structured decision-making processes while maintaining the collaborative ethos of the community.

Alongside the governance structures of the intentional community, the building itself is legally managed through a conventional strata-title Owners Corporation, as is typical for multi-residential developments in Australia.

Financial and legal structure

Urban Coup differs from traditional housing cooperatives in that apartments are privately owned rather than collectively owned by the community. The completed building is a strata-titled development, with each household owning its individual apartment while shared facilities are maintained through the Owners Corporation.

At the same time, the community operates through a hybrid governance structure that incorporates cooperative principles alongside the strata framework. While legal ownership of dwellings follows a conventional strata model, residents participate in collective decision making through community governance processes and working groups responsible for areas such as building management, shared meals, and sustainability initiatives. This hybrid arrangement allows the community to maintain cooperative forms of participation while operating within a legal structure that is compatible with conventional financing and property ownership systems. The structure also demonstrates how legal frameworks can influence the degree of resident control within cohousing developments by enabling collective governance while preserving individual ownership.

During the development phase Urban Coup operated as an incorporated association and established a financial structure that allowed members to contribute capital to help secure land and initiate the project.

Prospective purchasers contributed approximately $60,000 each as low-interest loans to the development vehicle, creating a capital pool that helped fund the land purchase. In addition, a smaller group of members contributed higher-risk development equity which earned a higher return but carried greater financial exposure if the project had not proceeded successfully.

This early financial commitment allowed the community to participate in the development process at an earlier stage than typical apartment buyers, giving them a stronger voice in design and decision making.

The project was delivered in partnership with Nightingale Housing, a not-for-profit housing developer that emphasises transparency and limits developer profit margins. In the case of Nightingale projects, developer profits are capped at approximately 15%, with savings typically redirected toward improved sustainability performance and shared facilities.

Sustainability

Urban Coup incorporates a range of environmental sustainability initiatives consistent with the broader principles of Nightingale developments.

The building achieves an average rating of approximately eight stars under the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS), exceeding the minimum regulatory requirements at the time of construction.

Key sustainability features include rooftop solar photovoltaic systems, rainwater harvesting, high-performance building envelopes, and efficient heating systems including hydronic heating.

The development also promotes low-carbon transport by prioritising bicycle infrastructure and locating the project close to public transport. The building includes extensive bicycle parking and is located near the Upfield train line and shared cycling path.

Residents have also implemented operational sustainability initiatives, including detailed waste separation and recycling systems within the building. These systems go beyond standard municipal recycling streams and are managed collectively by residents with assistance from specialised waste recovery services.

In addition to environmental performance, sustainability at Urban Coup also encompasses social sustainability. The shared spaces and regular communal meals support ongoing social interaction and collective stewardship of the building.

[INFORMATION]
Stairwell

Interiors have been designed with low embodied energy and low VOC materials

References:

Terry Teoh. Personal interview. Conducted by Michi Moses, 13 August 2025.

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Images sourced from: https://architecturearchitecture.com.au/projects/urban-coup, https://architectureau.com/articles/nightingale-village/, https://www.nightingalehousing.org/precinct/the-village, https://www.domain.com.au/401-24-hope-street-brunswick-vic-3056-2018723341

4.4 – Case Study 04

Cascade Cohousing

Hobart, Tasmania, Australia


History / Procurement

Cascade Cohousing, established in 1991, was the first cohousing community established in Australia. Founder Ian Higginbottom stumbled across the concept when travelling in the United States in the early 1980's, during which time there were only a handful of cohousing developments there. He came across Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durret's book 'Creating Cohousing' in the window of a Seattle bookstore and was so struck with the ideas around community building and shared resources that he bought several copies to send back to friends in Australia. Later in his travels, he stayed with a couple in Berkeley who just happened to be architects as well as friends of Kathryn and Charles. They spent an entire evening discussing cohousing and by the end of night Ian had a conviction to bring the concept over to Australia and start a community of his own. He then decided to extend his trip to undertake cohousing research in Denmark, the birthplace of the modern cohousing movement. After visiting several communities over there, he was convinced that it was not just an interesting theory, but a working model for building intentional communities, and he began to promote cohousing to anyone who would listen.

He initially enlisted a core group of around 6 friends and as a small group they began spreading the idea in the form of a grassroots campaign, enlisting the help of ABC talkback radio. This led to the establishment of Cohousing Tasmania, which later ended up splitting into the groups now known respectively as 'Cascade Cohousing' and 'Cohousing Co-Op'. This is not uncommon among larger cohousing groups as they become more serious about securing a site and establishing values and priorities. In this case, Cohousing Co-op initially had their sights set on a more rural lifestyle and wanted to establish themselves as a cooperative. On the other hand, the Cascade group preferred to be closer into Hobart's CBD and had the capacity to self-fund their development. As it happens, both cohousing developments now co-exist within several hundred metres of each other.

Ian admits that the way that Cascade Cohousing approached the development process was somewhat unconventional and would not necessarily recommend their methods for those taking on the challenge of establishing their own community. In his words: 'We were the first generation of cohousing in Australia, we didn't know what we were doing'. [1] As a group, they lacked the experience and professional knowledge of a developer, which may have streamlined the process in addition to cutting down costs.

To begin the process of searching for a site, the group initially decided on a set of key Site criteria; including 'within half an hour's bike ride of the Hobart CBD' and located on a bus route. As incorporating sustainable principles was also a key part of their vision, a site with northerly aspect was crucial to design using passive solar principles.
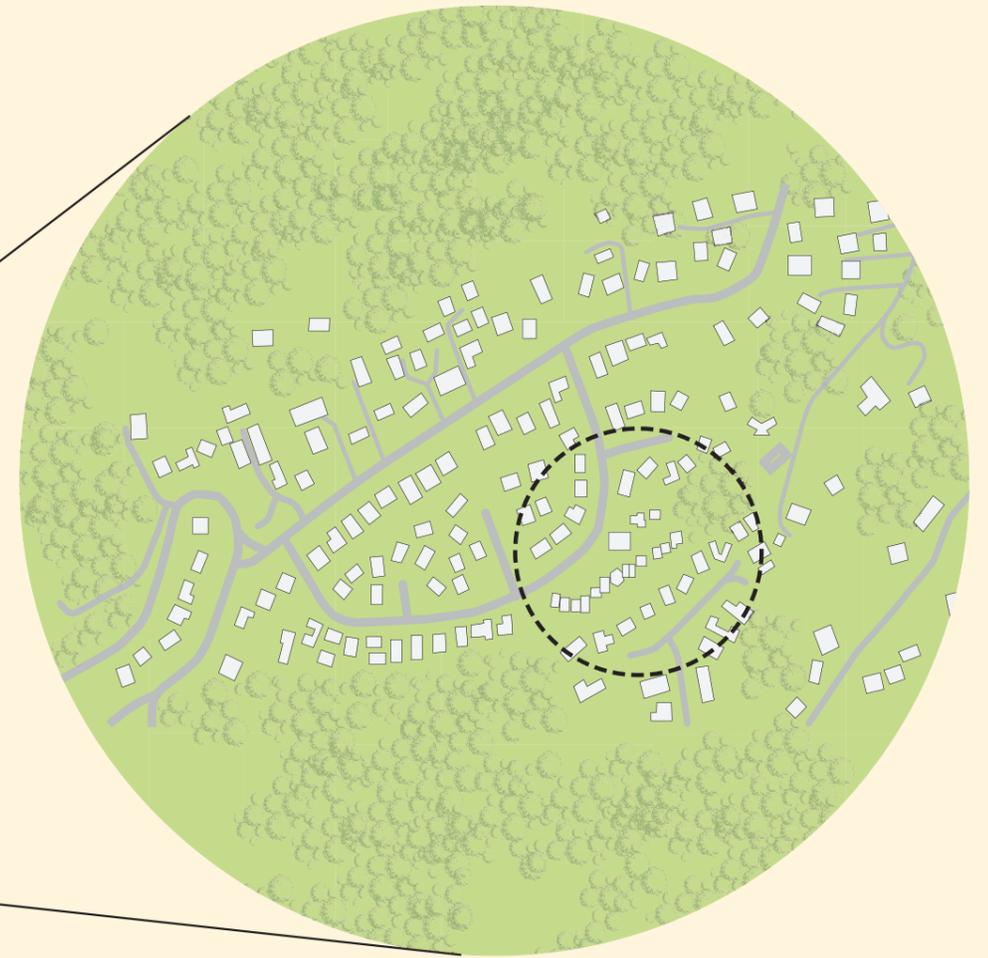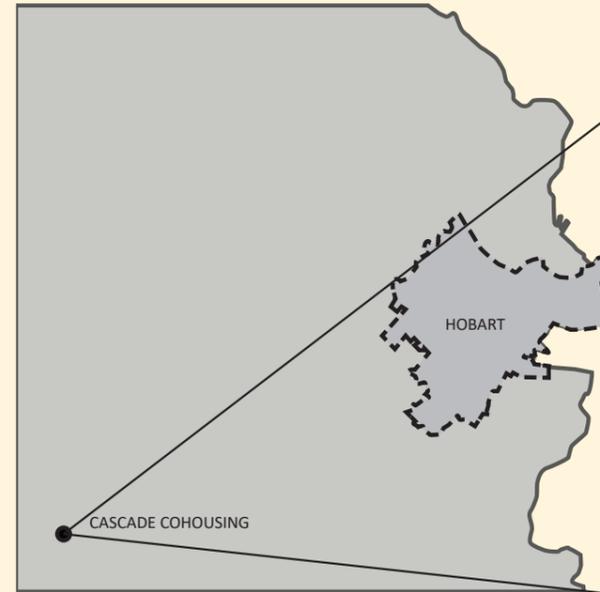
[INFORMATION]
Entrance to Cascade Cohousing

