Article

Planning for Lower-Income Households in Privately Developed High-Density Neighbourhoods in Sydney, Australia

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Abstract

In Australia, as in many other countries, private high-density housing is typically marketed as the domain of middle- and higher-income residents. But, in practice, it accommodates many lower-income households. These households often live in mixed-income communities alongside wealthier neighbours, but, because of constrained budgets, they rely more heavily on access to community services and facilities. This has implications for public infrastructure planning in high-density neighbourhoods where private property ownership dominates. In this article, we examine two neighbourhood case studies within the same local government area in Sydney that have sizable populations of lower-income households living in apartments, but which provide markedly different day-to-day experiences for residents. We consider the causes of these varying outcomes and implications for neighbourhood-scale planning and development. The article argues that coordinated and collaborative planning processes are key to ensuring that the needs of lower-income households are met in privately developed apartment neighbourhoods.

Issue
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1. Introduction: Locating Lower-Income Apartment Residents in Private Apartment Buildings

Strategic urban plans commonly promote consolidation as a solution to population growth, affordability challenges, and unsustainable suburban sprawl (Bunker et al., 2017). In Australia, as in many other countries (including the UK, USA, Canada, and China), strategic planning policy has combined with market forces to produce rapid growth in private apartment developments delivered as condominiums (Easthope, 2019; Kern, 2014; Murphy, 2020; Troy et al., 2020). These developments are typically marketed to middle- and higher-income res-

idents (Davidson & Lees, 2005; Fincher, 2004; Rosen & Walks, 2013). In practice, however, 36% of Australian households living in private apartments of four or more storeys are lower-income households (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Lower-income apartment households are defined as those with household incomes of less than $1,499 per week, in the bottom two quintiles of household income Australia-wide (Easthope, Crommelin, et al., 2020).

One reason for this is that few other options exist for lower-income households. Australia's small social housing sector (Groenhart, 2014) accommodates only 4.0% of all households (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

For most of the population, the only options available are owner-occupation or private rental, and apartments in urban areas generally cost less to rent or buy than standalone houses (Rosewall & Shoory, 2017). Australia also has a very small purpose-built institutional rental sector (Pawson & Milligan, 2013), meaning apartment buildings owned and rented by a single entity are uncommon. Most new apartment developments are delivered as speculative condominium developments (Troy et al., 2020).

Australia is not alone in housing a sizable population of lower-income residents in private apartment buildings. Notable examples include concentrations of lower-income households in private rental buildings across North America (Jones & Ley, 2016; Modlinska, 2021; Skaburskis & Nelson, 2014) and swathes of apartment buildings previously operating as social housing with ownership transferred to sitting tenants across Eastern Europe (Andrews & Sendi, 2001; Soaita, 2012). There are also many examples of lower-income residents room sharing and living in overcrowded conditions in private apartment buildings in cities around the world (Jayantha & Hui, 2012; Logan & Murdie, 2016; Mayson & Charlton, 2015).

While many previous studies on lower-income residents in private apartments have focused on areas with concentrations of lower-income residents, what makes the Australian case interesting internationally is the large number of lower-income private apartment residents living side-by-side with higher-income households, in the same buildings and neighbourhoods. This may be partly due to the tendency for Australian condominium buildings to include a mix of owner-occupiers and renters, as well as the geography of apartment development coinciding with the increasingly centralised industrial geography of Australian cities (Sigler et al., 2018).

There are examples of purposefully planned mixed-tenure apartment developments and neighbourhoods in Australia, including public housing estate renewal projects that incorporate a mix of social and private apartments (Arthurson, 2010) and situations where individual units within public housing buildings have been sold (Parliament NSW, 2005). However, our research (Easthope, Crommelin, et al., 2020) demonstrates that many mixed-income apartment neighbourhoods in Australia were not planned as such and have developed organically within fully private speculative developments. Mixed-income buildings and neighbourhoods might be mixed-income from the start or become increasingly mixed over time. These privately developed high-density and mixed-income neighbourhoods are the focus of this article.

Because of Australia's market-led housing delivery model, housing outcomes and public infrastructure provision in private mixed-income high-density neighbourhoods are highly varied in practice. In this article, we examine these variations through two neighbourhood case studies within the same local government area (LGA) in Sydney. Both have a sizable population of lower-income households living in apartments, but today provide markedly different outcomes for residents. In considering how neighbourhood-scale planning and development can affect the experiences of lower-income apartment residents, the case studies highlight two main issues: (a) planning processes and infrastructure provision, and (b) place management and community engagement.

The first case (Upper Strathfield) demonstrates how poor relationships between developers and government and a lack of coordinated strategic planning can negatively impact the provision of neighbourhood amenities and facilities. The second case (Rhodes West) demonstrates how coordinated and collaborative planning and urban design at the neighbourhood scale, underpinned by political will and appropriate resourcing, can deliver positive outcomes. Both cases also demonstrate that while planning plays a part, the impact of market dynamics on resident experiences is important.

