



The Urban Ecology NEWSLETTER

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URBAN ECOLOGY AUSTRALIA
IS TURNING 20!

And we are having a party

Come and help us celebrate our 20th birthday, renew acquaintances, mingle with like minded people, discuss sustainability ideas and share this huge milestone with us as we honour the people who had such foresight in 1991.

Guests of Honour will be Chérie Hoyle and Paul Downton.



Where? Christie Walk 101-105 Sturt St

When? Saturday December the 3rd

Time? 4.30 to 7.30

Bring a plate of food to share, we'll provide the drinks and nibbles and please rsvp so we know how many to cater for.

urbanec@urbanecology.org.au or ph: 08 82126760

Urgent action !!

From the Convener

As usual UEA has been buzzing with activity, ideas and innovations, but nothing could be more exciting than the news that the DVD we commissioned *Change Media* to make for us won first prize in the Community Film category for the 2011 MY HERO International Film Festival. The page will be on the web shortly and we will let you know the link when it is ready.

We've also had an AGM since the last newsletter and added two new faces to the Board.

Tanya Parker's position is in Industry Engagement with the Green Building Council of Australia and we are very fortunate to have her on our Board.

Dr Alan Stewart will be known to some of you, he was involved with UEA in the early 90's and as these things go, he's back and we welcome his return.

Beth and Ray Mylius from the group Sustainable Communities were the speakers at the AGM and they gave a very inspiring presentation. Particularly interesting is their method of

engaging people through developing themes for discussion and activity. Since we all have common goals we agreed that we should collaborate more often and join forces. Ray talked about sustainable economies which I found fascinating. He subsequently sent me the discussion paper and I include an extract from a discussion we had.

"We enjoyed our discussions with you and other Urban Ecology members at the AGM last night. I agree it will be valuable to remain in communication.

"One of the members of the working group had previously studied economics but the report is to be read as a lay view of the problems and potential solutions. Since conventional economic approaches have got the world into its present difficulties there is reason to think that non-economists can have a role in developing a different system."

I think we should use this valuable information as a basis for a workshop early next year, which segues nicely into information Patrick Greene put to the board about strategic initiatives for the year ahead.

From the Convener (cont)

- Promotion of 'good quality medium density urban infill'
- Urban infill has been identified as necessary in the 2030 SA Strategic Plan
- There is a lot of it happening already
- A lot of it is really poor quality sub-division – 2 x 0.5 "McMansions".
- We need to define what constitutes good medium density development.
- We need to provide councils, state govt agencies, and regulatory bodies with exemplars of good design
- Then we need to distil those things down into 2-3 key points that we can legislate – Tanya will be able to give us an insight into what's possible from a developer's perspective, and what is likely to have some success.
- An important website: http://www.grattan.edu.au/pub_page/117_report_getting_the_housing_we_want.html

This is by no means the only campaign I think we need to run next year – but I'd like to table it as one of maybe 2-3 key things that we push for.

Sue Gilbey
Convener UEA

Tours of Christie Walk continue to attract lots of interest. There have been over 1,000 visitors since July this year, mostly students from year 6 up to university level. 200 of these students have been from socio-economically disadvantaged schools which have benefited from the NRM Board's grant to finance their visits including the hire of buses. Another 150 students from Adelaide city schools have had their visits subsidised by an Adelaide City Council Community grant. Other visitors have included a group from Cape Paterson Eco-village, a new development underway in Gippsland Victoria. (see article on p 7)

Margaret Rohde

Christie Walk movie wins major award in 2011 MY HERO International Film Festival

UEA proudly announces the recent success of the 45-minute DVD: '**Christie Walk ... a piece of ecocity**' in the 2011 My Hero International Film Festival, gaining 1st Place in the Community Film category.

We congratulate our partner-filmmakers: Jen Lyons-Reid and Carl Kuddell, of *Change Media*, on this great achievement. They have been entering their productions in the My Hero Film Festival since 2007 and have won 2nd & 3rd prizes for several earlier films, but gaining a 1st Place is a 'sweet success'!

The My Hero Festival attracts a large number of entries globally and has a strong reputation for quality of production.

