



Annual Report

October 2020

Executive Summary

This year has certainly had its challenges for all of us and looking back over last year's report, it is striking how much we have managed to achieve, given the effect of the pandemic and the necessary restrictions.

While in 2019, the Hub blossomed and became very active, this year, without the ability to readily meet in person, Hub activity has been restricted and there has been more focus on the Cohousing.

Perhaps last year's key initiative was to establish a Strategic Plan that would drive the AGENCY Project's direction and activities over 2020 and the following years. The 'Vision', "For all of us to live and grow old with AGENCY in a community where everyone is valued and can contribute" was driven down to business plans for the Cohousing and the Hub with aims, strategies and actions.

The early part of the year the Steering Committee set about to develop the Business Plans to include a set of deliverable action plans.

The main work of the group this year arose from and encapsulated many of the actions of the Plan and became the main activity of the last 6 months. This was to establish a virtual cohousing project group – people who were interested in moving into a cohousing project in the next 5 years - and take them through a process as if it were a real project using the Balmain Works Depot site in Llewellyn Street as a hypothetical. About 15 people have regularly met, with nearly all meetings being held by video conference, culminating in an in-person outdoor codesign workshop and picnic.

This has been a valuable, interesting and enjoyable process, raising and discussing the important issues that impact on cohousing projects while at the same time building relationships and having a bit of fun. Louise Silburn and Vincent Murray have been the main drivers and much thanks needs to go to them for all the work they have done. A report has been appended.

The other key action has been a rebranding exercise. The strategic plan included a goal to communicate and promote who we are and it was decided that the name "The AGENCY Project" didn't reflect what we were about and the branding needed to be updated. After much discussion and debate the Committee decided to call our organisation "Agency cohousing and community" and have a simpler and more streamlined branding. Much thanks here must go to Lyn Gamwell who led this exercise and will continue to do so over the next year.

I'd like to thank all the Agency Project steering committee members: Frouke de Reuver, Lyn Gamwell, Roger Hamilton, Susan Hamilton, Vincent Murray, David Scandol and Louise Silburn who have overseen our work this year and all the members of the cohousing development group who have got a lot out of it and made friends. There is always a core of people who do most of the work, but it has been wonderful to see more people involved and enthusiastic. The AGENCY Project is still run by volunteers in their spare time and we really appreciate your help. I would encourage all members to lend their support and get involved.

I am also stepping down as President, not a big step as we are a flat organisation but our aim is to share the roles around as we develop. I will remain on the committee and will strongly support and advocate for our goals.

Guy Luscombe

Strategic Plan

Last year we reported against the Aims of the Strategic Plan, this year we report on the actions developed from the Strategic Plan and achievements for this year. Our actions for this year focussed on the cohousing. In the early months we met in subcommittees to develop an action plan to drive through the aims developed in the Strategic Plan.

AIM 1. Develop cohousing communities:

Develop supportive structures (finance, governance, property, design) and build up the principles around the model – financial, governance, design

Achievements

Developed the Cohousing Development Group as the structure to work through all these issues. Program of issues discussed in a series of meetings of group every two weeks to work through all issues like:

FINANCE:

- Finance models were developed and discussed based around various ownership scenarios.
- Several members attended Sydney Cohousing Workshop on Financing led by Karen Deegan
- Other Finance models from other organisations have been identified and circulated where available
- **Definitely more interest from potential funders in alternative housing models**

GOVERNANCE

- Preliminary 'rules' (the way we do things) were raised, discussed and developed. Key issues were around pets, cars, laundries, sustainability, communal facilities

PROPERTY

- Ongoing scoping for potential properties
- Inspected and did feasibility for old hotel in Caroline Street Balmain, currently used for studio accommodation. Found it difficult to finance
- Works Depot Expression of Interest seemed positive opportunity and developed but Council have now retracted

DESIGN

- Developed design guide with reference to the user group
- Ran Co design workshop for the Works Depot site, developing individual houses and arranging them on the site.

Measure of success: We set the goal of at least one cohousing project in the next 5 years and the group developed a realistic concept for the Works depot site.

AIM 2. Develop membership base:

Have a list of people eager to move into cohousing

Achievements:

Developed list of keen members (members ready to move now or in the next 5 years) and worked with them in the Cohousing Development Group.

We weren't able to do the other membership drive activities proposed linked to Hub and an event outside Woolies. Similarly weren't able to run information nights but the Development group helped to deepen understanding of cohousing or to do a Narara trip.

These will be revisited in 2021

Measure of success:

Increased number of members – people on 'waiting list'.

