

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 27/10/2016

SUBJECT: The Commons

Interview Location Melbourne, Australia

Interviewee



Rob Adams (RA)
Director, City Design and Projects, City of Melbourne.

Interviewer

Dr Josh Byrne (JB)
Research Fellow, Curtin University and the CRC for Low Carbon Living

Transcript

JB: Can you start by telling us your name and role at the City of Melbourne?

RA: My name is Rob Adams and I'm the Director, City Design and Projects at the City of Melbourne.

JB: And tell us a bit about your role?

RA: My greatest ambition at the moment is that Australia stops building more of the same, and starts to look at the need to build around existing infrastructure on the basis that if we're going to double the population of our cities in the next 30 years we can't do it with the model we've done for the last 100 years. So, projects that look at putting medium to high density in and around existing infrastructure capitalise on that infrastructure and produce a much better outcome for the city.

JB: So if we look at outer Melbourne in terms of the city, say Brunswick and what's happening at The Commons....talk us through the transition happening in those areas.

RA: I think The Commons is a beautiful example of that, what you've got there is a medium density building that sits immediately adjacent to a railway line and railway station therefore eliminates the need for motorcars and parking within that building and models itself on a sustainable future and that comes in the form of sharing facilities, laundry's and those uses. Using all the building, the roof as guttering grounds where you collect energy and collect water and really provide good accommodation at an affordable price back into these areas. So The Commons would be ideal if it could replicate itself across many other jurisdictions.

JB: And as you know with the Nightingale Model.... similar to The Commons... there have been some planning challenges around that, what's your perspective on that and what can be done to free that up more?

RA: I think our planning scheme has become cumbersome, and it's a product of planning schemes that have been added to incrementally over time and possibly lost the view of what we're trying to achieve. So in the Nightingale case, if you were to build across bus corridors, tram corridors around railway stations, there are some very simple rules that can apply to good development. How buildings sit within their context, how they feed the energy back onto the street, how they make our streets better spaces and I suppose that's the biggest space we have in our city. So I think we need to start asking ourselves the question, what are we trying to achieve? And write a planning scheme that enables that situation almost as a right if you work within certain parameters. So, I think we could free up a lot of energy, you know, through VCAT and other organisations, you know, by having as a right planning controls around good medium density development in the middle city, and that's something that the government has fallen behind on.

JB: Any other progressive changes that you see in the wind around these types of projects, making them more available and accessible?

RA: Well I think the other thing we should talk about is when you think about putting development in existing areas, around existing infrastructure, usually the comment comes back, yes, but it's actually difficult to consolidate the sites.

The beauty of the Nightingale model is that it doesn't need big sites and really just look at development that is delivered by small development projects where you don't have the huge overheads of developers. And The Nightingale, actually taking out the developer completely and doing it as an investment model through designers and future occupants I think starts to go to the heart of affordability.

Overlay on a lot of the development that's going to emerge through pre-fabrication and factory orientated development and I think you could see building costs come down significantly. So, if we can improve the planning, we can limit the development costs and then go back into technologies that go from the ute and the nail gun into the factory, I think affordability then becomes a real possibility within that housing.