This award can be seen as a win for community development and environment initiatives!

Carl comments: 'Your work will be celebrated online on the MY HERO web site's 2011 Festival Winner's page, to be on the web shortly (link to be advised)

A special Screenings and Awards Ceremony will be held on Saturday, 3 December, at USC in Los Angeles. At this gala event all filmmakers will receive a My Hero badge and be honoured guests at the Ceremony'. (*Oh for an air-ticket ... or two!*)

'It was a pleasure working with you all at Christie Walk and it is brilliant that the message is getting out!'

Our sincere thanks to Jen, Carl and Johanis for the insight, sensitivity and attention to detail they brought to the project

and to Simon Fisher for his talented leadership/management, of the venture!

Now that we've got our ECO- GONG, we are confident that the 'UEA/Christie Walk experience' will spread more widely, both in Australia and overseas!

The Christie Walk Resource Pack (rrp \$49 /UEA members \$25) is currently being used in more than 200 Australian schools. This duo-pack comprises the DVD and a companion CDROM, or e-book, of ideas and activities for learning about sustainability.

An article in *Interaction - Primary & Middle Years Geography* by Trish Douglas, Eltham College of Education, reviews the Resource Pack - here are a few comments:

"The makers of the resource state it is intended for students in Years 6 to 12, although many of the ideas can be adapted for both older and younger year levels. ...

"Section A of the e-book introduces the issues relating to the growth of cities and their contribution to global warming and climate change. It also provides some visions of how our cities could be transformed in the future and uses the Christie Walk housing project in Adelaide, South Australia as an example of a small piece of ecocity. Section B explores the topics of water use, energy, home building design and materials, transport, biodiversity and gardens, food, waste and community living. ...

"Finally, for the price it represents good value for money."

Norm Rohde

World Café Party

This is a gathering of residents and business people in the south west sector of the city of Adelaide.

The idea for this participatory event arose in the 'Peak Oil' group which meets periodically in the Adelaide South West Community Centre (ASWCC).

The purpose is to begin to explore 'What next for our community?' on matters to do with community, sustainability, environment, peak oil ...

Alan Stewart will be the host. He has much experience with the conversational process called the *World Café*. And has a strong connection with the founders of this approach to go deeply into questions that matter, now used widely around our little planet, 3rd from the sun. Which often leads to cooperative action.

Date: 26 November 2011

Time: 6.30pm

Venue: ASWCC, 171 Sturt St. On the western side of Whitmore Square.

To bring: A lively, inquiring spirit and finger food to share.

All welcome

[The World Cafe Party has been used in many places around the world
- see the website <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>]



Urban Edibles: On a mission to increase urban food production

Have you always wanted to have an edible balcony but don't know where to start? Urban Edibles is creating an online tool to help people easily determine which edible plants best fit their home, lifestyle and wildest dreams. The goal: successful and happy urban farmers growing great food on windowsills, across rooftops & on balconies everywhere.

The faces behind Urban Edibles are Sophia van Ruth, Marten Witkamp and Eefje Ernst, three entrepreneurial members of the Hub Rotterdam.

"We have been motivated by a need for better tools for busy city dwellers to help them choose and successfully grow food in apartment style homes. Two of our three founders are exactly our target market; busy people with full urban lifestyles, who found it all too hard to know where to start in growing their own food. So they enlisted myself as the third



team member. Together we became Urban Edibles.

"Urban Edibles begins with a healthy curiosity about the potential urban farmer. What motivates them? Do they want to grow incredible plants that

nobody has ever heard of to impress their dinner party guests? Do they want to grow something as an educational exercise with their children? Do they simply want to save money? These

and other questions can help us recommend inspiring plants to keep people's motivation high. Then of course we also need to know about their space and lifestyle opportunities. Is it inside or outside, how big is it, how much sun does it get, how much time can people realistically spend on their plants?