AIM 3. Match co-housing projects with development partners:

Set up and build relationships with interested partners;

Achievements:

Identified and approached partners / potential funders – Inner West Council, 02 Finance.

Continued to work with existing partners to keep them informed - BCCM, Bank Australia, Teachers Mutual, SGCH

Updated the Agency Co-housing Handbook as a result of the Development Group and rebranding. To be completed in 2021.

Measure of success:

In kind agreement with appropriate partner(s): e.g. Draft Terms of Reference/ Memorandums of Understanding/ Joint Venture.

FUTURE ACTIONS

Most of the actions below were put off due to the numbers of people and pandemic limitations and will be revisited in 2021

AIM 4: Promote and lobby:

Make cohousing more visible and urgent;

ACTIONS:

- *Create short stories about what we and others are doing and post.*
- *Use in our communications to members to engage and inspire individuals to be members.*
- *Do a talk at the Balmain Institute about the cohousing*
- *Lobby via Llewellyn Street development to Council and MPs (we did approach some Councillors and MPs)*
- *Continue 'Meet up' promotion of 'Introduction to co housing' nights*

- *Speak to Anthony Albanese about federal tax reform in relation to cohousing age care*
- *Keep in touch as set out in our communications strategy.*

AIM 5. Network:

Know all cohousing groups in Australia and be recognised as a leader;

- *Connect to other cohousing groups; Connect with housing industry and other stakeholders; Research and set up a data base*
- *Share knowledge & resources encourage take-up of cohousing in Inner West Sydney.*
- *Compile a list of key stakeholders to be targeted for workshops, talks etc.*
- *Go to workshops and talks*

Measure of success:

Number of groups connected with; database established.

AIM 6: Centralise and share knowledge:

Share knowledge and information about cohousing: what it is, how it works and how to do it.

- *Set up database, connected and engaged with other groups like Cohousing Australia (CHA);*
- *Promote and actively support the www.collaborativehousing.org website*

Measure of success:

More people being able to talk confidently about cohousing and what The AGENCY Project is doing.

Guy Luscombe

AGency Cohousing Development Group

It is an exciting time in the cohousing world with potential developments being pursued in Newcastle, Northern Beaches, and the Blue Mountains.

Here in Balmain over the last few months, a group of around 15 people has been meeting on Zoom to discuss some of the detail behind setting up a cohousing project. We have used the potential of the Balmain Works Dept site as the focus for this and every two weeks have had several agenda items to consider as if we were the group of people to be moving into a development on that site. In recent weeks we have been advised by the council that they have withdrawn the Shared Accommodation EOI which incorporated this site. This is due to the impact of Covid-19 on the operations of the council is not specifically related to the Balmain Works Department. However, it does mean the likelihood of this becoming available for development into a cohousing community is slim.

However, the work we carried out together was always based on the premise that the site may not be available but it has provided a very useful catalyst for the group to think through the issues that are common to any cohousing development.

The Llewellyn Street Works Department Journey

The key issues we discussed were:

principles of cohousing: agreed it has to be socially, environmentally and financially sustainable, for residents' life-time, discouraging speculation, promoting interaction and togetherness while respecting privacy, intellectually, emotionally and physically stimulating, supports people to live and age in a healthy, dignified manner, supports diversity of race, religion, gender, lifestyle and ability, has a consultative and transparent decision-making and exists within a robust legal and financial structure.

governance: we considered the different legal structures and use of sociocracy to discuss and agree key issues related to financing the project. We used questionnaires for members to indicate how much money they would be prepared to pay and how much space they would like for their dwelling and used the results as the basis for discussion about the mix between private and public shared space and different financing options.

pricing: we developed some detailed pricing models to give a ballpark idea of the costs involved in being part of the development. Options included: buying/leasing land, buying/leasing units, unit floor space area, percentage of shared space.

shared space: we talked about what we would ideally like as shared space – answering the question 'how do I see myself spending my day'. Some of the shared space ideas were a shared library in shared sitting/meeting room or a bookshelf wall with everyone with their own section, workshops for art, making things, shed for repairing things, shared equipment, bikes, storage generally, laundry – 'shared and sexy' with coffee, community garden on roof and on the ground - get more sun, shared dining with big screen, moveable walls, energy created connected space, capacity to sit and watch the world go by. The village square/grande place idea. Kitchen area opening out into the green – cooking happening

not just for shared meals but cooking e.g. biscuits for everyone – or experimenting and sharing with others.

