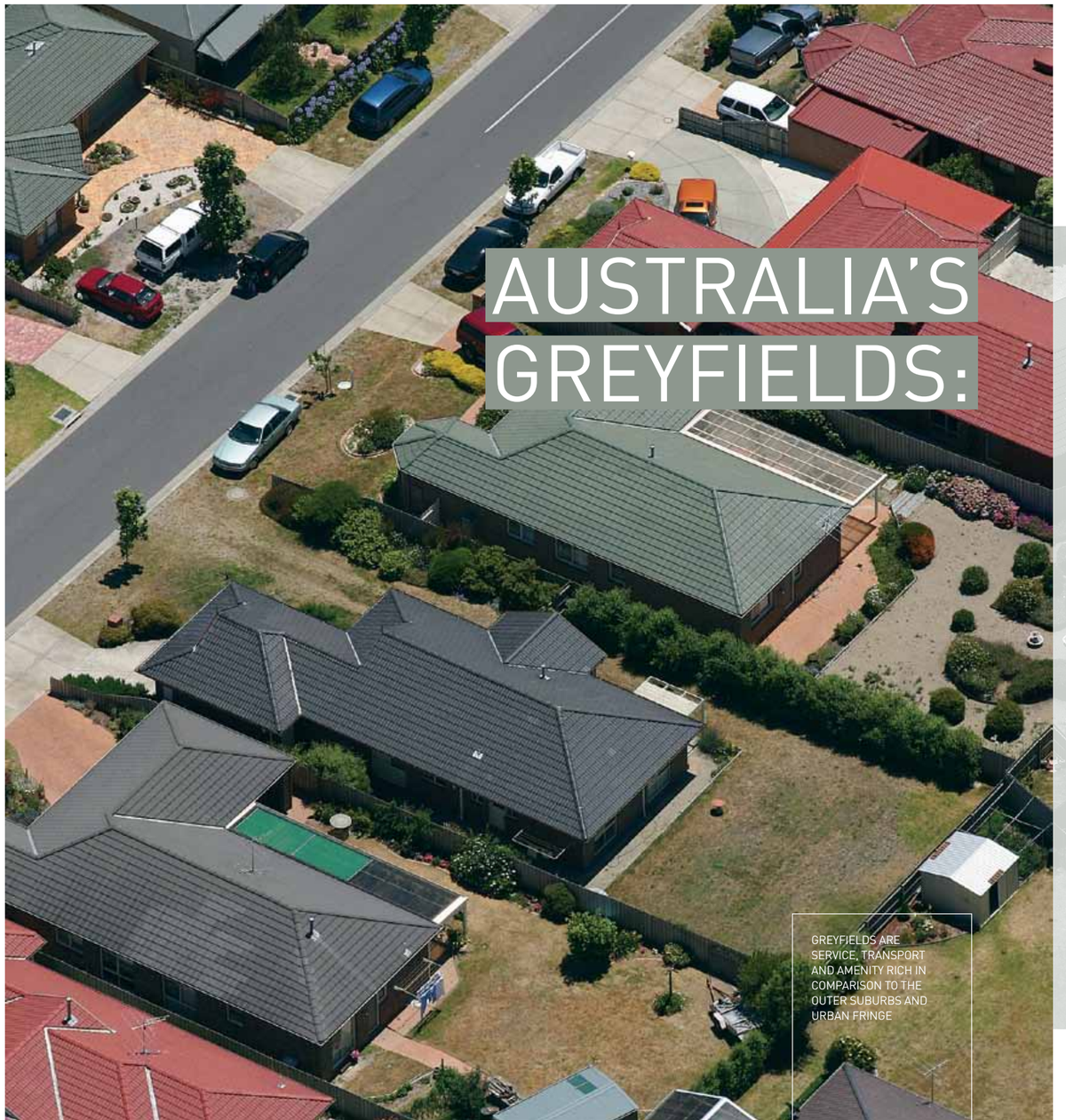

AUSTRALIA'S GREYFIELDS:

GREYFIELDS ARE SERVICE, TRANSPORT AND AMENITY RICH IN COMPARISON TO THE OUTER SUBURBS AND URBAN FRINGE

OVERLOOKED MIDDLE SUBURBS OFFER NEW RESIDENTIAL SOLUTIONS

AUSTRALIAN CITIES' AGING RESIDENTIAL TRACTS, OR 'GREYFIELDS', OFFER ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC SOLUTIONS TO AUSTRALIA'S HUNGER FOR CITY HOUSING. BY **PROFESSOR PETER NEWTON**, INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH, SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, MELBOURNE.