Financial structure + property titling

Despite lacking expertise, the group managed to find a site on government-owned land. They bought six blocks which had been subdivided and sold off to fund social and affordable housing, which they then promptly amalgamated back into a single block. Ian admits that this step could have been avoided if they had a direct channel to government/ had known about the opportunity prior to the blocks being subdivided.

The group didn't set up a legal entity, instead buying the land as 'tenants in common' and drafting an agreement with a lawyer. In this arrangement, each individual owns a specific share of the whole property. In this case, $1 into the common fund equated to $1 of equity. If anyone is unable to pay their share when required, the attorney would transfer the land out of their name. This ended up being a fairly complex arrangement, as each time a new member was added, they would have to go to the bank and restructure the mortgage agreement. As equity was shared between the group, they met the requirements for an owner- builder loan, which at that time required 60% equity. The common ownership structure came to an end once the building was complete, and property was then Strata titled (as stipulated in the original agreement). Changing the property titling arrangement required a restructuring of shares and retrospective financial negotiations, which was a challenging process. The property boundaries also had to be properly defined, as these had not been established when members bought in.

The group enlisted the services of an architect and landscape designer at the beginning of the process, but due to the development being entirely self-funded, they were limited in terms of budget and took on a lot of the work themselves. They were able to comply with the majority of council regulations, with the only discretionary element being the 'common house', due to the fact that it was a community building which necessitated separate titling.

The development met the precinct density requirements on average, with the housing concentrated to the top of the site, allowing for a greater amount of common space. They also designed the houses to work within the height and street-scape guidelines, opting for single dwellings resembling a town house development rather than a two-storey apartment complex.

Some savings were achieved through owner-building, with residents contributing 'sweat equity' during their free time to establish many of the common areas and landscaping.

Ian believes that cohousing is undervalued in comparison to a more typical model due to a lack of familiarity/ misconceptions around it being 'alternative'. The benefits of cohousing are often overlooked when cohousing properties are valued by banks or real estate agents, not taking into account the sense of community, support (particularly for retirees or single parents), and the common facilities available to residents.

Design features

Cascade cohousing consists of 16 dwellings across 14 titles (two of the houses have ancillary dwellings). The dwellings are mainly concentrated to the south of the site and are oriented to the north to take advantage of passive solar principles.

The dwellings are terraced down the slope of the site, which has a steep gradient downwards to the east and views towards Hobart.

The dwellings share a cohesive design language, most being two-storied, steeply pitched gable-roofed dwellings with timber cladding, reminiscent of alpine chalets. Despite being similar in form and materiality, they have individual features reflective of the participatory design process, with most

residents opting to take on the owner-building process themselves or engage separate builders. Residents were conscious of reducing the ecological impact of the development, choosing to mitigate this by opting for smaller footprints (the average dwelling size is 101m²), and using materials and finishes that would have the least impact biologically. All homes have large North facing windows and incorporate a high amount of thermal mass, with most homes featuring aerated Hebel blocks for their insulative quality and ease of assembly.

Steps and interconnected paths connect each of the dwellings, in addition to small pockets of common gardens, play spaces, and the common house. The majority of the landscaping was conducted by the residents themselves in the early days of the community.
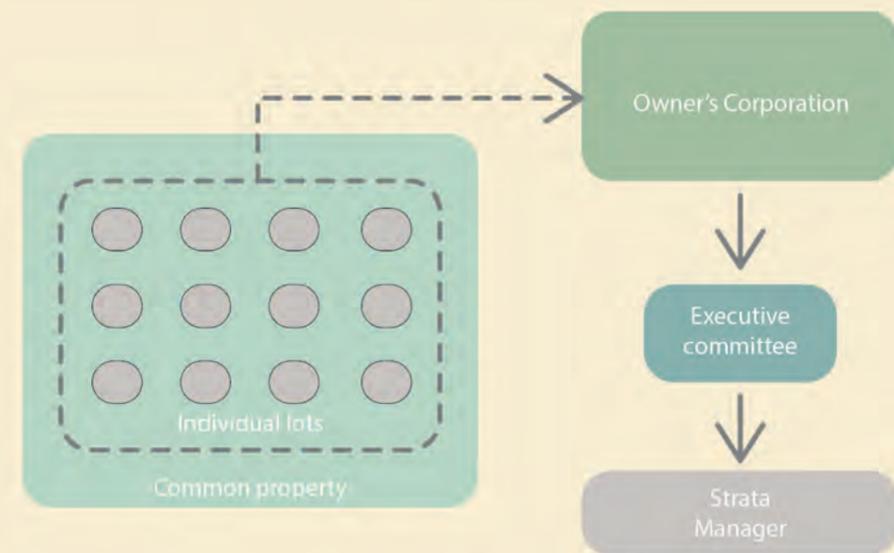
[INFORMATION]
Shared kitchen and dining

[INFORMATION]
The site attracts local wildlife such as this friendly Pademelon

[INFORMATION]
Communal permaculture gardens

References:

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Community and Governance

Cascade cohousing has no formal governance structure, however as a Strata titled development, they have a body corporate which plays a role in the administration and management of the community. In the early days of Cascade, they experienced a difficult period where unresolved issues that had been pushed aside for the sake of the development re-surfaced. This period forced a few of the members to undertake personal development and there was a push for 'consensus training' among the group. Unfortunately, there has been no continuation of this training for new members, with spending of common funds one of the more contentious issues within the community. This is in contrast to cohousing in the US, now in it's 3rd generation, where there are now specific courses and conferences run on different governance models such as sociocracy and elements key to community building, such as the design of the 'common house'. Despite the lack of formal governance system, they are a highly organised group and run monthly meetings for which residents can volunteer for positions such as facilitator, minute taker etc. Embedded in the community culture of Cascade are the optional thrice-weekly dinners. Residents have the flexibility to choose the number of dinners they would like to participate in each week, and this in turn determines your voluntary obligations for meal preparation and clean up. The Cascade community also enjoys several gatherings throughout the year to celebrate key dates such as Winter solstice and Christmas. These gatherings are an opportunity for residents to let their hair down and put their differences aside.
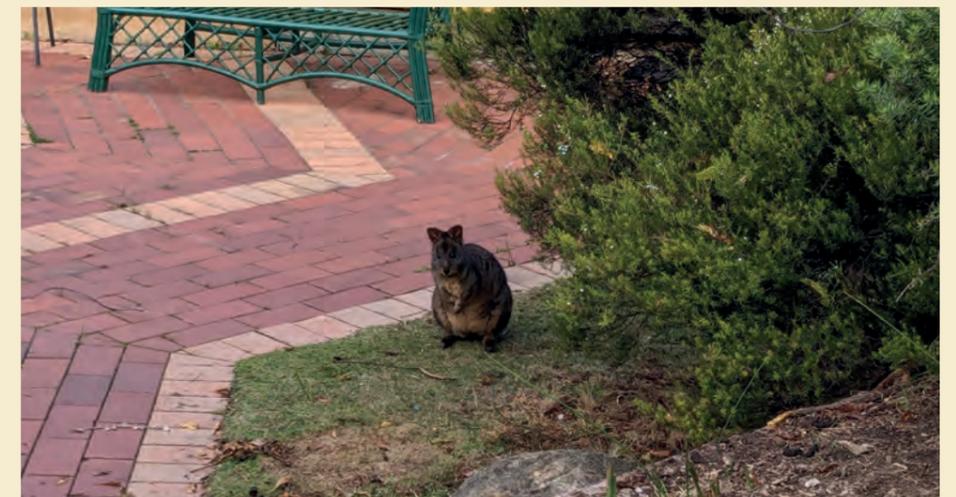
Sustainability

Cascade Cohousing embraces sustainability through various initiatives designed to minimise environmental impact and promote community well-being. The community incorporates passive solar design and energy-efficient appliances to reduce energy consumption, while solar panels provide renewable energy. Water conservation is achieved through rainwater harvesting and water-efficient fixtures. Residents practice permaculture and organic gardening, enhancing local food production and

biodiversity. Waste reduction is emphasised through recycling and composting programs. Additionally, the community encourages sustainable transportation options like walking, cycling, and public transit, fostering a green and socially cohesive living environment.

Legend

1. Common house

2. Carpark

3. Private green space

4. Veggie garden and chicken coop

5. 'Forest'

5.0 – Findings

Findings summary matrix

	Community size/ number of dwellings	Financial structure / Property titling	Governance structure	Community	Design features (to facilitate community)	Sustainability
CASE STUDY 1 Wybalena grove	105 town houses, located within 5 clusters	Originally set up as a **Cooperative**, now under **Unit Title** (known as **Strata title** in other states)	**Body corporate with resident nominated Executive committee.** Common spaces managed by strata manager. Originally stipulated that EC required one member per cluster but struggle to find volunteers	- Working bees - Resident interaction facilitated through design	- Shared paths, parking bays, letter boxes - Houses arranged in clusters - Common areas: playground, pizza oven, tennis court, community garden	- Solar panels to individual dwellings - Community garden - Site incorporates large amount of endemic bushland + habitat which is protected/managed by strata manager - Some EV charging
CASE STUDY 2 Narara Ecovillage	115 people living on-site, ranging from newborn to early eighties. Stage one has 42 standard lots and 18 cluster units. Stage 2 consists of 43 lots ranging in size from 550 to 900m². Total lots: ~103	**Cooperative** with **Community title.**	**Sociocracy** - proactive regarding training residents, many established groups/circles spanning a broad range of interests	- Compulsory service (52 hours a year) - Shared dinners - Open days, festivals - Large amount of families, approximately 60 children (though no one between ages of 21-35*)	- Common house - Permaculture gardens - Shared letterboxes - Shared parking and EV facilities	- Solar smart grid - Water management system - Sustainable housing guide - Re-use of existing buildings and infrastructure - Stringent sustainability standards - Conservation of natural bushland
CASE STUDY 3 Urban Coup	Approximately 55 people living across 29 households. Mix of 1, 2, 3, and 4-bedroom apartments	**Incorporated association** and **Unit Trust** during development. Transitioned to **Strata title** post construction.	**Sociocracy** - working with 'Sociocracy for all' to train all residents	- Diverse demographic, reflecting a variety of professional backgrounds and ages - Shared dinners - Part of broader Nightingale village community	- Communal kitchen and dining area - Guest accommodation - Rooftop - Future Japanese bath - Multi-purpose rooms	- Designed with passive solar principles - Double glazing + high levels of insulation - On-site water collection and re-use systems - Fully electric - GoGet car share services and proximity to transport services - Sustainable materials - Shared facilities and resources
CASE STUDY 4 Cascade Cohousing	16 dwellings across 14 titles (two of the houses have ancillary dwellings)	**'Tenants in common'** contractual arrangement during construction. Transitioned to **Strata title** post construction.	**No formal governance structure** - however highly organised in accordance with own systems (several founding members have had consensus training). Relatively small size of development means that it can be effectively managed through democratic processes.	- Shared dinners - Working bees/ 'sweat equity' - Contribution to maintenance of common facilities is common but not enforced Ageing population - families in beginning, but social dynamic has changed (less young families)	- Common house -Guest accommodation -Shared kitchen -Movie room and projector - Children's room - Shared permaculture gardens - Shared green space and seating -Shared EV charging	- Passive solar design - Solar panels - Water conservation through rainwater harvesting and water-efficient fixtures. - Permaculture and organic gardening - Recycling and composting programs. -Encouragement of sustainable transportation options like walking, cycling, and public transit

5.0 – Findings

This report investigates the role of cohousing in addressing housing affordability and living conditions in Australia. The report begins by contextualising Australia's housing crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, rising interest rates, and frequent natural disasters.

To explore potential solutions, the report examines cohousing as an alternative housing model. Cohousing communities prioritise social connections, sustainability, and affordability, and typically feature shared spaces and resources, participatory decision-making, and diverse, inclusive environments. The report's methodology includes in-depth case studies of four Australian cohousing communities: Wybalena Grove, Narara Ecovillage, Urban Coup, and Cascade Cohousing. Data was collected through site visits, surveys, informal interviews, and desktop analysis, focusing on procurement methods, financial and legal structures, governance models, and design features.

Financial structure and property titling

How do legal and financial structures impact the level of control that residents have over a development?

Financial structure and property titling form a key role in the way a community is run, from the level of community involvement, to shared responsibilities and resident participation during the design process.

The case studies illustrate how legal and financial structures impact the level of control residents have over a development:

Unit Title and Owners Corporation:

In Wybalena Grove, the transition to unit title provided individual ownership and greater control over units while maintaining collective management through an Owners Corporation. This balance allowed residents to manage their properties effectively.