We begin with a review of literature on lower-income households in private apartments and the importance of neighbourhood infrastructure provision. We then profile Australia's lower-income apartment residents and outline the study's research methods. The two cases are introduced, and the factors leading to different outcomes across the two neighbourhoods are discussed. We conclude by considering the role of planning and urban design in ensuring that the needs of lower-income households are met within privately developed high-density neighbourhoods. Through the case study analysis, we highlight the importance of coordinated and collaborative government intervention in property development processes, and the dangers of market-led housing delivery models. While a collaborative and coordinated planning process was achieved in a high-profile site (Rhodes West), a less attractive site in the same LGA was largely left to languish, demonstrating the uneven distribution of planning resources and controls for high-density development.

2. Research on Low-Income Residents in High-Density Settings

2.1. Lower-Income Households in Private High-Density Neighbourhoods

Much literature on private condominium development has focused on the role of international finance (Ley, 2017; Rogers & Koh, 2017), gentrification (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009), privatisation (Kern, 2007; Rosen & Walks, 2013), exclusion (Atkinson et al., 2005), and luxury marketing (Costello, 2005; Raynor et al., 2017). This research demonstrates how condominium development is implicated in neoliberal agendas, particularly the increasing privatisation of cities. However, much of it implies or assumes that condominiums house wealthy residents or are left empty (Graham, 2015).

At the building scale, studies have focused on the diversity of households living within condominiums in Australia and internationally. This work has considered the needs of families with children (Easthope & Tice, 2011; Kerr et al., 2020; Nethercote & Horne, 2016) and ethnoculturally diverse households (Liu et al., 2018; Murdie, 2003; Noble, 2021). These works recognise that diverse household types can find themselves excluded in design and management decisions that result from market-led development and persistent cultural norms of a narrow resident profile (see also Fincher, 2004). Australian research has also demonstrated the inequitable impact of energy poverty on lower-income apartment residents (Cook et al., 2020). This work has played an important role in "opening up a more intimate, rich and imaginative understanding of the high-rise'' (Baxter, 2017, p. 4), but has largely focused on the building scale rather than the neighbourhood.

While there is literature that considers the needs of lower-income apartment residents at the neighbourhood level, it has primarily focused on areas of concentrated disadvantage, including areas of both social and private rental housing (e.g., Gifford, 2007; Kearns et al., 2012). Other than research addressing the displacement of lower-income residents from gentrifying neighbourhoods (e.g., Jones & Ley, 2016), little attention has been given to the needs of lower-income households living in mixed-income privately developed apartment neighbourhoods. There are notable exceptions, including Park's (2019) exploration of alternative rental systems catering to lower-income condominium residents in Korea, Forrest et al.'s (2002) research in Hong Kong, and Nguyen et al.'s (2020) research in Hanoi demonstrating the importance of neighbourhood planning and facilities for low-income high-rise apartment residents in mixed-income areas.

A larger body of literature focuses on neighbourhoods that have been planned as mixed-income and include some components of social housing (e.g., Arthurson, 2010). From a broad strategic perspective, mixed communities have the potential to reduce the stigma of lower-income households (Atkinson, 2008) and even reduce "threshold effects" of high concentrations of disadvantage (Galster, 2007). This literature offers important lessons on how the needs of lower-income high-density residents can be accommodated at the neighbourhood scale. For example, in the Melbourne neighbourhood of Carlton, Levin et al. (2014) found that developers' desire to mitigate the costs of subsidised affordable housing resulted in private open space being provided only for market-rate apartments, meaning affordable housing tenants relied on nearby public parks. This created unexpected burdens on public facilities. Although the "exposure to success" narrative of social mixing has long been criticised (Sarkissian, 1976), there is some literature that points to greater acceptance of diversity resulting from greater opportunities for interaction in shared spaces (Roberts, 2007), although this is also fraught with challenges (Lawton, 2013).

While this literature provides insights into best practices in purposeful planning for mixed-income and mixed-tenure communities, such neighbourhoods benefit from the involvement of social housing providers in the planning and delivery of services and facilities. This is typically not the case in private high-density neighbourhoods. In neighbourhoods where housing delivery is market-led and social housing providers are not involved, there is a clear risk that the needs of lower-income residents will be overlooked. Building upon the existing literature, this article addresses a gap in knowledge by concentrating on the needs and experiences of lower-income apartment residents in privately developed high-density neighbourhoods.

2.2. Importance of Public Infrastructure and Services for Lower-Income Residents

Neighbourhood facilities shape residents' everyday lives and their sense of belonging and well-being (Easthope, Crommelin, et al., 2020). Limited space within individual apartments can lead residents to rely more heavily on their local environments as extensions of their homes (Andrews & Warner, 2020). This is especially so for lower-income households where overcrowding is more likely (Nasreen & Ruming, 2021). While higher-income residents may have more diffuse networks and resources, neighbourhoods and neighbouring tend to be more important to poorer residents (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Nguyen et al., 2020).