"We then marry this information with our database of plant knowledge that is specific to growing in pots... and presto! *Personalised plant combinations and growing advice to suit the individual urbanite.*"

Urban Edibles are developing their products now and have recently put a part of the project on a crowdfunding site called *sponsume*. Crowdfunding enables everyday people to be micro-scale investors and philanthropists! This is a unique moment, if you think you would use the matching software designed above, you can contribute to developing it online (through a secure online payment system). **Move fast though! The deadline for contributions is November 20, 8pm Australian time.** The plant matching software will be available for free online once it is complete.

Check these websites::

<http://urbanedibles.eu>

<http://the-hub.net/>

www.animatearts.net

<http://www.sponsume.com/project/urban-edibles>

Sophia van Ruth (Life member, ex-volunteer and ex-board member of Urban Ecology Australia, now resident of the Netherlands)

UEA hopes that recent visitors to Adelaide will be an inspiration to the Adelaide City Council and to the State Government and help to inspire change to the city and its environs.

Jan Gehl in and on Adelaide

Jan Gehl, well known urban designer www.gehlarchitects.com was back in South Australia as a speaker in the Adelaide Festival of Ideas 2011.



He was previously here in 2002 and produced a report entitled *PUBLIC SPACES AND PUBLIC LIFE City of Adelaide 2002*. A hard copy of this is held in the UEA office and it is also available as a pdf.

I understand that, while the Adelaide City Council was 'interested' in his suggestions

on how to make this a more pedestrian and cyclist friendly city, little of these have been adopted. This is quite different from what has happened in Perth and Melbourne. And now in Sydney where George Street (the main thoroughfare from Central Station to Circular Quay) is to be used exclusively by people - on bicycles, on foot and in buses.

Also that at this time he saw the early beginnings of Christie Walk.

After Jan's recent presentation I spoke with him and mentioned that there are now diverse online items about the state of play here. He asked me to send them to him which I did.

It occurs to me that exploring elements of his report and of Paul Downton's book *Ecopolis: Architecture and Cities for a changing climate* could be of value for how we develop our consultancy services on sustainability dimensions of urban design and processes of associated community participation.

Alan Stewart, PhD

Another Festival of Ideas speaker - Tim Horton

Tim Horton is the Commissioner for Integrated Design in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. At the Festival of Ideas in Adelaide he presented *5000+* - a vision to make Adelaide more sustainable and liveable.

The integrated Design Commission is about more than planning, design and development, it's about giving the community a say in how Adelaide develops and more than bricks and mortar, it's actually looking at how these projects will be funded, what realistic timing should be involved and actually turning the vision into reality, in what is an Australian first.

Tim spoke of a vision of the west end of Adelaide with shops, apartments, townhouse, tram and gardens - some cars but under control!

5000plus.net.au/ to see some of Tim's visions

Herbert Girardet visits again

Herbert Girardet, Adelaide's inaugural Thinker in Residence in 2003 visited again recently to present an update on his previous thoughts on sustainable cities to a forum at the University of SA.

He lamented that globally we may have passed the time where we only need to consider sustainability for our cities, and that we now need to seriously consider regeneration of our cities, whereby they power themselves by renewable energy, adopt circular metabolic systems replicating nature (including an improved relationship between cities and their hinterlands), and a carbon neutral transport system.

He summarised the development of cities over time as moving from an 'Agropolis' where the city was integral with its surrounding agricultural land, to a 'Petropolis' where access to cheap fossil fuels led to a total disconnect between the city and its sources of energy, water, food and waste disposal. The future for cities is as an 'Ecopolis', (crediting this term to our own Dr Paul Downton) where linear systems must change to circular systems and the hinterland must once again become integral to the operation of the city.

Herbert believes that Adelaide has the potential to become a model for a regenerative city - it has made the right start and is the right size. Some actions that can be taken now include:

- o Increase the pedestrian area of the CBD (reducing the car dominance) allowing bicycles to become the major means of transport in this area.
- o Establish areas for intensive urban food production.
- o Collect, store and re-use more urban stormwater.
- o Develop demonstration projects to explain how good outcomes are possible.
- o Develop plans to retrofit parts of the city (and suburbs) as demonstration projects.

He observed that retrofitting cities is being seen as making good business sense as well as a good environmental imperative in many places now. Investment decisions by businesses are potentially more significant than those of governments because they are taken over a longer term, and should be encouraged to consider regenerative development opportunities.