Cooperative and Community Title Models: Narara Ecovillage's cooperative model with community title supported both shared ownership and individual responsibilities, giving residents significant control over their properties and the community's governance and operations.

Unit Trust and Strata Title: Urban Coup established an incorporated association during the early stages of the project to organise prospective residents and support collective decision making. During the development phase, a unit trust structure was used as the financial vehicle through which members contributed capital, including low interest member loans and development equity, to help secure land and initiate the project. This structure enabled future residents to participate in key design and development decisions earlier than typical apartment purchasers. Following completion, the building transitioned to a conventional strata titled arrangement, with individual households owning their apartments and shared facilities managed through the Owners Corporation.

Shared Equity and Strata Title: Cascade Cohousing's initial tenants-in-common arrangement fostered a strong sense of collective responsibility, but frequent restructuring was challenging. The transition to strata title provided clearer individual ownership and enhanced control over individual units and common areas.

In conclusion, legal and financial structures that balance shared and individual ownership, provide transparent and inclusive governance, and support resident participation in decision-making processes significantly enhance the level of control residents have over a cohousing development.

Governance structure

How do legal and financial structures impact the level of control that residents have over a development?

The governance structures of each cohousing community are critical to their functionality and community cohesion. The case studies illustrate that a community's governance structure significantly influences the level of resident participation and cohesion:

Structured Governance Models: Communities like Narara Ecovillage and Urban Coup with structured governance models (sociocracy and modified consensus) demonstrate high levels of resident participation and cohesion. These models promote inclusivity, transparency, and collective decision-making, ensuring that all residents are actively involved in governance processes.

Training and Support: Providing training and support in governance models, as seen in Narara Ecovillage and Urban Coup, enhances resident engagement and ensures effective participation. Training helps residents understand their roles and responsibilities, leading to better governance outcomes.

Community Activities and Shared Responsibilities: Regardless of the formal structure, communities that emphasise shared responsibilities and regular community activities, such as Wybalena Grove and Cascade Cohousing, foster strong social bonds and a sense of collective ownership. These activities play a crucial role in maintaining cohesion and participation, even in less formally structured environments.

Challenges in Volunteerism: The willingness of residents to volunteer for governance roles is critical. Wybalena Grove's challenges in finding volunteers for its Executive Committee highlight that governance structures must be supported by resident engagement to be effective.

In conclusion, effective governance structures that promote inclusivity, training, shared responsibilities, and regular community activities are key to enhancing resident participation and cohesion in cohousing communities.

Affordability

How do financial and governance structures impact the affordability of cohousing developments?

How can affordability be achieved through design elements such as the incorporation of shared resources?

Wybalena Grove

Wybalena Grove's original cooperative model aimed to reduce costs through collective ownership and shared resources.

The shift to unit title (strata title) allowed for easier financing and property transactions, potentially making individual units more accessible.

The community design includes shared paths, parking, and common areas, which can reduce individual costs for amenities and infrastructure.

Narara Ecovillage

The cooperative ownership and community title structure support shared ownership and collective investment, spreading costs among members.

Requiring members to contribute service hours annually integrates community work into the financial model, potentially reducing costs for maintenance and operations.

The emphasis on sustainability, such as solar arrays and permaculture gardens, helps reduce long-term living costs.

CLaN (Collaborative Living at Narara) aims to make living within the community more accessible by allowing for shared living arrangements to lower costs and encourage diversity.

Urban Coup

Not-for-Profit Developer: Partnering with Nightingale Housing ensures capped developer profits.

Energy Efficiency: High energy efficiency and shared utilities reduce ongoing living costs for residents.

Shared Resources and Spaces: Communal spaces and resources, such as shared kitchens and laundry facilities, can potentially assist in reducing individual living expenses.

Cascade cohousing

Self-Funded Development: The self-funded nature of Cascade Cohousing allowed for control over costs, although it required significant initial investment and effort from residents.

Shared Resources and Sweat Equity: Contributions of sweat equity and shared resources helped reduce construction and maintenance costs.

Sustainability Practices: Emphasis on sustainability practices, such as passive solar design and permaculture, helps lower long-term living costs.

Financial and governance structures play a crucial role in the affordability of cohousing developments by determining how costs are distributed and managed. Cooperative ownership and community titles spread expenses among members, while service hour contributions can lower maintenance and operational costs. Not-for-profit models with capped developer profits can increase affordability. Additionally, the design elements of shared resources and communal spaces reduce individual expenses for amenities, infrastructure, and utilities, further enhancing affordability. Incorporating sustainability practices also helps lower long-term living costs, contributing to the overall economic accessibility of cohousing communities.

5.0 – Findings

Community

What particular design features aid in facilitating community?
How do Cohousing developments contribute to community and wellbeing in contrast to speculative development?

Shared Spaces and Facilities

Design and Layout: Cohousing communities, such as Wybalena Grove and Narara Ecovillage, are intentionally designed with shared spaces like common houses, community gardens, and shared pathways. This physical layout encourages frequent interactions among residents, fostering a strong sense of community.

In contrast, speculative developments often prioritise maximising individual unit sales and may lack shared communal spaces, leading to less interaction among residents.

Participatory Decision-Making

Governance Models: Cohousing communities like Narara Ecovillage and Urban Coup use inclusive governance models such as sociocracy and consensus decision-making. This involvement in decision-making processes empowers residents, giving them a sense of ownership and responsibility for their community.

Speculative developments are typically managed by developers or external property management companies, with limited input from residents, reducing their sense of involvement and ownership.

Social Activities and Networks

Community Events: Cohousing communities often organise regular social activities, such as shared meals, gardening days, and communal projects.

For example, Cascade Cohousing hosts community dinners and gatherings, which strengthen social bonds. While some speculative developments may offer amenities like gyms or pools, they often lack organised community events, leading to a more

fragmented social environment.

Long-Term Commitment

Resident Stability: Cohousing often attracts residents who are committed to the long-term success of the community. This stability helps build deeper relationships and a stronger sense of community.

Speculative developments may have higher turnover rates as properties are often bought and sold for investment purposes, leading to a more transient population and weaker community ties.

Environmental and Social Values

Shared Values: Cohousing communities often share common values related to sustainability, cooperation, and mutual support. For instance, Narara Ecovillage emphasises permaculture and renewable energy, aligning residents around shared environmental goals.

Speculative developments may not have a unifying set of values or goals, as they are primarily driven by market demand and individual investment returns.

Supportive Networks

Mutual Support: Cohousing residents often develop supportive networks, providing help with childcare, elder care, and other community needs. This mutual support enhances residents' quality of life and sense of belonging.

In speculative developments, residents may be more isolated and less likely to rely on or offer support to their neighbours, reducing the overall sense of community.

[INFORMATION]
Narara Ecovillage has been designed to facilitate community
https://nararaecovillage.com/

6.0 – Recommendations

Recommendations to Improve Affordability and Ease of Procurement for Cohousing Developments

1. Incentivise Cohousing Models:

Financial Incentives: Provide financial incentives such as grants, low-interest loans, or tax credits specifically for cohousing projects. This can help reduce the initial capital investment required and make cohousing more accessible to a broader range of people.

Subsidies for Land Acquisition: Implement subsidies or provide discounted public land for cohousing developments to reduce the overall cost of the project.

2. Facilitate Access to Finance:

Specialised Financing Products: Encourage the development of specialised financing products by financial institutions that cater to the unique structure of cohousing. This includes cooperative loans, shared equity schemes, and construction loans tailored for multiple owners.