Neighbourhood features that influence apartment residents' experiences include parks, community spaces, schools, and childcare, as well as proximity to jobs, transport, retail, and services (Andrews & Warner, 2020). Walkability, traffic, safety, and lighting are also valued (Cook et al., 2020). Resident satisfaction in high-density neighbourhoods is dependent on the amount and quality of services and amenities (Allen, 2015). Yet, community infrastructure is often under-resourced or insufficient to cater for growing populations (Hendrigan et al., 2019). The presence of neighbourhood spaces where residents feel they belong and can connect with others helps overcome social isolation, improves mental well-being, and supports children's health and development (Andrews & Warner, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020; Thompson, 2018).

While private apartment developments often provide facilities and amenities in individual buildings, these do not necessarily compensate for a lack of neighbourhood facilities. These facilities being accessible only to building residents can lead to social exclusion and segregation, much like the development of "gated communities" (Atkinson & Blandy, 2006; Nethercote, 2019; White & Serin, 2021). Facilities in private buildings are likely to increase the cost of living there (because of both perceived desirability and running costs), which can contribute to affordability pressures on lower-income people. This is true for both renters (indirectly through

higher rental costs) and owners (directly through contributions to common expenses).

3. Australia's Lower-Income Apartment Residents

Across Australia, incomes are generally lower and residents younger in apartment households compared to households in other dwellings (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Private apartments also have a higher proportion of renters than other dwellings (Easthope, Thompson, et al., 2020). Despite the dominant narrative of apartment residents being primarily middle-to-high-income households (Fincher, 2004), previous research has noted a significant representation of lower-income households in apartments compared to other dwelling types (Randolph & Sisson, 2020; Randolph & Tice, 2013).

The majority of lower-income apartment residents living in private apartments with four or more storeys are private renters (55%), although a sizable minority are owner-occupiers (31%; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). This reflects the tenure breakdown in these properties overall, with more than half (59%) of all private apartments with four or more storeys in Australia being rental properties, compared with only a third (33%) being owner-occupied (the balance being empty properties, second homes, and short-term lets; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). This can be explained in part by the absence of rental alternatives, and in part by generous tax breaks available to small-scale investor owners who often favour smaller properties and are more willing to buy units pre-completion (Nethercote, 2019; Sharam et al., 2015).

Compared to both higher-income apartment residents and households in other dwelling types, lower-income apartment residents are more likely to be born overseas, lone-person households, unemployed or not in the labour force, and renting (Easthope, Crommelin, et al., 2020, p. 2). These households also include people living with children (32% of lower-income high-density residents), owner-occupied households (31% of lower-income high-density residents), and Oceania-born residents (44% of lower-income high-density residents; see Easthope, Crommelin, et al., 2020,

p. 2). This profile points towards a range of challenges in recognising and addressing the needs of residents in higher-density development.

4. Mixed Methodology for Understanding the Needs of Apartment Residents on Lower Incomes

The two case study locations were selected because of their high numbers of low-income apartment residents and their differing planning and development trajectories. Although in the same LGA, they have very different urban landscapes (one located between a rail line and a major road and the other on the waterfront). The two cases reveal different neighbourhood-scale planning and development processes and demonstrate the complex intersection between planning processes, property values, and public-private sector collaboration. The intention was to understand the effects that different neighbourhood-scale planning and development approaches had on the experiences of low-income apartment households. We anticipated that the selection of two case studies within the same LGA would enable deeper analysis of the case studies in their political context, while also facilitating comparison.

Table 1 provides an overview of resident demographics. Residents in Rhodes West are younger, tend to live in smaller households, and are better educated relative to New South Wales (NSW) and Australia. Asian ancestry is more common than European, and residents are less likely to drive to work or own their homes. While the proportion of lower-income households is similar to state averages, a high proportion of households are on high incomes, and the median personal income is also above the state average. Lower-income households are most commonly international students, young adults, and retirees (Easthope, Crommelin, et al., 2020).

Upper Strathfield's population is younger, better educated, and more likely to be of Asian ancestry relative to NSW and Australia as a whole. Residents are less likely to drive to work and more likely to rent. Households in Upper Strathfield are slightly larger, and the median personal income is lower than state averages. Median household incomes, however, are higher,

Table 1. Case study key statistics.