community space: community food gardens, cut throughs from Darling Street, play areas and how the community would interact with the cohousing. There would also be a way to transition between private to more communal open space and then public space with landscaping, low fences etc. It was suggested it is nice to see people in their houses as it maintains contact and interaction.



pets: we agreed pets would be welcome with some potential limitations.

cars: parking permits are not available for residents on the surrounding streets and on-site parking will take valuable room away from building and open space. Underground parking is expensive to build. Thus, very little on-site parking likely so a big topic of conversation was how residents could do without cars. This varied but interestingly the dialogue prompted several people to reflect and slightly change their original positions.

sustainable design: we reviewed the agency design guide and discussed potential options for sustainable building. These included: solar panels, backup battery, passive heating/cooling, shared cars, waste-water management, community garden, recycling.

design: to develop the design collaboratively, in true cohousing fashion, we met in Elkington Park for a socially distanced (not that it ended up that way when everyone got so interested in the plan!) practical design session with cut out houses to create our 'ideal' apartments. This provided an insight into the balance required between what was important to those of us used to having our own private space and the principles of designing sustainable, inexpensive dwellings focusing on shared space. For example, most people valued natural light, private open space, spare bedrooms, study areas and an element of privacy but also wanted community gardens a share house, shared workshops, and studios. This made the placement of the cohousing development in relation to the community space and in each of the individual units.

The proposal was to keep the two administration buildings which would be repurposed as places for the shared facilities and / or communal use.

A **standard 2-bedroom floor plan** was developed based on what people had developed themselves and the dimensional constraints of the site. Each unit had a floor area of 90 sqm. These were arranged mirrored



terrace house fashion (to save space and suit the local context) in groups of 4 in a 2 up 2 down situation with a central stair accessing the upper two units.

This configuration enabled 24 x 2-bedroom units over two floors as a likely number that could fit. Total 'sellable' floor area would be around 2160 sqm.

A number of basic configurations were developed at the workshop and a couple reviewed in the subsequent workshop resulting in an L shaped option with two street frontages as preferred.

Lifts were another interesting topic of debate; the need for a lift was raised (no pun intended). It was acknowledged that a lift is necessary for people in a wheelchair and would be convenient for moving and groceries and can facilitate interaction. But it was also recognised most older people can deal with stairs and that it can be good for them; that only a small percentage of people over 65 need a wheelchair; 50% of units are accessible from the ground; and the stairs are wide and a single flight making them easier for people to use and for a stair lift to be added if required. Other factors are cost and ongoing maintenance; how many there would be and how to get to the unit from the lift. For example, if there was just the one— a walkway would be necessary along the front or the back of the run of units and this could affect privacy (above).

Interaction

Being a cohousing community, created for people coming together, the comments were made that it should be designed to encourage incidental interaction, with common paths and small sitting areas. A roof garden could also be a place for this interaction and the common walkway from the lift could also encourage occasional encounters.

Carparking

No car parking was shown but on this site Council would probably require some on site car parking. Ideally there would be car sharing. Excavation is expensive but the site slopes away to the south east towards the Llewellyn Jacques street corner and this would reduce the excavation required and could provide a semi submerged car parking area for around 15 cars.



Where to now?

Earlier this month we were advised by Council that the EOI we responded to relating to the Llewellyn Street Works Department had been withdrawn subject to further review and investigation into the shared accommodation needs of the merged Inner West Council. This means that there is no likely opportunity for us to develop this site in the short term, and possibly never. That was of course always the case – the EOI was just a first step in a long process to securing the site.

Everyone who took part in the group learned a great deal from the experience and it has further motivated many of us to find a site that would not have the complications of council ownership. This

will require investment finance and as such our next steps are to focus our attention on securing one or more investment partners so that we can be ready to jump in and secure appropriate land/property for development or remodelling.

In the meantime, we are taking an active interest in other cohousing developments in the area and will be learning all we can from them. We intend for the cohousing development group to stay together in some form, holding socials and sharing ideas with each other so we are ready to 'leap' into real development when the opportunity presents itself.

Louise Silburn and Guy Luscombe

The AGENCY Hub

Since the last AGM we have held 23 events organised through Meetup. This is of course down on last year's total but still able to feature the normal mix of documentaries and socials before lock-down commenced. After April we moved to only having online and outdoor events (including a socially distanced picnic and a few good bush walks – see picture below of our last one on the La Perouse coastal track) which kept us going till now when we hope to be able to carefully ramp up our activities.