Government-Backed Loans: Introduce government-backed loan schemes that reduce the risk for lenders and make it easier for cohousing groups to secure financing.

3. Streamline Planning and Approval Processes:

Expedited Approvals: Create expedited approval processes for cohousing projects that meet specific criteria related to sustainability, affordability, and community benefit. This can reduce the time and administrative burden involved in getting projects off the ground.

Flexible Zoning Regulations: Amend zoning regulations to be more flexible in allowing for higher density and mixed-use developments, which are often integral to successful cohousing projects.

4. Supportive Legal Framework:

Standardised Legal Structures: Develop and promote standardised legal structures and documentation for cohousing developments. This can reduce legal complexity and costs for groups looking to establish cohousing communities.

Cooperative Ownership Models: Encourage cooperative ownership models through legal recognition and support, making it easier for groups to adopt these structures.

5. Promote Awareness and Education:

Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the community about the benefits of cohousing, including its social, economic, and environmental advantages.

Training and Resources: Provide training programs and resources for individuals and groups interested in developing cohousing projects. This can include workshops, online resources, and advisory services.

6. Integrate Cohousing into Housing Strategies:

National Housing Strategy: Integrate cohousing as a key component of the national housing strategy. Recognise cohousing as a viable option for increasing affordable housing supply and promoting community cohesion.

Local Government Policies: Encourage local governments to incorporate cohousing into their housing policies and strategies. This includes setting targets for cohousing developments and providing local support and incentives.

7. Encourage Public-Private Partnerships:

Collaborative Projects: Foster partnerships between government, private developers, and non-profit organisations to develop cohousing projects. These partnerships can leverage different strengths and resources to create successful cohousing communities.

Pilot Programs: Implement pilot programs that demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of cohousing. Successful pilot projects can serve as models for wider adoption.

8. Ensure Long-Term Affordability:

Affordability Covenants: Require affordability covenants on cohousing developments to ensure that they remain affordable in the long term. This can prevent speculative increases in property values that can price out future residents.

Community Land Trusts: Support the establishment of community land trusts that hold land in perpetuity for the benefit of the community, ensuring long-term affordability and preventing land speculation.
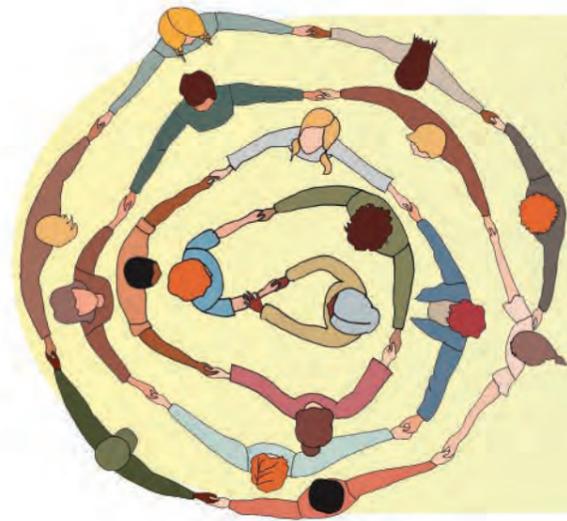
By implementing these recommendations, Australia can enhance the affordability and feasibility of cohousing developments, contributing to a more diverse, inclusive, and sustainable housing landscape.

Cohousing Essentials: A Quick Guide to Community Living

An overview of the steps required to form a successful resident-led Community

Common characteristics of cohousing include:

- **Participatory processes**
- **Designs that facilitate Community**
- **Extensive common facilities**
- **Complete resident management**
- **Non-hierarchical structure**
- **Separate income sources**

1. What is Cohousing?

Cohousing is a type of intentional community where residents actively participate in the design and operation of their neighborhoods. Typically, cohousing communities consist of private homes clustered around shared spaces like kitchens, dining areas, gardens, and recreational areas. These shared spaces are designed to foster interaction and cooperation among residents. Cohousing emphasises collaborative living, sustainability, and a strong sense of community, where decisions are often made collectively. This model combines the benefits of private living with the advantages of social connections and shared resources.

INDIVIDUAL DWELLINGS

COMMON HOUSE

CHICKEN COOP

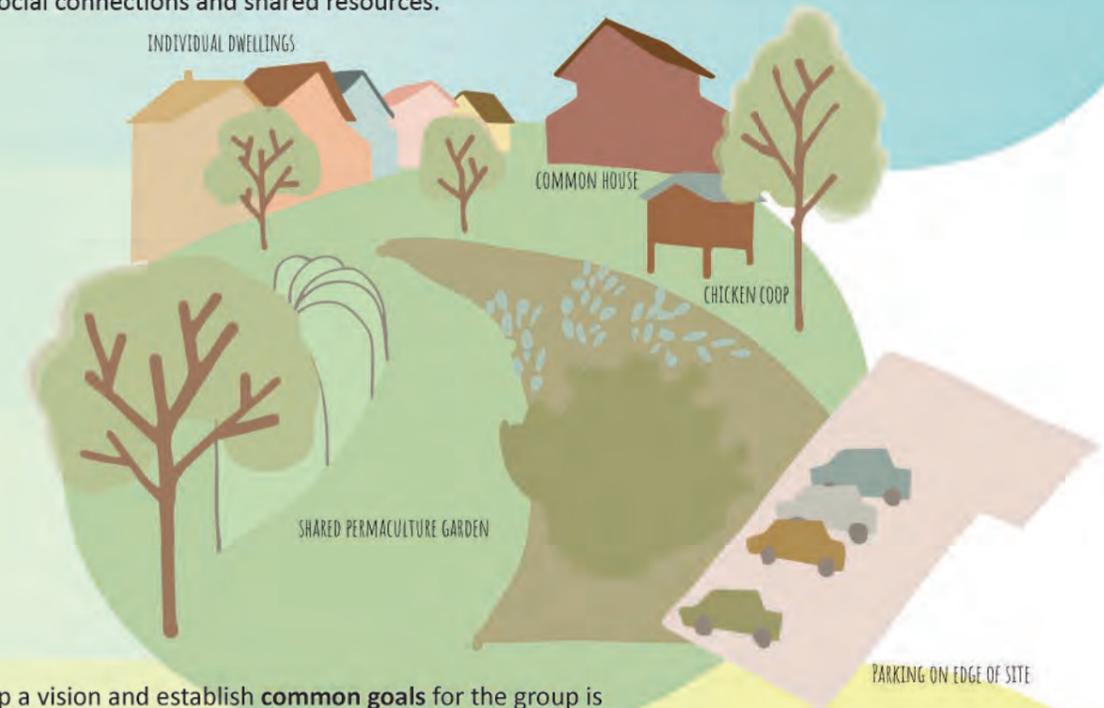SHARED PERMACULTURE GARDEN

PARKING ON EDGE OF SITE

2. Forming a Group

A key step in the formation of a cohousing community is to establish a **core group** of passionate members united by the same **vision**. This process often starts informally, as a group of friends or family who share an interest in collaborative living.

The development process can be challenging and often difficult to navigate, and this will ensure that a project has enough momentum behind it to get through the hurdles that will inevitably arise.

One way to develop a vision and establish **common goals** for the group is by writing a vision statement. A **'Vision statement'** is a means of describing the overarching purpose and main priorities of the group from the beginning.