He commended the good initiatives that have been undertaken in Adelaide (particularly with renewable energy generation which is now up to 20% of total energy produced) and observed that these are usually given more recognition elsewhere than here. We however need more self confidence in our abilities and achievements he noted, and to promote the best practice examples.

Andrew Tidswell

CORD - the 21st century way to create communities.

By Michael Bosio

My quest is to change the paradigm of home.

I am seeking like-minded people interested in establishing a community of interest in cohousing and denser forms of accommodation that create more vibrant communities.

The post-war model of fenced single dwelling developments relying on cars is obsolete. The progressive critical thinking for the 21st century is Community Oriented Residential Development (CORD), which addresses the changing dynamics of our population and captures the emerging trends in the desire of people to live in vibrant connected communities and be surrounded by pleasant amenities.

I have a longstanding interest in accommodation that supports a good community lifestyle with minimal financial and environmental impact. I have used creative ideas in the homes I have built to optimise lifestyle on a footprint that has minimal impact. I have resisted taking the pathway of opulent luxury at great expense.

In midlife I have completed my Masters in Urban and Regional Planning. This study has broadened my horizons to think beyond my own accommodation in the status quo to the entire urban landscape and how it connects with the citizens.

The urban sprawl which persists in Adelaide is perceived as the desirable lifestyle for the community. However, there have been studies (Williams et al 2009) that demonstrate transport has the greatest impact on individuals' opportunities and quality of life given it connects work and home. Lengthy commuting time separates families, is non-productive and a concern to women when they are separated from their children and families by considerable distance. Job opportunities for workers can be impaired when commuting is too time consuming and costly. Private transport is not an option for many citizens who do not drive (low income earners, teenagers and the elderly) and their reduced mobility excludes them from other communities, services and amenity (Williams et al 2009).

The community's demand for affordable housing is currently met by living in the outer suburbs. However in many of these dormitory suburbs families can incur high debt and endure long commuting times.

Diverse neighbourhoods with individuals of varying ages in different family formations provide social connection and a sense of community.

Neighbourhoods that are safe for children and offer a supportive social environment are particularly valued by a community (Williams et al 2009).

The emerging trend is for people to live in smaller accommodation, closer to work, transport and amenity (Miller 2011).

I am keen to establish a CORD community of interest as a preliminary stage in establishing a more formal structure for building future community-based developments, particularly modelled on the concept of cohousing.

I see Urban Ecology Australia's Christie Walk development as an excellent proven example of cohousing and sustainable living in Adelaide. It is highly relevant to the implementation of the 30 Year Plan for Adelaide. However, when inquiring about similar developments many visitors to Christie Walk are disappointed to learn there is no current activity occurring in Adelaide. Urban Ecology Australia has offered to support my efforts to establish this community of interest.

If you are a like-minded person and would like to be involved in the establishment of the **CORD community of interest** please contact Urban Ecology Australia:

Telephone: 08 8212 6760

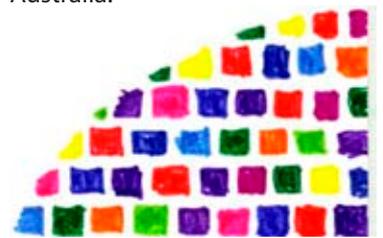
Email: urbanec@urbanecology.org.au

References:

Williams, P, Pocock, B, & Bridge, K, 2009 *Linked up Lives; Putting Together Work, Home and Community in 10 Australian Suburbs*, Centre for Work And Life University of South Australia. <http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/documents/Linked-Up-Lives.pdf>

Miller, J 2011, *Emerging Trends in Real Estate 2012*, Pricewaterhouse-Coopers International limited and the Urban Land Institute, Washington DC.

Michael Bosio



Support for cycling in London

In response to increasing urban congestion, London BMW dealer Stephen James has opened a full-service bicycle shop in one of its showrooms, displacing cars to make room for it. The company stated that they wanted to offer a fuller range of transportation options, and that customer surveys showed that many of their clients were already cyclists or interested in

taking up urban cycling. They also cited London's congestion as one of the factors in their decision, and have changed their website to remove statements prejudicial against urban cycling.