Rod Freeman is looking into the possibility of starting up the documentaries again and we have already booked the agency spring picnic for the evening of Sunday November 15th. There will also be a visit to the Blue Mountains Cohousing site and Blue Eco homes Passive House show home on 2nd November with bush walk included. The dog walks (which were the only activity that didn't stop this year) still go on with the same loyal dogs and their owners – first Saturday of every month at Mort Bay park. Please let us know about other activities you would like, and we can help you organise and publicise them through Meetup.



Margot Woods

Rebranding from The AGENCY Project to agency cohousing & community

A communications sub-committee recommended to the Steering Group that we re-brand – i.e. change our name and our logo to better represent who we are and what we do. We agreed that there are 3 key words that represent and differentiate us as an organisation. They are:

Agency: all agreed that this is the key umbrella to our entire proposition and that we should retain it: *agency: the capacity to make independent choices about our lives for the whole of our lives (sociological definition)*

Cohousing: our intention is to advocate for and to set up a cohousing development (or developments) in the inner west of Sydney, (specifically on the Balmain Peninsula), designed to support a healthy connected quality of life for people as they grow older. As a new, resident-driven housing model for New South Wales, this is taking work and advocacy both to achieve recognition by government at every level and to find suitable land and development funding.

Community: Our other intention is to set up and maintain wider community engagement in the local area to complement the cohousing arm. This is via the Agency Hub, a practical supportive network of people in the inner west who want to stay socially connected and be assisted as needed as they grow older. This aspect of who we are is now vibrant and growing organically, with a plethora of activities being organised and communicated to a growing list of inner west residents. We agreed to change our name to simply represent this.

agency cohousing & community

We also determined that our logo should – as far as possible – represent the qualities of

- Warmth and Welcome
- Community and Sustainability
- Independence and Togetherness

After much consideration of possibilities that would work in a primarily online environment, we decided to base our logo on the image to the right. The overall communication is of separate *and* connected homes. The colours are vibrant and warm, the central building colour represents our commitment to sustainability and the 3 buildings are independent and at the same time connected.

Soon, the new name and finalised logo will be rolled out on our Facebook page, in our direct communications and then in a refreshed website:



Lyn Gamwell

Treasurer's Report (including Membership)

The Steering Committee decided, and communicated to members, in 2019 that we would be aiming to streamline membership renewal to once per annum in October rather than on a rolling basis. This was to help with management of who was and who wasn't financial at the time of the AGM in October. We wished to ensure that as many members as possible were financial and consequently able to vote on any issues raised at the Annual General Meeting.

Most interested members have recently paid their very modest membership fee and we feel we have a strong financial membership base. We did have several people on our database who did not respond to recent correspondence. We have been following them up to verify if they have been receiving communications via our electronic mail system called 'Mail Chimp' effectively or if they are no longer interested.

Most of you would be aware, but I will reiterate, that early financial members will be the ones who will have the first opportunity to invest in projects as they become available.

The Financial Report for the year, included here, is very simple as we have had very limited financial activity as outlined in the President's Report.

Our core membership base is quite strong at 74 Financial members with a number of folk on our 'Interested' Database. We do plan to undertake a new membership drive in 2021.... More information on this will be available soon.

<u>Opening Balances</u>	\$ 1,284.01	\$ 941.26
<u>Receipts</u>	2020	2019
Membership Dues Received	\$ 1,290.00	\$ 1,020.00
Hall Hire Refund	\$ 250.00	\$ 250.00
Hall Hire Refund separate event	\$ 250.00	
Bank Interest Recvd	\$ 0.51	\$ 3.26
Holding Deposit for AGM venue 2018 returned		\$ 550.00
Proceeds of Film Night (MeetUp Event)	\$ 461.00	
Contribution to Drinks for AGM		\$ 65.00
Total Receipts	\$ 2,251.51	\$ 1,638.26
<u>Expenses</u>		
MeetUp Subscription Fee	\$ 160.80	\$ 301.22
Hall fee for MeetUp event (Hannaford)	\$ 250.00	\$ 500.00
Contribution to dinner - Green Fabric Organisation		\$ 125.00
Survey Monkey Subscription		\$ 203.94
AGM Expenses		\$ 163.47
WordPress Website fee	\$ 132.87	
Office Works Printing	\$ 178.54	
Button Badges	\$ 117.63	
Fair Trading Fee	\$ 47.00	
Credit Card processing fee	\$ 1.00	\$1.88
Total Expenses	\$ 887.84	\$ 1,295.51
Calculated Balance 30th September 2020	\$ 2,647.68	
Calculated Balance 31st October 2019		\$ 1,284.01
Diff	\$ -	\$ -
Balance at Bank 30th September 2020	\$ 2,647.68	

Susan Hamilton