Governance models

It is crucial to develop **effective group processes** in the early stages of group formation to ensure there are clear pathways for decision making and conflict resolution among group members.
Some popular forms of governance models are:

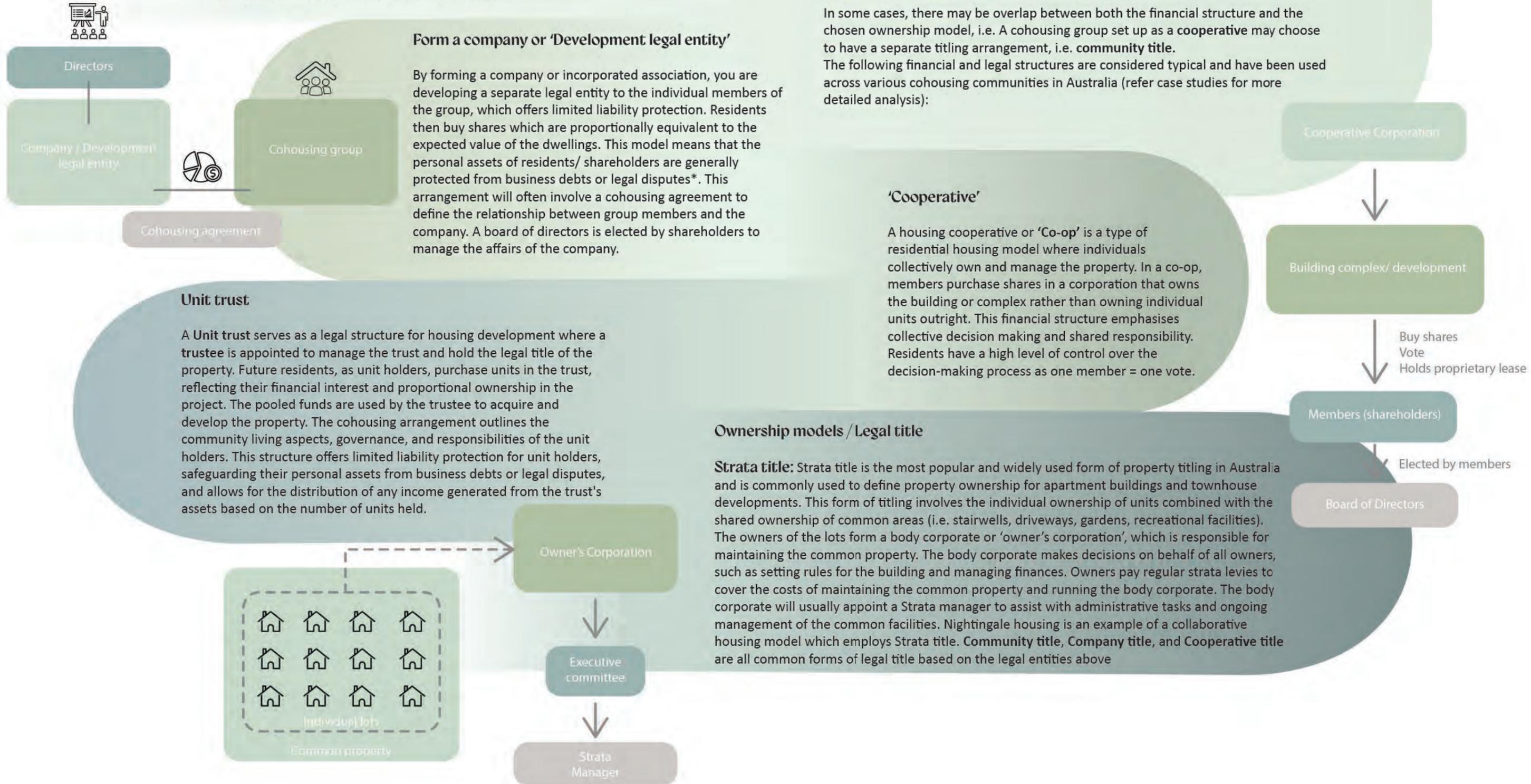- Sociocracy
- Coloured cards
- Consensus model

The next step in this process is to build membership and find potential members. This might involve spreading your 'vision' via word of mouth, social media, radio, etc.

3. Legal and financial structures

The absence of suitable financial and legal models for cohousing development is a key barrier to collaborative living models in Australia*. This is mainly due to the inability of cohousing groups to access finance and a lack of knowledge about which form of legal entity might be best suited to their development.

Prior to commencing a project, it is important to consider what **legal and financial structures** your group will follow throughout the **development process**, and how the property is to be **titled**. The legal and financial structures should be shaped by the **needs and aims** of the group and take into account the **financial capacity** of the group, location, the number of dwellings, building type and form, level of control over design elements, and level of individual customization.

In some cases, there may be overlap between both the financial structure and the chosen ownership model, i.e. A cohousing group set up as a **cooperative** may choose to have a separate titling arrangement, i.e. **community title.**
The following financial and legal structures are considered typical and have been used across various cohousing communities in Australia (refer case studies for more detailed analysis):

Directors

Company / Development legal entity

Cohousing group

Cohousing agreement

Form a company or 'Development legal entity'

By forming a company or incorporated association, you are developing a separate legal entity to the individual members of the group, which offers limited liability protection. Residents then buy shares which are proportionally equivalent to the expected value of the dwellings. This model means that the personal assets of residents/ shareholders are generally protected from business debts or legal disputes*. This arrangement will often involve a cohousing agreement to define the relationship between group members and the company. A board of directors is elected by shareholders to manage the affairs of the company.

'Cooperative'

A housing cooperative or **'Co-op'** is a type of residential housing model where individuals collectively own and manage the property. In a co-op, members purchase shares in a corporation that owns the building or complex rather than owning individual units outright. This financial structure emphasises collective decision making and shared responsibility. Residents have a high level of control over the decision-making process as one member = one vote.

Cooperative Corporation

Building complex/ development

Buy shares
Vote
Holds proprietary lease

Members (shareholders)

Elected by members

Board of Directors

Unit trust

A **Unit trust** serves as a legal structure for housing development where a **trustee** is appointed to manage the trust and hold the legal title of the property. Future residents, as unit holders, purchase units in the trust, reflecting their financial interest and proportional ownership in the project. The pooled funds are used by the trustee to acquire and develop the property. The cohousing arrangement outlines the community living aspects, governance, and responsibilities of the unit holders. This structure offers limited liability protection for unit holders, safeguarding their personal assets from business debts or legal disputes, and allows for the distribution of any income generated from the trust's assets based on the number of units held.

Owner's Corporation

Executive committee

Individual lots

Common property

Strata Manager

Ownership models / Legal title

Strata title: Strata title is the most popular and widely used form of property titling in Australia and is commonly used to define property ownership for apartment buildings and townhouse developments. This form of titling involves the individual ownership of units combined with the shared ownership of common areas (i.e. stairwells, driveways, gardens, recreational facilities). The owners of the lots form a body corporate or 'owner's corporation', which is responsible for maintaining the common property. The body corporate makes decisions on behalf of all owners, such as setting rules for the building and managing finances. Owners pay regular strata levies to cover the costs of maintaining the common property and running the body corporate. The body corporate will usually appoint a Strata manager to assist with administrative tasks and ongoing management of the common facilities. Nightingale housing is an example of a collaborative housing model which employs Strata title. **Community title**, **Company title**, and **Cooperative title** are all common forms of legal title based on the legal entities above

4. Finding a Site

Finding a site is a crucial part of the development process. The first step is to identify key site criteria and decide as a group on which characteristics you would like to prioritise. One method is to have group members participate in a survey or questionnaire. This could also involve a group session to write a design brief. The process of finding and securing an appropriate site can take months if not years. If you are partnering with a developer, they should be able to drive this process based on the brief and vision that your group has established.