Location	Rhodes West	Upper Strathfield	NSW	Australia
Population	6,721	2,734	7,480,228	23,401,892
Dwellings owner-occupied (%)	33.6	27.5	64.4	65.5
Median age	28.8	28.5	38	38
Average number of people per household	2.4	2.9	2.6	2.6
Population born in Australia (%)	16.6	14.7	65.5	66.7
Population with bachelor's degree and above (%)	54.8	44.6	23.4	22.0
Median weekly personal income (A$)	754	587	664	662
Median weekly household income (A$)	1,712	1,679	1,486	1,438
Household income < $650 per week (%)	20.5	19.0	19.7	20.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016).

pointing to households comprised of multiple lower-income residents. Lower-income households are most commonly lower-income workers, young adults, and retirees (Easthope, Crommelin, et al., 2020).

The case study fieldwork was completed between April 2019 and February 2020. It comprised a review of relevant documentation, structured observations through a neighbourhood design audit, and interviews and focus groups with residents and governance stakeholders. The neighbourhood design audits for each area included daytime and night-time observations, an assessment of local services and facilities, and basic morphological analysis. Document reviews incorporated strategic planning policies, land-use and design controls, precinct designs and plans, housing targets, design guidelines, and media coverage.

In Upper Strathfield, a two-hour focus group with four residents was conducted in the evening in a nearby commercial centre. Recruitment was through a local letterbox drop, with participants screened as having low household incomes. The focus group was conducted with a translator present, to assist one resident with limited English.

In Rhodes, a two-hour focus group with three residents was held in the evening at a local community hall. Participants were recruited through their connection with a council-facilitated community liaison group. This provided valuable insights into the community consultation process but did not reflect the diversity of the community. To complement this focus group, nine intercept interviews (ranging from 10 to 20 minutes) were conducted at a local community fair. Intercept intervie-

wees were not explicitly screened based on income, age, ethnicity, or tenure, but participants were recruited to ensure diversity across these characteristics.

In addition to residents, six other interviews were conducted with governance stakeholders (three local government, one state government, one planning consultant, and one community centre manager), relevant to both case studies (although the community centre was in Rhodes). These interviews considered how well apartment developments have provided for the needs of lower-income residents and how the process of delivering buildings and neighbourhoods unfolded in practice. Interviews also discussed the accessibility, provision, and quality of neighbourhood services and infrastructure. Resident and stakeholder interviews were transcribed, and transcripts were reviewed to identify key issues and themes.

Following the case study research, a workshop was conducted with a further six key stakeholders (two state government, two local government, one development manager, and one strata manager) to consider the implications of the case study findings for future policy and planning. Participants were active in the design, delivery, and management of apartment buildings and neighbourhoods across Sydney.

5. Introducing the Case Studies: Rhodes West and Upper Strathfield

Despite being in the same LGA (see Figure 1) and having both undergone large-scale redevelopment since the early 2000s, the case study neighbourhoods reflect

Figure 1. Case study locations.

contrasting planning outcomes. While Rhodes West was almost complete when the research was undertaken, development in Upper Strathfield had stalled, leaving numerous vacant lots and limited public amenities. This section begins with an overview of each neighbourhood, before discussing the key reasons for different outcomes between the two cases.

The neighbourhood of Rhodes West (Figure 2, top) is located on a narrow peninsula built upon reclaimed land. It has been transformed in the last 20 years, shifting from industrial to residential and commercial use. Although development densities are high by Australian standards,

with several buildings over 20 storeys, Rhodes West benefits from a variety of public open spaces and water views that provide a sense of spaciousness. Most buildings maintain a positive connection with their streets providing a high level of passive surveillance. Wide roadways and footpaths ensure a comfortable scale in streets even where buildings are tall. However, the tall buildings cast shadows over the public realm and wind flows are higher in the neighbourhood than in surrounding areas. Footpaths are smooth and obstacle-free, and there are many places to sit. There was little traffic at the various times the research team visited. Buildings, streets,

Figure 2. Rhodes West (top) and Upper Strathfield (bottom). Source: Authors' work using Google Earth and GEOFABRIK.

and open spaces are well maintained, with few signs of disorder, litter, or graffiti. The foreshore open space (Figure 3) is heavily used for exercise and recreation. There are several playgrounds, a dog park, and a community garden, as well as cafes, restaurants, shops, and a multi-functional community facility.

Residents told us that the neighbourhood provided a high level of everyday amenities and was a quiet, attractive, and enjoyable place to live. The foreshore, community centre, and access to shops and trains were especially valued. A council interviewee noted that residents "love living in Rhodes" and have "a real sense of pride" in the neighbourhood (Canada Bay staff member). Residents affirmed this with one community member stating, "I think it is a good atmosphere to live in" (Rhodes resident 1). Another commented that there are "enough playgrounds…the riverside is beautiful and the shopping centre….I am very pleased" (Rhodes resident 2). Rhodes West was also valued for its perceived safety: "It feels safe you know? When you are walking home from the train station it is always busy at night, you don't walk alone in the dark" (Rhodes resident 8).

