Apartment Living in the 21st Century – CPTED Challenges in creating a sense of Neighbourliness

**Slide 1 – intro** - Greg Saville, evolving practice, 2nd generation CPTED, the notion that we can start by examining the physical aspects of place, the so-called bricks and mortar but we must end up looking at the social aspects of what we call home and neighbourhood, who is living where, what are their habits and behaviours.

Moving beyond the theory of the rational offender and its emphasis on design toward looking at the social dynamics between residents in terms of preventing crime in apartment living environments.

Considering the notion of people getting to know one another, feeling more inclined to look out for each other and perhaps inadvertently taking more responsibility for the people they live amongst.

The presentation will focus on private housing and some of the feedback we’ve been getting from people living in these environments as I think a similar presentation on public or social housing deserves its own

In that context we’ll use some specific examples to highlight some of the challenges facing local government as the consent authority in assessing the kinds of social environments developers are aiming to encourage or at the very least consider.

**Slide 2 – Industrial sites** - To counter urban sprawl State and local governments are pursuing urban consolidation policies focused on getting more people living closer to city or regional centres along transport corridors including the rezoning of old industrial areas into residential areas.

Our flagship Sustainable Sydney 2030 Strategy aims to provide the City’s vision for a more inclusive, liveable, accessible, vibrant and captivating City to reinforce Sydney’s global status and build prosperity for all– this in the context of a rapidly increasing population in the City.

**Slide 3 – Apartments** - Over 100,000 people or 75% of the population currently live in an apartment in the City of Sydney Local Government Area (LGA).

People live in apartments in all parts of the LGA. In some parts of the LGA practically all dwellings are apartments (e.g. Haymarket), while in others only about half of the dwellings are apartments (e.g. King Street). The majority of apartment residents rent their properties from a private landlord (53%), 30% own the apartments they live in and 12% live in a social rental apartment.

The majority of apartments in the LGA are strata titled. By 2031, the City expects its resident population to grow by over 80,000 people. The majority of these new residents will be housed in apartments. When a person buys a strata titled property, they are buying two things: a ‘lot’, (the airspace within
the four main walls, ceiling and floor and anything in that airspace including internal walls, floor coverings and fixtures) and a share in the common property (which includes the building and grounds) along with all of the other lot owners.

This is an example of a typical DA in this case of approximately 350 apartments which might come across my desk for comment.

**Slide 4 – Sense of Neighbourliness** - Now aside from commenting on the design considerations around preventing specific crimes such as burglary eg from balcony to balcony or committing multiple steal from motor vehicle offences by illegal entry into a basement car park we also have to ask ourselves what effect is this increase in apartment living having on our sense of neighbourliness?

The author and social commentator Hugh MacKay has recently argued that we are coming to the end of a 25 year cycle of people losing touch with their neighbours. First, the sustained high divorce rate and low birth rate means family life is less coherent and more fragmented than it used to be and households are shrinking.

And we have a desire to belong to small human herds, typically in groups of 5-8 people which used to be the size of most families. It used to be that stay at homes mums would provide the “social glue” by forging relationships with people on their streets – now we graze together at the local café, there are more people involved in team sports, book clubs, community choirs etc all of which serves to satisfy our herd instinct and to revitalise our sense of being in a community.

**Slide 5 – Swimming Pool** - Property developers are tapping into this trend eg through swimming pools, gyms and communal gardens.

Issues for neighbourly interaction both common and disputed eg building quality, defects, repairs and maintenance parking, pets, noise, waste management, overcrowding and most frequently of all noise.

**Slide 6 – Hallway Rooms**- Some so-called secure apartments allow access to one floor or level of a building at a time. How much does this limit social interaction in and around apartment buildings like this one?

If there was a fire for example and the alarm went off how could people alert each other and how would people know who was unaccounted for when everyone had assembled at the agreed meeting point?

What if upstairs was making a lot of noise and you can’t work out how on earth you can get up there to have a conversation, say hello and let them know its an issue – eg high healed shoes and wooden floorboards. If you’re having a party do you a) invite your neighbours b) warn your neighbours c) both A & B or d) none of the above – just go with the “it’ll be alright on the night’ notion?
People have also told us that they can’t get parcels in the post or pizzas delivered because while there’s an intercom system there are no instructions on how to use it. So I suppose we are asking is there such a thing as too much security or at what point is enhanced security of this kind counterproductive?

**Slide 7 – Meeting room** - What we’d like to see are more of these sorts of design features being incorporated - meeting rooms for residents to discuss common issues such as noise, fire drills, meet with the body corporate, multi-purpose uses such as community celebrations, socialising, children’s birthday parties – rarely are these included.

**Slide 8 - Scale of apartment dwelling development** – Green Square – largest urban renewal project in the southern hemisphere – hemisphere envy - focus on internal courtyards and access – some residents have told us that they can see these internal courtyards from their apartment but their swipe card doesn’t allow them access so they don’t know how to get there.

Also notice all the vacant space on the roofs.

**Slide 9 – Rooftop Garden** - A rooftop garden not only provides an opportunity to cool building temperatures down but allows for people to socialise.

**Slide 10 – Rooftop Garden** - And to learn about sustainable living and promote the benefits of physical activities by growing fruit and vegetables.

**Slide 11 – Apartment courtyard** - DA Claims: The design will encourage people to gather in the space and to feel some responsibility for its use and condition – it will be a vibrant place with well finished materials which will instill civic pride and a sense of ownership. How about some BBQs, furniture, shade?

**Slide 12 – Townhouse development** - Townhouse Development application with regard to this internal courtyard – “Each dwelling has been designed as a townhouse with generous private open space – it is considered that the communal areas will not be in demand. Accordingly, the communal areas comprise a mix of paved areas and deep soil landscaping to provide a landscape setting and enhance the visual amenity of all dwellings.” A case of designing a sense of neighbourliness out.

**Slide 13 – Playground** - There is some evidence that there are increasing numbers of families with children moving into our medium to high density apartment complexes. This to some extent increases the pressure on the provision of amenities such as local parks to keep up with the fast pace of development. If not families may have to get in their cars and drive to a park which can mean people moving out toward the sprawl in order to have a backyard of their own. The provision of facilities such as playgrounds within these complexes are therefore important but they are rarely provided.
Slide 14 – Basketball Hoop - And of course facilities for older children as well.

Slide 15 – UK Study Sheffield - A study in the City of Sheffield in the UK by William Bird looked at how far four generations of the same family were allowed to roam when they were aged 8. Great-grandfather George – 6 miles unaccompanied to his favourite fishing spot, Grandfather Jack – 1 mile on his own to play in the woods, Mother Vicky – half a mile to the local swimming pool, Son Ed – first to be driven to school, 300 yards

Slide 16 – Bland park - Tim Gill another UK researcher has written quite extensively on this and his feeling that children are increasingly growing up in a risk averse society and how important it is for children and young people to have the freedom to explore and experiment as a critical part of their emotional development. So we need to consider how we can improve these sorts of environments

Slide 17 – Children challenges - And provide these sorts of opportunities- to consider what Gill goes on to describe rather poetically as “the lost art of benign neglect.”

Slide 18 – Children bikes street - And this of course will also be relevant to the new roads and streetscapes which are also integral to the social environment in apartment settings – eg the garden beds providing territorial reinforcement or a sense of personalisation of individual dwellings.

Thanks for listening and I hope we can continue to have some dialogue in terms of achieving sensitive, innovative and viable design solutions which can improve a person’s sense of belonging and make for opportunities for people to develop positive relationships, look out for each other and create a safer living environment.