

BROWNLIE TOWERS
Urban Regeneration Project
Launch Pad and Context Report
Prepared for Department of Housing
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ARCHITECTURE INTERIOR DESIGN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PLANNING URBAN DESIGN

01 INTRODUCTION

In March 2009, the Department of Housing (DoH) engaged HASSELL to review the land uses and develop a Masterplan around the Brownlie Towers (Figure 1). This report represents the key outcomes of Stages 1 of the project, providing the findings of the preliminary site and context review, Launch Pad workshop and presents a way forward.

In 2006, DoH commenced internal and external renovation of the two Brownlie Towers. DoH are now seeking to physically and socially regenerate the wider Brownlie Towers Precinct by redeveloping the existing public houses surrounding the towers and opening up the precinct to private investment. It is envisaged that social renewal will be achieved in part by diluting the overall proportion of public dwellings and increasing the diversity of residents.

Key to the master planning is considering existing and future land uses, including the potential reconfiguration of open space areas to facilitate better integration of housing with adjacent community facilities owned and managed by City of Canning. Current uses include the Aquatic Centre, Youth Centre, Scouts Hall, Multi-Cultural Centre, tennis and netball courts and the Bentley Library. There may be scope to rationalise some of these uses.



Figure 1. Indicative Study Area - Brownlie Towers Precinct

The Brownlie Towers Precinct, Bentley, was developed by the then State Housing Commission in 1969-1970 and was considered an ambitious experiment in social and urban planning. The Radburn design, including interconnected parks, was adopted for the Brownlie Towers Precinct as it was regarded as best practice for social housing at the time.

The two towers were the hub of the area with a series of townhouses constructed around a landscaped setting. A diverse range of housing types were provided, including approximately 75 detached houses, 119 two-storey town houses, a three storey block of flats (32 units), and two ten-storey blocks in Brownlie Towers (320 units). Thirty houses have been sold as affordable housing with the balance of the development retained for public rental housing by Homeswest.

The original subdivision was commended by the Australian Planning Institute and Royal Australian Institute of Architects. The WA Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects was particularly impressed by the project and its provision of a high level of housing diversity and integration of different housing types that it expressed "...hope that this project will set a standard and serve as a fine example for private enterprise to follow...".

The social and physical outcomes have unfortunately not lived up to expectations. There is now recognition that concentrating public housing in locations (regardless of the diversity of physical form) intensifies social problems. Discussions with DoH confirm that most clients take every opportunity to relocate out of the Brownlie Towers Precinct.

Physically, the Radburn design was intended to provide a walkable, high quality landscape, however the physical outcome is a series of uninviting and unsafe public open space areas. It is understood, previous retail / commercial uses have been unsuccessful - probably due to the limited street exposure and a lack of trade generated by the surrounding community due to the negative perception of the area.

In 2003, the Department for Housing initiated a staged internal refurbishment of the two towers. An external upgrade was initiated in September 2005, (illustrated in Figure 5). The revamp is continuing (Figures 6 and 7) and is expected to be completed by August 2009. Residents in the Brownlie Towers have continued to occupy the units during the internal and external renovations.



Figure 4. Photo of Brownlie Towers from 1969-1970



Figure 6. Recent photo of the extend of renovations



Figure 5. 3D image of the proposed external renovations to Brownlie Towers



Figure 7. Recent photo of the extend of renovations

Regional / District Location

Brownlie Towers Precinct is approximately 8.5km south-east of the Perth CBD. The site is located within Bentley, which is single dwelling suburb with a predominant density of around (R17.5/R30).

A number of public facilities of a district scale are located to the south of the Precinct including Aquatic Centre, Youth Centre, Scouts Hall, Multi-Cultural Centre tennis and netball courts and the Bentley Library.

Curtin University and Bentley TAFE are located approximately 1km east of the site.

Key movement corridors nearby the site include Manning Road to the south, which connects to Leach Highway and Carousel shopping centre (and regional hub) to the east, and the Kwinana freeway to the west. Albany Highway is 1.3km to the north via Ashburton and Bedford Streets, providing access to Bentley Centre, a district shopping facility.

Housing

The existing breakdown of housing provided in the study area include:

- two ten-storey blocks in Brownlie Towers (320 units)
- 31 detached houses (28 original, 3 more recent detached houses)
- 32 flats (Kurari - original condition)
- 101 townhouses (23 refurbished, 78 original), and
- 9 grouped dwellings (recently built, over 2 sites).

In line with various programs to assist Homeswest tenants to purchase their accommodation, a number of properties within the area have been sold in the past.

The remaining housing stock is significantly degraded and many dwellings remain uninhabitable. It is understood that it is likely that all existing buildings on DOH's land (with the exception of the two towers) can be removed, although consideration may be given to the retention of selected groupings of townhouses that could be refurbished.