Upper Strathfield is separated from the rest of the LGA by the six-lane Parramatta Road and bounded to the south and west by railway lines (Figure 2, bottom). The Eastern portion is dominated by detached houses. The western portion has undergone significant change since the 2000s and now contains several apartment buildings of up to 10 storeys. Many original houses have been demolished for further apartment develop-

ment; however, no development has occurred since new planning controls for the area came into effect in 2014. Approximately 1.2 hectares of land have been vacant since 2014 or earlier (Figure 4), giving the area a run-down feel, with low levels of passive surveillance. There is low-quality graffiti around the vacant lots, and street lighting is variable. There is a limited shade for pedestrians and no public seating or purposeful public open space. The apartment buildings to the north lack design coherence and provide little visual interest or activation at street level. Although Upper Strathfield is across the rail line from a commercial centre, pedestrian access involves passing through an unappealing underpass (Figure 5; for more detailed site descriptions, see Easthope, Crommelin, et al., 2020).

Residents told us that a main benefit of the area was that "everything is convenient" (Strathfield resident 2) with easy access to train services, buses, and local shops. This convenience and the affordability of housing in the area relative to other parts of Sydney were seen to make the precinct good "value for money…for working families" (Strathfield resident 1). However, the closest parks and children's playgrounds are about one kilometre away, there is no community centre, and there was nowhere local to "hang around" or to "meet and talk" (Strathfield resident 1). Heavy and constant traffic also made walking around the area unpleasant. Focus group residents highlighted a need for more pedestrian crossings, with walking journeys to Strathfield station lengthened by the unavailability of safe and convenient crossing locations.

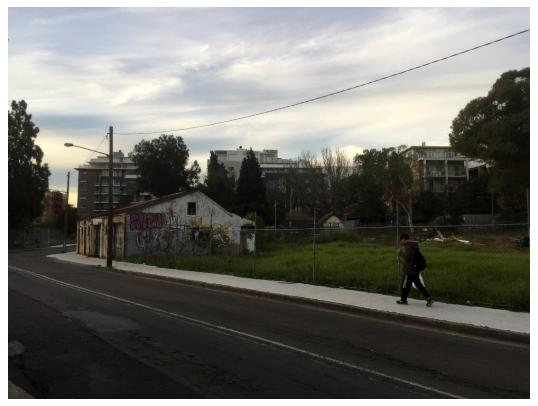**Figure 3.** Rhodes foreshore, looking south across Homebush Bay.

Figure 4. Vacant lot in Upper Strathfield, facing northwest along Cooper Street.

Figure 5. Underpass under the railway tracks in Upper Strathfield.

6. Factors Driving Different Outcomes Between the Two Cases

6.1. Planning and Public Infrastructure Provision

While both case studies involved the market-led delivery of apartment housing, different planning trajectories impacted how this development was managed, communicated to residents, and ultimately delivered.

Australian governments have taken a limited role in direct housing provision and management since the mid-20th century, privileging market-led housing delivery (Gleeson & Low, 2000; Troy et al., 2020). One flow-on effect is that public infrastructure funding has become entwined with private development processes, through reliance on developer contributions. Given the profit developers make through apartment development, mandatory contributions toward public infrastructure or affordable housing have become common in Australia and internationally (Crook et al., 2016; O'Flynn, 2011). While developer contributions often provide valuable public infrastructure, these contribution mechanisms are not always sufficient to meet the growing infrastructure needs associated with increasing densities (Allan et al., 2006). The debate also continues regarding whether the types of infrastructure provided through contributions adequately reflect community interests or preferences (O'Flynn, 2011). Further, this funding model usually requires development to occur before the infrastructure is provided, meaning the first residents must wait for infrastructure associated with subsequent developments to be completed before they have access to necessary spaces and services. Lower-income residents are likely to be particularly impacted by time-lags, where they cannot afford alternative services in the interim (or must travel or pay for private services). The different outcomes in Rhodes West and Upper Strathfield in this regard are especially notable.

6.1.1. Rhodes West

The first redevelopment plans for Rhodes West were produced in 1999. The area's proximity to the 2000 Sydney Olympics site and strong activism from nearby residents meant it attracted significant political interest at both local and state levels (Cook, 2007). While local government planners initially took the lead in developing the plans for the site (with involvement from state government planners and remediation experts), Canada Bay Council ultimately opted to hand responsibility to the state government, given the complex land remediation required. Political wrangling over the site culminated in an NSW parliamentary inquiry being held in 2002, after which the state government produced the initial planning framework for the area. This included a formal consultative role for a community liaison group and set development densities to enable developers to meet ongoing remediation costs while still making

a profit. Additional non-statutory guidelines protected public access to the foreshore and controlled densities, particularly close to the water.