Site topography and orientation

Is the site suitable for your preferred housing typology and will it facilitate passive solar design? It's also important to assess the level of existing infrastructure and that which will have to be provided (i.e. water and sewer connections, electricity, roads).

The key considerations when finding a site are:

Location – Urban/ Suburban/Rural

Is the site located in an urban or rural area? When Urban Coup were searching for a site, their discussions around this key question led them to split off into two separate groups, 'Near and Tall' and 'Far and Wide'. While some may have romantic notions of a cohousing community located in remote and spacious farmland (and not to say this can't work in some instances), a community must consider the practicalities of their chosen location in terms of commute distance, access to public transport, and amenities such as healthcare and schools.

Size of cohousing group

The size of your group will likely have some impact on your preferred **housing typology** (single detached house, duplex, townhouse, apartments)
According to McCamant and Durrett, the **ideal group size** is around 16 to 25 households. This size of community is considered ideal because it is small enough to know everyone well , while also being large enough to **secure finances** for development. This development size is also large enough to have extensive shared facilities but small enough to be easily managed by direct democracy.

1. Site research

Begin by consulting your local online council maps for zoning, land use, environmental overlays. Real estate agents and land registers can also be useful sources of information.

2. Visit and Evaluate potential sites

At each site visit, bring along a site checklist based on your chosen site criteria. This allows for simple comparison between potential sites.

Site checklist:
- Proximity to services (shops, healthcare, schools, etc.)
- Transport connections – bus, train, bike
- Affordability of land
- Size – does the site accommodate the number of dwellings + common spaces you require?
- Topography
- Zoning
- Infrastructure

3. Due diligence

Once you have selected a potential site, it's important to conduct due diligence to assess any potential risks to the project such as bushfire and environmental assessments. You may want to engage an architect or planner to conduct a feasibility study for the site, overlaying the site constraints with a potential master plan. This is also a good time to engage with your local council to discuss whether your plans for the site are likely to be approved and compliant with council guidelines.

4. Negotiate and secure site

Negotiate with the site's owner or relevant authorities to secure the site. If working with a developer, they will likely negotiate the land purchase on your behalf. Whatever the chosen purchase pathway (long term lease, partnership, direct purchase), ensure that you engage with a lawyer or solicitor to review legal agreements and advocate for and protect the interests of your group

5. Design and Development process

Development strategy

It's important to identify early in the development process whether your cohousing group will undertake the project as a self-development strategy or be guided through the process by a developer. There can be advantages and disadvantages to each method and this will largely be determined by the type of development, level of control/ participatory design and financial capacity. In deciding which approach to take, the cohousing group should consider who is assuming financial risks, who is managing the development process, and what resources are available in their area

Self-Development Strategy:

In this approach, the group assumes all financial risks, including fundraising and securing financing for land and construction. While self-developing might seem cost-effective by avoiding developer fees, it can lead to increased costs due to inefficiencies and inexperience. If suitable developers are unavailable, the group must handle the process, necessitating a team of professionals (project manager, architect, builder) for expertise. This method offers high customisation and a strong sense of community from the start.

Developer-Led Strategy:

Here, a professional developer manages the project, handling most aspects of development. The developer's experience, resources, and expertise in construction, financing, and project management reduce stress and workload for future residents, and often result in quicker project completion and lower financial risk. However, there is less control and customisation for residents, and higher costs due to developer profit margins.

Developer as Partner (Joint Venture Strategy):

This collaborative approach involves shared responsibilities and risks between the resident group and a professional developer. It combines the strengths of both self-development and developer-led models, allowing residents to benefit from the developer's experience while maintaining significant input and control. Clear agreements are essential to balance the residents' goals with the developer's priorities.

2. Collaborative design process

Your chosen development strategy will determine to some extent the level of participation that your group has in the design process. Regardless of whether you're partnering with a developer or have chosen to self-develop, consider engaging an architect or external consultant to facilitate the collaborative design process.

If partnering with a developer, they will typically lead the design process, engaging a team of consultants on your behalf. This is somewhat dependent on the project, but would typically include: Architect, Urban designer/planner, Landscape architect, Engineers (Civil, Structural, Hydraulic).

1. Redefine brief and scope of project

Ensure that as a group you have a clearly defined project brief. Your brief should define the preferred typology (i.e. townhouse, apartments, standalone dwellings), number of households, common spaces (i.e. shared kitchen, guest facilities), landscaping requirements, as well as any specific design considerations such as accessibility requirements and design to facilitate community. This will act as a guide for your consultant team and is a flexible document that will gradually become more detailed as the design phase progresses.

3. Development approvals

Your design team will work closely with the local authorities to secure the necessary permits and approvals required for your cohousing development. This will generally include development approval and construction approval.

5. Contractor selection

Your chosen developer or architect will assist in the final contractor selection process. This will generally be determined by a set of selection criteria including experience and track record, technical capability, finances, project cost, and any 'value' adds, potential cost savings or innovations.

6. Build

Depending on the scale and complexity of the project, this will generally take a period of 14-18 months from breaking ground to final completion. Your level of involvement during this period will depend on the development strategy, however it will most likely involve regular communications with the design and construction teams to provide updates on timelines, site issues, potential design changes etc.

4. Tender process

Once the detailed documentation has been finalised by your team, the project will go out to tender for a construction contractor (generally 3-4 builders depending on project size) who will provide a preliminary scope and costing for the project.

8.0 – Glossary

Dictionary of terminology

Collaborative housing: Collaborative housing is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of different housing models which prioritise community building and shared resources. They often involve a strong emphasis on sustainability, and participatory design. Different forms of collaborative housing include cohousing, cooperative housing, co-living, and building groups (Baugruppen). x
These models can also be combined, for example a cohousing community may use a cooperative as its legal entity and a building group for its development process.
It has gained traction as a movement in Australia in recent years as it provides an alternative to conventional, multi-unit development.

Cohousing: Cohousing is one of the best-known models of collaborative housing. Since gaining popularity in northern Europe in the 1960s, cohousing has spread across Europe and North America, with a small number of projects also in Australia. Cohousing developments typically aim to create a sense of community and social belonging through a design that emphasises shared space and social interaction, and strong consensus processes around community governance.

Cooperative housing: Focused on the rental market, cooperative housing is a popular governance model for housing around the world. In Scandinavia, as much as 30 per cent of housing is cooperative housing, and in Australia there are already more than 8,000 people living in this type of housing. Cooperative housing providers use the cooperative law structure and apply it to housing; residents join the cooperative as members and rent from it. It is one of the best models for providing affordable, secure rental housing in a collaborative way, often for students and other lower-income groups.

Co-living: Co-living has been described as a 21st-century version of dormitory living for adults that helps to address urban housing affordability, while reducing resource use and supporting social connection. Typically developed under new-generation boarding house provisions, co-living provides rental accommodation in buildings that also include significant communal spaces. Some properties employ a dedicated community manager to help the community to thrive.

Building groups (Baugruppen): Building groups involve a collective of prospective owner-occupiers coming together to co-create a development. They provide input to the design and may also get involved in putting together finance and overseeing development approval and construction. There are a number of ways this might occur, ranging from groups of friends coming together to develop, to strangers being brought together by an architect or development manager who is facilitating a development.