Over time, some of these properties have been further subdivided by private owners. It is understood the DoH have commenced a process of buying some of these properties back to enable a holistic redevelopment of the precinct.

There is also a spread of public housing across Bentley, beyond the Brownlie Towers precinct. DoH own approximately 700 lots in Bentley. Anecdotal evidence suggests many of the social issues in and around the Brownlie Towers Precinct are created by passers-through, rather than only those within the Precinct.



The uninviting entrance to Brownlie Towers



Dwelling damaged by fire in 2008



Existing town houses within the precinct



Single dwellings adjoining the precinct



The townhouses with new carports show signs that some tenants are prepared to invest time into maintaining / improving presentation



Aged townhouse stock

Open Space

The original quasi Radburn Design created a number of greenways which weave through the various townhouses and remain part of DoH's freehold lot. Although the original idea was to encourage a walkable setting, the street environment does not encourage walking, cycling or public transport.

The State Housing Commission also set aside 1.61 ha of public open space to the south of the site which now accommodates a Youth Centre and Pendana (multi-cultural centre). Lots were also sold for the construction of churches, and a land exchange with the City of Canning enabled the creation of Bentley Aquatic Centre in the south-east part of the site.

On face value, there is an abundance of surplus public open space in the Precinct which could be used more efficiently, proving mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. The full extent of this surplus land needs to be discussed with the City of Canning (and lease holders) and the Department of Education.

Any move to rationalise the open space and/or the facilities should take into account that the existing public facilities service the current residents and if improved, could hold significant appeal to future residents.



Open space with poor surveillance



Dumping of general rubbish



Uninviting and unsafe walkways



Good shade trees in parking areas



Well established vegetation



Well established vegetation

04 SITE CONTEXT

Community Assets

There are a number of public and recreation facilities south of the DOH landholding including:

Aquatic Centre: It is understood that, due to the age of the Aquatic Centre that the Council considered closing the facility but chose not to in light of the strong community views that it should stay open. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the pool is well used.

Bentley Youth Centre: Well used.

Scout Hall: Used for storage

Canning Tennis Club: Operating club

12 Netball Courts: It is understood that these courts are not used.

Bentley Library: Bentley Library is a local community library.

Al Hidayah Islamic School & Bentley Primary School: Operating schools

Salvation Army: The Salvation Army provide soup kitchen and emergency relief on some days of the week. Investigations indicate that some Brownlie Towers people use the soup kitchen.

Pendana (multi-cultural centre): The Multi-cultural Day Centre operates 7 days a week and caters for a wide range of communities. It is understood aged care packages are also distributed from this location to the wider area. Multicultural Seniors Day Care event is also held at Pendana.



Bentley Tennis Club



Bentley Library



Youth Centre



Aquatic Centre - bordered by barbed wire fencing



Bentley Primary School



Aquatic Centre - bordered by barbed wire fencing

Retail and Commercial

A small shopping complex with around 350m² of retail floorspace forms part of the Brownlie Towers complex, however it is in poor condition, poorly designed in relation to the street and provides for only very basic requirements (small deli and chemist). It is understood most clientele are from the Brownlie Towers with very limited patronage from the surrounding residential area.

The DoH also operate out of an office in this small complex and have aspirations to provide a district office if the site is redeveloped.

Hillview Terrace appears the most successful neighbourhood hub in the locality, providing for the “daily needs” within 10 minutes walk from the Precinct. The route is not particularly direct and the steep topography is likely to reduce its appeal especially for aged residents, families with prams and residents without cars.

The DoH study ‘Review of the Mixed-Use Complex Development Options Feasibility Study’ (October 2005) notes that, on the basis that the Metropolitan Centres Policy has determined 0.53m² per capita to guide provision of local shopping floorspace, the population of 4,762 persons within the 800m catchment (of Brownlie Towers) allows for 2,524m² of local shopping. This is 363m² more than what is currently provided in the locality.

Beyond the local catchment, more substantial (weekly) shopping facilities are available at the Bentley Centre on Albany Highway, approximately 15 minutes walk from the site. This includes a range of retail, office and community facilities. Bus services are poor between Brownlie Towers Precinct and the Bentley Centre and walking, especially for weekly goods is impractical without a private car or bus service. Albany Highway also represents a barrier to strong pedestrian connectivity.

Major shopping and commercial facilities are available at Carousel, approximately 3km south-east of the site. This includes major retail (department stores, bulky goods, supermarkets and speciality stores), entertainment (cinemas, restaurants), office and community uses. From a regional perspective, the area appears well serviced, however major shopping is difficult to access from the Precinct other than by car.



Struggling retail outlets in Brownlie Towers



Retail unable to attract customers from surrounding suburbs.



Hillview Shops represent a bustling alternative for surrounding residents



Cold Stores Fremantle

West Australian News - Leach Highway

West Australian News - Leach Highway

Goderich St, East Perth

Examples of Department of housing Developments throughout Perth