In 2007, Canada Bay Council was reinstated as consent authority for the neighbourhood (except for land still requiring remediation), prompting amendments to the planning controls. Approximately 20% of the area had been redeveloped, with the remaining sites having approved master plans. However, the Council was concerned that the planned public spaces and communal spaces within buildings were inadequate given the population densities. It sought expressions of interest from developers to help fund a larger community centre. A consortium of four developers prepared a joint master-plan allowing density and height increases in exchange for additional contributions towards community infrastructure. The consortium's proposal became part of the Council's statutory plans in 2011, resulting in an 8% increase to the permitted floor area across the development (City of Canada Bay, 2010). While the developments already completed were mostly low-rise, with some 10 to 12 storey buildings, the new scheme permitted up to 25 storeys close to the rail line. In return, additional developer contributions were provided, including $18m in cash, 23,195m2 in additional open space and a further $980,000 towards roads and toilets. The balance between density and open space was valued by residents living in Rhodes, with one resident commenting, "You have a certain density, and people are happy. If you keep adding…they build some tower here…[if] investors do everything, then you lose the garden, you have more people overcrowded. It's better to maintain this [balance]" (Rhodes resident 8). These balanced outcomes were only possible because of close relationships between local government and developers and the Council's negotiation skills:

> In the instance of Rhodes, it worked well because you had buy-in at a precinct scale, but that relationship was based on the ability of [the] Council to be well informed in the negotiation space and for those developers to be trying to drive a good outcome. (State government representative)

Infrastructure across the site was delivered in stages. A shopping centre was delivered early and became a focal point for community life, including as the venue for community consultation about subsequent development phases and the design of the expanded community centre (Canada Bay staff member). This level of public input was central to the positive outcomes:

> In Rhodes, Council did engage the community in the…master-planning process. People understand and lobby for the things that are yet to be delivered…that's brilliant. It shows how engaged they are and it's very place based. (Canada Bay staff member)

Planning the 43-ha site as a single entity made it easier to achieve visual and physical coherence, ensure an orderly development process, and justify the need for more community infrastructure. The active involvement of high-profile developers also made it more straightforward for the Council to successfully negotiate a plan to increase density in exchange for more community infrastructure (see also Easthope, Crommelin, et al., 2020). The successful outcomes relied on cooperation and communication between the developers and the Council, as well as the shared interests of local and state governments in seeing the high-profile site redeveloped well. The state government played a key role in laying the initial plans for a coordinated redevelopment of the peninsula. The Council also invested significant resourcing in the neighbourhood, establishing a Community Committee and hiring a place manager to facilitate engagement between community members and the Council.

6.1.2. Upper Strathfield

Upper Strathfield had a very different planning and development trajectory. The neighbourhood was earmarked as an area with development potential in the early 2000s due to its proximity to Strathfield train station. Since then, there have been multiple changes to planning controls. Early plans (2002) proposed building heights of up to 10 storeys, scaling down to six and then four storeys closer to low-rise residential streets in the eastern portion. Minimum requirements also applied to the provision of communal open space within developments, with public space investment supported by a contributions plan.

In 2008, the Council updated its planning controls. The low-rise eastern portion, dominated by occupied single-storey dwellings, was rezoned for medium-density residential uses allowing for apartment buildings with a maximum height of 8.5 m. Meanwhile, controversy surrounded the neighbourhood, with claims that a property developer had received preferential treatment from local planning authorities, including the opportunity to acquire public properties without a formal public tender (Besser, 2007). These claims highlighted a broader concern about the scale of landholdings by that developer, with their companies reportedly holding more than 30 sites in the area (Besser & McClymont, 2007).

Planning controls were again amended in 2013, with all developable land in the western part of Upper Strathfield zoned for high-density residential, allowing building heights between 17 m and 59 m. A Public Domain Plan and Contributions Plan came into effect in 2014 and set principles and controls to improve amenity while guiding medium and high-density residential development. The Council expected these public domain improvements to be realised over 15 years, through a combination of land acquisitions, disposals, and development contributions. However, at the time of writing, no new development had occurred under these latest planning controls.

Since 2014, other planning initiatives have promised to reshape the area's future. The neighbourhood is covered by the Parramatta Road Corridor Urban Transformation Strategy and the Burwood, Strathfield, and Homebush Planned Precinct, state government-led initiatives designed to provide clearer strategic direction for areas where significant population growth and physical change are expected. Both initiatives entailed more proactive involvement of state government planners in formulating planning policy and controls, but both had stalled at the time of writing. This is likely due to the 2019 announcement that a new station would be built at North Strathfield as part of the Sydney Metro West, changing the development landscape yet again.

The lack of coherent strategic planning for Upper Strathfield is problematic. A constantly changing development context and a lack of coordination among different agencies have left Upper Strathfield lacking a shared vision with political backing. Exacerbating these problems, the case study area has been peripheral within these broader strategies. For example, the Parramatta Road strategy covered Upper Strathfield but prioritised other sites. Similarly, the neighbourhood is on the periphery of the LGA and is separated by train lines and highways, so has arguably been peripheral to the Council's strategies too.