Tenure: Tenure refers to the legal arrangement or status under which property or real estate is held or occupied. It defines the conditions, rights, and obligations of the occupants or owners of the property. Strata title, Community title, and Cooperative are all common forms of tenure in Australia.

Ecovillage: An ecovillage is an intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designed through locally owned participatory processes in all four dimensions of sustainability (social, culture, ecology and economy) to regenerate social and natural environments.
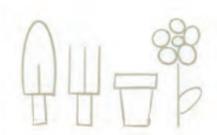
Intentional community: An intentional community is a planned residential community designed to foster a high degree of social cohesion and teamwork. Its members typically share common values, goals, or lifestyles and make a deliberate effort to live together in ways that reflect these shared principles.

Common house: In the context of cohousing, a common house is a shared building that serves as a communal space for residents. It is designed to foster community interaction and provide amenities that individual homes might not have.

Community tax: As coined by architect Charles, Durrett, the 'community tax' describes the small inconveniences that every individual puts up with to enjoy the benefits of living in a high-functioning community. I.e. the occasional price one must pay to enjoy common dinners every week, share a car, or live within a beautifully landscaped environment.

Housing stress: Housing stress refers to a situation where a household spends a significant portion of its income on housing costs, leaving little money for other essential needs such as food, clothing, healthcare, and transportation. Housing stress is typically defined as being when a household is paying more than 30% of its income on housing costs (rent or mortgage repayments).

Suburban sprawl: Suburban sprawl refers to the uncontrolled, expansive spread of suburban development into rural or undeveloped areas surrounding a city. It is characterised by low-density residential housing, single-use zoning, and heavy reliance on automobiles for transportation.

Deliberative development: Deliberative development is a development approach in which key decisions about a project are made through structured dialogue and collective decision making among stakeholders, often including future residents, designers, and developers. Rather than being delivered through a purely speculative or developer led process, deliberative development involves participants in shaping the project's goals, design, governance structures, and shared resources from early stages. This model emphasises transparency, participation, and consensus building, with the aim of producing outcomes that better reflect the social, environmental, and spatial needs of the community involved.

Inclusionary zoning: Inclusionary zoning is a policy that requires or incentivises developers to include a certain percentage of affordable housing units within new or rehabilitated residential projects. The goal is to create mixed-income communities, increase the availability of affordable housing, and promote social and economic integration.

Sweat equity: Sweat equity refers to the non-monetary investment that individuals contribute to a project through their labour, effort, and time. It is often used in the context of business start-ups or real estate, where individuals invest their own work to increase the value of a business or property, earning an ownership stake or other financial benefits in return.

Participatory decision making: Participatory decision-making is a process where all members of a group or community actively engage in the decision-making process. This approach ensures that the perspectives, ideas, and concerns of everyone involved are considered, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the decisions made.

Sociocracy: Sociocracy is a governance system emphasising equality, consent-based decision-making, and decentralised structures. It uses circles for decision-making, where decisions are made by consent, not majority vote. Roles are elected by consent, and transparency and feedback are key. It's used in organisations valuing collaboration, aiming for more democratic, efficient governance.

Consensus decision-making: Consensus decision-making is a group decision-making process where all group members collaborate to reach a decision everyone can support or accept. Unlike majority voting, consensus seeks to address objections and find solutions that consider everyone's input. It emphasises inclusivity, cooperation, and ensuring decisions are mutually agreeable, fostering unity and collective ownership.

9.0 – Resources

Cohousing in Australia

CoHousing Australia

https://transitionaustralia.net/site/cohousing-australia/

Collaborative Housing Australia

https://www.collaborativehousing.org.au/

Ecovillages Australia

https://www.ecovillages.au/

Cohousing Canberra

https://www.cohousingcanberra.org.au/

NewCoh

https://www.newcoh.org/

Cohousing overseas

The Cohousing Association of the United States

https://www.cohousing.org/

Community-led Homes UK

https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/what-community-led-housing

"Cohousing for Life" (Book)

A Practical and Personal Story of Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood

By Robin Allison

"Creating Cohousing" (Book)

By Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett

"The Cohousing handbook" (Book)

Chris Hanson

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

Cohousing survey

Cohousing Residents Survey – Wybalena grove
Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey! Your feedback is essential in understanding the experiences of cohousing residents and improving future developments. Please take a few minutes to share your thoughts and insights.

Contact: Michi Moses
Email: michi.playford@lighthouseteam.com.au
Instagram: @Co.habitate

Cohousing Residents Survey – Wybalena grove
Personal Information

1. Name (Optional)

2. Age bracket

☐ 18-24

☐ 25-34

☐ 35-44

☐ 45-54

☐ 55-64

☐ 65+

3. How long have you been living at Wybalena Grove?

Cohousing Residents Survey – Wybalena grove
Community Choice

4. What motivated you to choose to live at Wybalena Grove?

☐ Strong sense of community

☐ Shared values with others

☐ Desire for collaborative decision-making

☐ Location and proximity to services

☐ Sustainability initiatives

Other (please specify)

Cohousing Residents Survey – Wybalena grove
Mental Wellbeing

5. How has living in a cohousing community contributed to your mental wellbeing?

☐ Improved sense of belonging

☐ Reduced feelings of isolation

☐ Enhanced social support

☐ Increased sense of security

Other (please specify)

6. Are there specific activities or aspects of community life that positively impact your health?

Cohousing Residents Survey – Wybalena grove
Design Features

7. What design features of the cohousing community do you appreciate the most?

☐ Common areas (e.g., pizza oven, shared spaces)

☐ Green spaces and outdoor areas

☐ Privacy considerations in individual units

☐ Sustainable and eco-friendly features

Other (please specify)

8. Are there any design features that you feel could be improved or added?

Appendix

Cohousing survey

Cohousing Residents Survey – Wybalena grove
Sustainability

9. How important was sustainability in your decision to join the cohousing community?

○ Extremely important

○ Very important

○ Somewhat important

○ Not so important

○ Not at all important

10. In what ways do you see the cohousing community contributing to environmental sustainability?

☐ Shared resources (i.e. common facilities and tool libraries)

☐ Energy Efficiency (i.e. through the use of passive design or incorporating renewable energy)

☐ Water Conservation (i.e. rainwater harvesting and grey water systems)

☐ Landscaping and Permaculture (i.e. providing community gardens and resilient landscaping)

☐ Transportation (Bike infrastructure, car sharing and EV facilities)

☐ Waste Reduction (composting, recycling)

11. Are there specific sustainability practices or initiatives within the community that you find particularly effective or impactful?

Cohousing Residents Survey – Wybalena grove
Community Engagement

12. How often do you participate in community events or activities?

○ Always

○ Usually

○ Sometimes

○ Rarely

○ Never

13. Are there specific types of community events or activities that you would like to see more of?

Cohousing Residents Survey – Wybalena grove
Decision-Making and Governance

14. How do you feel about the collaborative decision-making process in the community?

○ Very satisfied

○ Satisfied

○ Neutral

○ Dissatisfied

○ Very dissatisfied

15. Is there anything you would change about the governance structure or decision-making process?

Cohousing Residents Survey – Wybalena grove
Overall Satisfaction

16. On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with your overall experience living in the cohousing community?

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Cohousing Residents Survey – Wybalena grove
Additional Comments

17. Please use this space to provide any additional comments, suggestions, or insights you would like to share about your experience in the cohousing community.

2023 PAUL PHOLEROS SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

For further information about cohousing and this research journey please follow @co.habitate on Instagram.
For further information about the Paul Pholeros foundation visit:
https://www.ppfoundation.com.au/