<http://bit.ly/v1CUm1>

Rick (Richard Risemberg)

Hi there,

Yesterday I gave a talk as part of a forum on "Australia's Sustainable Future" at the Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) event in Geelong, drawing on my understanding of the way Australian cities need to change I gathered as part of doing a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning at UniSA. (You might remember I joined as a member last year, did a tour, and tried to get other UniSA students along).

I featured Christie Walk quite prominently in my talk as an important example of the way Australian cities could evolve if we're serious about tackling climate change among other environmental issues.

cheers, Patrick (Sunter) patsunter.esq@gmail.com

UEA Invited to ERDC

The SA Parliament's Environment, Resources and Development Committee (ERDC) invited Urban Ecology Australia to make a presentation to it following a visit the committee made to Christie Walk earlier this year. They were keen to formally record the important points made to them on the tour. (The ERD Committee's function is to inquire into matters concerning the environment, resources, transport and planning in South Australia, and its current inquiry is around urban density).

On 26th October Margaret and Norm Rohde, and Andrew Tidswell visited Parliament House to make the presentation.

Matters covered included the context of increasing urban density, the nature of Christie Walk and the benefits of such developments as well as principles that could be applied to future medium and high density residential developments.

The 30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide, South Australia's Strategic Plan, the Adelaide 5000+ and Integrated Design Strategies all promote increasing densities in targeted areas to transition our city to a more liveable and sustainable future.

The practical, social and economic benefits of Christie Walk were described in detail as were the benefits to governments, such as:

- o Reduced demand on utilities.
- o Reduced waste production.
- o Reduced demand on health care from improved physical, mental and emotional health.
- o Reduced reliance on government services from increased reliance on each other.
- o Reduced need for new infrastructure provisions.

The principles that applied to the development and on-going

operation of Christie Walk were presented to the Committee as replicable in any new medium to high density multiple housing development, and include such things as:

- o Careful site selection including proximity to public transport and community facilities.
- o Providing a balance of open space to built area; with landscaping, gardens (including opportunities for food production) and recreation spaces for all ages and needs.
- o Separation of cars and pedestrians including keeping cars to the periphery of the development, allowing safe and pedestrian friendly internal areas for people.
- o Landscape planting to modify climate extremes.
- o Mix of dwelling types and sizes.
- o Good passive environmental building design including features to reduce energy, water and resource use.
- o Community spaces both indoor and outdoor.

The Committee responded positively to the presentation and was keen to explore the practicalities of replicating Christie Walk. UEA offered its services in providing appropriate briefing for new projects as well as planning community development and community governance.

Andrew Tidswell

Web Wanderings with Wayne

In recent months, we have added several interesting websites to the list that UEA supports, as follows:

Eco News - An excellent daily bulletin of items of current ecological interest, produced in Melbourne. Available by email upon (free) subscription. <http://econews.com.au>

Polisplan - A collection of learned articles by Steven Liaros on many aspects of urban planning. <http://www.polisplan.com.au/Polls/welcome.html>

Moreland Energy Foundation Limited - MEFL is an independent not-for-profit organisation, established to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the municipality of Moreland, in the inner-northern suburbs of Melbourne. <http://www.me FL.com.au>

Bundagen Community - Bundagen Community on the mid-north coast of NSW was established in 1981 with three guiding principles: social harmony, environmental responsibility and economic independence. <http://bundagen.com.au>

Sustainable Communities SA - People tackling climate change together. <http://sustainablecommunitiessa.wordpress.com>

Urban Edibles - Connecting urbanites with edibles. <http://urbanedibles.eu> (Former UEA Board member Sophia van Ruth, now working in Holland, is involved with this project - see her article on p3)

Hi,

I would just like to thank you for maintaining the resource at urbanecology.org.au/links/ - it's essential that information regarding environmental issues are easily and broadly accessible.

There is another resource that I think would make a good addition to your list. It's a comprehensive consumer guide to energy efficient housing and "green mortgages". It's located at www.mortgageloan.com/environment/ and covers what EEMs are, how they work, the different kinds of EEMs etc.