Alongside ongoing strategic changes, that much of Upper Strathfield is owned by a single developer has left the neighbourhood in limbo. While the reasons for the lack of development since 2014 are unclear, interviewees suggested that this landowner might be holding off developing sites in the hope that development densities would increase yet again. With no new development, there has been no scope to implement the 2014 Public Domain Plan. Residents involved in the focus group shared that plans for a park with a playground outside their apartment complex had not yet eventuated: "I think [the Council] are trying to wait for the other buildings to finish and then build a park in the end…that could take another 10–20 years" (Upper Strathfield resident 1). This highlights a key risk in relying on development contributions to fund public infrastructure: It requires development to occur, which in turn requires favourable market conditions, and owners to not be holding land as speculative investments.

6.1.3. Comparing the Cases

The failure to provide local infrastructure in Upper Strathfield has resulted in a poor living experience for residents. This is in notable contrast to Rhodes West:

> If you think of great developments, Rhodes, they built infrastructure first….Where this [does not occur], there is a need either for direct government intervention, simply providing the required infrastructure

using a different funding stream, or a mechanism to incentivise the developer to proceed with development, including the proposed public infrastructure. (Canada Bay staff member)

The public profile of the neighbourhoods is another key difference. Rhodes West was a high-profile site with land owned by "tier one" developers (the largest and most experienced in the industry), and the site was developed shortly after the remediation of Homebush Bay for the Sydney Olympic Games. In contrast, Upper Strathfield is less picturesque, and the major landowner is less prominent. These factors played a part in shaping planning outcomes, as Rhodes West attracted greater political attention and, in turn, greater resourcing for coordinated planning approaches. As evidenced through the two cases, strong leadership at the local government level assists in achieving positive outcomes, as does a coherent planning vision at the state government level, and coordination between state and local governments. While Rhodes West was an area of significant focus for both the Council and the state government, Upper Strathfield has received less attention, and the difference in outcomes for residents is marked.

6.2. Place Management and Community Engagement

While the case study areas are not purposefully planned mixed-tenure developments, important insights can still be gleaned from literature on what makes planned mixed-tenure developments work well. For example, Rowlands et al. (2006) highlight the importance of place-making, ongoing management and quality design in achieving positive outcomes. Best practice design to facilitate community engagement includes well-maintained, welcoming, shared open spaces, playgrounds, and community facilities; design that encourages active mobility, street-level interaction, and the opportunity to engage in social programs; and a community services "hub" in a central location with a mix of services such as shops, health services, or a library (Stubbs et al., 2017). Alongside design, community engagement is also important. This includes involving residents in the planning and design process, establishing a clear pathway for the community to share concerns regardless of their tenure status, and welcoming/social inclusion activities in new developments (Stubbs et al., 2017).

6.2.1. Rhodes West

Rhodes West benefits from the presence of a highly engaged community, and governance arrangements and facilities that support this engagement. As one resident explained, multicultural community associations helped in "building a real community atmosphere" (Rhodes resident 4). In addition to community groups that run events and regular programs to connect community members, the Rhodes Community Committee (RCC) pro-

vides the opportunity for residents to discuss strategic issues directly with Council representatives. Formed in 2014, the Committee replaced a similar group established by the Council in 2005 in neighbouring Rhodes East. Resident interviewees told us of the longstanding and positive relationship between the Council and the RCC. Although an interviewee felt that the committee was primarily a means for information exchange, not having "a lot of teeth to it" (resident RCC representative), they also pointed out occasions when the Council had proactively engaged with them on planning and development issues.

Another unusual but advantageous feature of the governance arrangements for Rhodes West is a dedicated place manager position within the Council. Interviewees said the presence of this dedicated place manager provided a repository of long-term, embedded local knowledge. Having this role established before significant redevelopment occurred also helped address many challenges faced during the transition from the development phase to the operational phase of the neighbourhood. One resident explained it made them "feel like I had a voice and there was somebody…looking out for us and paying attention to us" (RCC representative).

6.2.2. Upper Strathfield

While Upper Strathfield is perhaps not large enough to justify its own community centre, residents reported that the lack of local community spaces made it difficult to connect with others and form local relationships. Resident interviewees told us that there are no community groups or networks in Upper Strathfield and that they knew very few locals, even within their buildings:

We know some people in [our] building, but…just when we happen to bump into those people. There's no formal or proper place to meet or to talk to those people really…we'd all like a community centre…it would be good if they could have something like that. But as long as they are waiting for the builders to do the planning, I think that's why [we don't have one]. (Upper Strathfield resident 1)

While the Council aspires to achieve "density done well" in its Local Strategic Planning Statement (City of Canada Bay, 2020, p. 9), Upper Strathfield falls short of this goal. Although Upper Strathfield has good access to public transport, this is not enough and residents also need spaces and facilities within easy walking distance.