Australia's population is projected to reach more than 35 million people by mid-century, according to ABS and Treasury forecasts. Over 70 per cent of this growth will be in our capital cities.

Already, this acceleration is exerting huge pressure on Australia's major capital cities and their housing markets. Designed to achieve more compact urban development, metropolitan planning strategies for Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane require that more than half of new and future housing be constructed in established, middle-ring suburbs with the remainder in traditional outer 'greenfields'.

These strategies are coupled with other sustainable city objectives related to reducing resource use (energy and water consumption, car-based travel, housing space etc) and greenhouse gas emissions.

However, these plans are failing. This failure is largely due to an inability by the government, development industry and local communities to

> BY NEGLECTING THE REGENERATION OF GREYFIELDS, GOVERNMENTS ARE CONSIGNING OUR BIG CITIES TO LESS SUSTAINABLE, LIVEABLE AND COMPETITIVE FUTURES.

tackle the following solution – the creation of a practical and replicable model to regenerate Australia's 'greyfield' suburbs.

To me, greyfields describes the aging, occupied residential tracts of suburbs that are physically, technologically and environmentally obsolescent. They also represent economically outdated, failing or undercapitalised real estate assets.

Typically found in a five to 25 kilometre radius of each capital city centre, greyfields are service, transport and amenity rich in comparison to the outer suburbs and urban fringe.

Currently, the residential redevelopment occurring in our greyfields is fragmented and piecemeal. Where one residential property is demolished to make way for several townhouses is necessary, but not sufficient in scale to meet the demands for additional housing.

THE CHALLENGE IS TO REDIRECT POPULATION AND PROPERTY INVESTMENT INWARDS TO THE GREYFIELDS

The pace and scale of redevelopment around activity centres and on major arterials is also lagging. Thomas Friedman of the NY Times wrote that the co-founder of Intel said: "Companies come to strategic inflection points, when the fundamentals of business change and they either make the hard decision to invest and take a more promising trajectory, or do nothing and wither."

The same is true for cities. By neglecting the regeneration of greyfields, governments are consigning our big cities to less sustainable, liveable and competitive futures.

In 2010, Swinburne, Monash and RMIT universities undertook a research project, funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). The premise was to articulate a new model for greyfield precinct residential redevelopment, akin to those that successfully operate in our cities' greenfields and brownfields.

The key questions explored are:

- → Why aren't we building more (high density) housing in the middle suburbs? And what can be done about it?
- → Where are the most prospective greyfield precincts located? What are the necessary market and community dynamics for precinct redevelopment?
- → What range of visions and models for precinct regeneration can be articulated for different places? How can low rise, high density be introduced to increase housing yield together with a mix of dwelling types, styles and costs?
- → How can the precinct achieve carbon neutrality, demonstrate the application of water-sensitive urban design with integrated urban water systems, minimise waste generation and automate waste disposal, and present more walkable and socially integrated neighbourhoods?

A NEW RESEARCH PROJECT FUNDED BY AHURI INVESTIGATES GREYFIELD RESIDENTIAL REGENERATION

- → How can low-rise high density be more cost effective?
- → What design, construction, manufacturing and labour force innovations can be brought to bear at a greyfield precinct scale?
- → What new institutional and governance arrangements need to be established?

Articulating a new model for greyfield residential regeneration is central to the AHURI project. Not only does it align with the national objectives emerging from the Major Cities Unit of the Department of Infrastructure, but also with the city redevelopment objectives, such as those outlined in Melbourne's Committee for Melbourne's Building Melbourne Program.

The benefits would be considerable: substantial infrastructure cost savings compared to greenfield-fringe development, more environmentally sustainable and resilient communities, more affordable housing (enabling aging baby boomers to downsize to a nearby precinct redevelopment with spare cash) and the basis for a new type of property development industry involving government and community partnerships.

Instead of perpetuating the outward growth of Australia's big cities, the easy, but unsustainable path, for urban development, our more challenging strategy is to redirect population and property investment inwards to the greyfields as a catalyst for their regeneration.

For more information on this project and greyfields publications, please contact Professor Peter Newton on pnewton@swin.edu.au