Take a look at it and see what you think. I hope that we can help others find this information and contribute towards raising environmental awareness.

Regards,
Dan Roberts

Cape Paterson Ecovillage

On a lush green hill overlooking the swirling waters of Bass Strait stand three pioneers of hope for Australia's future. Brendan Condon, Mike O'Mullane and Tosh Szatow survey the site that will soon begin its transformation into a unique sustainable housing project. The Ecovillage aims to be Australia's first operationally zero-carbon residential development.

Over nine years ago, Brendan and Mike embarked on their journey to develop a lifestyle option with a difference. Like all journeys into the unknown, it's been full of unexpected twists and turns, and now the destination is in full sight. Cape Paterson Ecovillage is the first and only of its kind in Australia and its zero-emission concept is even quite rare internationally.

"We doggedly held on to the concept for nine years because we see how critically important living, breathing examples of sustainable, cost-effective, low-carbon living are," says Brendan passionately. He admits that he and fellow director Mike O'Mullane were not prepared for the hurdles they have faced – they thought that compromising big profits for big ideals would be an easy sell.

The Cape Paterson Ecovillage is forging a path to an ultimate coastal lifestyle that doesn't cost the earth... In May, the State Government gave the village the green light. Land release and construction will begin in early 2012. "We are making a red-hot attempt at developing a functional, zero-carbon housing project," says Brendan. It's a development with a difference. The village concept has been fully developed to integrate solutions across biodiversity, sustainable architecture, onsite clean-energy production, electric vehicles powered onsite, water efficiency, on-site food production, community development and promotion of an active lifestyle.

This equates to a coastal community of 220 lots, with residents living amongst restored wildlife habitat including wetlands. An active lifestyle is encouraged through provision of walking and cycling paths for a community that uses clean energy generated on-site, in stylish, efficient houses that capture their own water. Shared spaces including a workshop, garden and café are integral to the project. As permanent residents establish themselves, it is anticipated that opportunities for involvement in local enterprise will emerge and grow. This may include on-site management of energy services, a workshop that will re-purpose tired goods for the local community and beyond, and food services that draw on produce from household and community gardens and local farmers.

It may sound a little futuristic, but ironically many of the solutions draw on historical, commonsense practices such as good orientation of homes and access to community facilities – simple practices that are often forgotten in modern developments. The Ecovillage team started with the assumption that achieving this standard of sustainability in

housing would generate costly up-front premiums. They were prepared to share this cost with residents to achieve a legacy. In 2010, Brendan assembled a skilled team of builders and designers and, for six painstaking months, worked through the economics of building 220 sustainable houses. Leading sustainable house designers were identified and consulted. Some of the world's largest solar panel producers were approached to quote for clean energy generation for all houses and also electric vehicles, to future proof the project against rising energy, water and oil costs.

The team grew to include Sustainability Victoria, Master Builders and Alternative Technology Associations, and the Moreland Energy Foundation. The study drew on input from talented local Bass Coast builders TS Constructions, and designers Beaumont Concepts, winners of the National HIA Greensmart home award for 2010 and 2011. And then came the Eureka moment. The team found that a combination of rapidly reducing costs for sustainability features such as solar panels, combined with good design, reduced the upfront premium. When the running costs of the houses were calculated over the life of a mortgage, Tosh and Brendan explain that even with conservative scenarios for future energy, water and oil costs, the style of housing and lifestyle options offered will put residents way ahead financially compared with conventional housing options.

Tosh completed the final detailed analysis for the project, using his background as a researcher and advocate for local energy systems. He recently left the CSIRO and joined the development team to realise his dream of demonstrating the effectiveness of local clean energy. He believes we have already reached a tipping point where, if done right, clean energy can be more affordable than the alternative.