The Upper Strathfield case also highlights the importance of communicating well with residents. Residents had been told about the plans for a local park and were frustrated because that it was yet to be built. While explaining the reasons for this is not straightforward (especially with new infrastructure delivered elsewhere in the LGA), having an entity like the RCC in place would

have made this communication easier. It may also have allowed residents to suggest temporary changes that could mitigate the impact of the delayed infrastructure.

6.2.3. Comparing the Cases

The case study findings raise important questions about why community engagement processes like those adopted in Rhodes West—the RCC and a dedicated place manager—were not employed in Upper Strathfield. Given that the area has undergone multiple rounds of changes to local planning controls and is recognised in state-led planning processes as being of strategic importance, this discrepancy seems hard to justify. These differences appear to have meaningfully contributed to the contrasting resident experiences in the two case study areas.

7. Reflections on How to Improve Outcomes for Low-Income Apartment Residents

Australia, alongside other countries internationally, houses a sizable population of lower-income residents in private apartment buildings. To date, however, little consideration has been given specifically to the needs and experiences of these residents, particularly at the neighbourhood scale. Through a detailed consideration of two contrasting case studies within the same LGA, this article has shed light on the experiences of these residents and highlighted the importance of coordinated and collaborative government intervention in property development processes to ensure good outcomes for these communities. It has also illustrated the potential for the planning and design of high-density neighbourhoods to vary markedly, even within a single jurisdiction. In this section, we reflect on the differences between the two case studies, to identify lessons to inform private apartment development in future.

The most striking difference between the two cases is that while Rhodes West was treated as a flagship development by politicians, planners, and developers, Upper Strathfield was not. While implicated in multiple strategic plans, it was not central to any. Meanwhile, Rhodes West was singled out for intensive support and resourcing by the Council and was also viewed as being of strategic importance by the state government.

There are various explanations for this discrepancy. One is that Rhodes West was a master-planned "brownfield" site which benefitted from state government involvement and investment from the beginning due to the complex remediation requirements. By contrast, Upper Strathfield is effectively an infill development area, involving multiple separate land parcels across a smaller area, although a single developer owns most of the properties. This may have resulted in different expectations from local government about how the development would proceed, and the extent to which the community could have meaningful input. Another explana-

tion is that Upper Strathfield is physically marginalised, being effectively cut off from the rest of the LGA by a major road. Indeed, one resident interviewee said that they thought that the neighbourhood's location meant that they "get forgotten sometimes" (Strathfield resident 1). A Canada Bay Councillor concurred, describing Upper Strathfield as "out of sight, out of mind" and a "no man's land" (Bastians, 2019). Rhodes West, by contrast, was a high-profile foreshore development in the heart of the LGA. The value (both economic and political) of this site drew governments' attention, while also attracting developers with the experience, resources, and incentive to work proactively to achieve a high-quality outcome. The different approaches to planning and development in the two case studies, and the different outcomes for residents, should be of great interest to other jurisdictions both in Australia and internationally concerned to ensure the successful delivery of the compact city model for a diverse population.

These different political and market contexts play an important part in explaining why the two case study areas had different outcomes. But while they may explain the different outcomes, it is harder to justify them. If Rhodes West is a demonstration of what is possible, the question becomes: How can we ensure the types of outcomes achieved in Rhodes West are achieved elsewhere? A key lesson from the Rhodes West case is that coordinated and collaborative planning processes are essential to ensuring that the needs of lower-income households are met in privately developed apartment neighbourhoods. Doing this well requires close coordination between local planning activity and state-level strategic planning processes. In addition, to achieve well-planned, staged infrastructure provision that meets the community's needs over time, local governments need to be properly resourced to undertake a strong coordinating role in all areas undergoing redevelopment. This will require more funding for local governments to meet growing infrastructure needs and to support place management and community engagement activities across all neighbourhoods, not just flagship sites. It also requires councils to be able to pool and reallocate funding in a strategic way, rather than relying on developer contributions tied to particular projects.

There is also a broader lesson from these cases. So long as the privatised housing model that underpins Australia's system of funding and delivering housing prevails, lower-income residents will be at risk of disadvantage, given their reduced capacity to compete for the best properties and locations. So long as systems rely primarily on the private delivery of housing, it must be the government's role to redress the imbalance in outcomes by prioritising the needs of lower-income residents in neighbourhood-scale planning and infrastructure provision, to even the playing field as best as possible. The Rhodes West case demonstrates that "density done well" is possible given thoughtful planning and sufficient resources. What is yet to be achieved is

a system that can produce such outcomes in peripheral neighbourhoods like Upper Strathfield as well as in flagship locations like Rhodes West. Achieving this will require a clearer acknowledgement of the experiences of lower-income residents in the private housing market, and the political will to ensure their needs are met. Given that Australia is fast becoming a nation of apartment dwellers, a failure to tackle this issue puts the prosperity and social cohesion of our cities at risk.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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