

# Good design is the foundation of infill



**Bottleyard in Northbridge was designed by MJA Studio for Handle Property Group.** Picture: Dion Robeson

## STREET WISE

■ Carmel Van Ruth

Perth has witnessed an increase in high-density urban infill proposals as developers respond to a growing market appetite for housing choices in established areas.

These larger developments — typically mixed-use or multi-residential — have a significant impact on the public realm, adjacent development and the surrounding community.

It is important that these developments are well designed. Multi-residential developments accommodate a diverse range of changing occupants and must work well for longer than single houses as multiple ownership limits the ability to alter or redevelop.

More than half of Perth's metropolitan local governments have appointed multi-disciplinary

Design Review Panels to offer independent expert advice on the design quality of proposals. Good design can deliver dwellings that offer good levels of amenity, are flexible in their use, cost effective to operate

## Design Review Part one of two.

and maintain, and appropriate for their location.

For developers, a well-managed design review offers flexibility to depart from the R-Codes and local policies to deliver improved, site-specific outcomes. Where senior planners can participate in design reviews, solutions can be brokered collaboratively, enabling a smoother approvals phase after endorsement.

Where development incentives are offered for good design, some developers are seeking out designers who have previously earned support for exemplary projects and are granting them latitude to develop innovative solutions to deliver improved amenity. Once the positive built outcomes are realised, these developers are encouraging these approaches in other jurisdictions where the incentives don't apply — market interest and reputational benefits of good design are enough. Development incentives for good design are not only encouraging better developers, they are incrementally

shaping expectations as our apartment market matures.

Skilled architects are needed for infill development. These projects are complex endeavours demanding a thoroughly considered design response.

Architects are educated — and then practise — in a culture of design review, and generally welcome the iterative process. Design teams benefit by gaining independent advice and early validation of design approach.

For local governments, having a design review signals a commitment to ensuring new developments make a positive contribution. Panel members can bring knowledge of context, community, history and future direction.

Panels can identify recurring design issues and recommend improvements to policy. Improved design outcomes can ease community concern about infill development.

In the next part of this column, we will examine how to support design review panels and assess Design WA draft policies.

■ Carmel Van Ruth is a senior architecture officer in the Office of the Government Architect.