Brendan is quick to point out this is not a commune or even an 'alternative' development – his ambition is to 'mainstream' the core elements of the project. He expects it will attract a diverse community of like-minded people that are seeking low-cost, low-impact living in an integrated community that supports rewarding lifestyles. "People of all ages have already registered their interest in the village, including many locals, and people from all walks of life from doctors to tradies and everything in between," he says. It is hoped the Cape Paterson Ecovillage will be a flagship project that guides future housing development and prosperity.

www.capepatersonecovillage.com.au



The Commons 7 Florence St Brunswick Victoria



The Commons is an urban development of sustainable apartments located just 6km from the CBD, on Florence Street, Brunswick. The striking building is home to just 24 apartments, along with two retail spaces, three artist studios and a cafe staffed by the genius baristas from South Melbourne's Dead Man Espresso. When you add an 8 star energy rating, these are very nice numbers indeed.

Thanks to the vision of Brunswick's own Breathe Architecture, taking the smart route and choosing energy efficiency doesn't mean you have to sacrifice good looks. The rooftop garden of The Commons is a green haven and a natural air conditioner. The open plan interiors are spacious and modern, and they encourage natural ventilation. They make green look good.

THE site ticks all the hipster boxes: rough-hewn wooden planters are filled with vegies, coffee is served from a retro silver caravan and next door are old factories and a graffiti-daubed bike path.

But this isn't an impromptu street party or an exhibition opening. On a Saturday morning in Brunswick, potential buyers have gathered for an open-for-inspection at the proposed site of a no-car, "deep green" apartment block, which developers say will set a new benchmark for sustainability in Australia.

It is part of an emerging breed of eco-friendly residential developments in Melbourne that aim to minimise the residents' carbon footprint as well as tackle hip-pocket considerations like electricity and fuel prices.

All feature solar panels and solar hot water, rooftop or courtyard space for growing vegies and herbs, lots of bike parking and public-transport-friendly locations. But some, like this Brunswick development - known as The Commons - and the proposed Raw House apartments in Fitzroy, take it a few steps further, with a "zero car" policy (no car parking), "natural ventilation" (no airconditioning) and a seven or eight-star energy rating, among the highest for residential buildings in Australia.

Residents will be given a lifetime membership to the local car share scheme and a yearly myki card. Both buildings

were designed by architect Jeremy McLeod, whose firm, Breathe Architecture, won a Victorian Architecture Award for sustainability last year. "There's a lot of 'green washing' out there but we just think of ourselves as architects - and members of the human race - who aren't reckless with our resources," he says.

Built on the site of an old warehouse that was formerly an artists' squat, The Commons will have highly insulated walls, doubled-glazed windows and fixtures made of raw copper.

Both developments promote a communal ethos, with shared laundries and rooftop gardens and ground floor cafe or restaurant space. Bikes can be parked inside the restaurant, patrons share the stairs with residents, and building owners can use the restaurant after hours as an extension of their living rooms.

"That girl on level two that you always wanted to meet but never had the chance? You could be washing your towels or picking herbs together," McLeod says with a laugh.

The Commons proposal has been developed by Small Giants, a private investment firm that puts their money into social enterprises that include the Melbourne-based journal Dumbo Feather.

Development manager Adam Borowski said their first sustainable development was the Edo apartment building in Seddon, which has energy efficient technologies such as a solar hot water system and an underground water tank, but the Brunswick building would "push all the boundaries". "Most people who have bought are working in the city, professionals, it's not the feral hippies that you might expect for a sustainable building," Mr Borowski said.

On the other side of the river, Century 21 Wilson Pride St Kilda managing director Graeme Wilson said his real estate team was initially sceptical about the wind turbine-topped Elwood Green apartment block, but "had to eat our words". "We had a lot of people through who were very serious about the green elements and sustainability - it's nice to see people raising the bar," Mr Wilson said.

But a clear conscience doesn't always come cheap. The price of a one-bedroom apartment at The Commons will start from \$375,000, and a one-bedroom at Elwood Green sold for between \$460,000 and \$520,000.

In Australia's first high-rise timber building, a Grollo family development at the old Carlton & United Breweries site in Swanston Street, a three-bedroom apartment will cost about \$1 million. The Delta building will be carbon neutral and have its own gas-fired electrical generator powered by waste wood chips, and a rainwater and a grey-water recycling system.

<http://www.theage.com.au/environment/its-commons-sense-to-be-green-20110909-1k1yo.html#ixzz1dcouJxgQ>