



Community attitudes towards rural development and subdivision

Research Report

Prepared for Intrapac Property P/L

July 2023



J W S R E S E A R C H



Contents

<u>Background, objectives and methodology</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Executive summary</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Detailed findings</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>The benefits and barriers to rural or semi-rural living</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Definition of a good neighbourhood</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>Impressions of housing developments, larger blocks, and responsibility for development</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Interest in the features of a master planned sustainable community</u>	<u>34</u>
<u>Addressing local objections, trusted voices</u>	<u>48</u>



Background, objectives and methodology



Background and objectives

The Lloyd Creek Rural Village project team sought to understand community needs, and attitudes towards rural development to inform their proposed project.

The aim of the research is to inform the development planning documentation and refine the messaging about the Lloyd Creek Rural Village to address community concerns.

To that end, Intrapac Property commissioned JWS Research to undertake research with residents of Darwin and surrounds.

The research program has been designed to explore and understand Darwin residents' current attitudes and perceptions toward rural development and subdivision of a nature similar to the Lloyd Creek Rural Village Development, to inform strategic communications and engagement efforts.

The research outcomes will determine the best way forward to change the narrative, that is dispel any myths as well as to understand and properly position the Lloyd Creek Rural Village to the local community in Darwin and the surrounding areas.

The objectives of the research are to:

- Ascertain awareness and knowledge of rural development and subdivision.
- Determine the extent of understanding and engagement with rural development and subdivision, as well as the nature of any community doubts and concerns.
- Identify the necessary language and information required to change the narrative and underlying perceptual drivers of concerns and opportunities.
- Ascertain the trusted sources of information, messengers and role models best able to effectively deliver messaging to both the general public and key stakeholders.

To address these objectives, qualitative research was conducted with a total of 45 Darwin residents, with 34 participating in focus group discussions (in person) and 11 participating in in-depth interviews (via Microsoft Teams or telephone). The interviews were conducted with community representatives, including office bearers of associations, aspiring home buyers and people living on acreage in rural areas.

The research was conducted in May and June 2023.



Research methodology overview

Qualitative Focus group discussions

n=4 face-to-face focus group discussions (34 Darwin residents)

- Among residents of Darwin, Palmerston and Litchfield.
- 2 hours in duration.

Conducted Tuesday 31st May and Thursday 1st June, 2023.

A total of 34 Darwin residents participated in the focus groups

Qualitative In-depth interviews

n=12 residents of Darwin, Palmerston and Litchfield

- A wide variety of residents were included:
 - those born in Darwin, and those who migrated from elsewhere in Australia and migrants from overseas
 - a mix of ages and genders
 - long-term residents and recent arrivals (for example moving to Darwin within the last two years)
 - people with tertiary or trade qualifications
 - people who already live on large rural blocks (five acres or similar) and those who aspire to
 - home-owners who considered large rural blocks but did not purchase
 - home-owners in suburban Palmerston and Darwin
 - renters looking to purchase a home.

Interviews were conducted from 23rd May to 29th June 2023.



Qualitative methodology: focus groups in detail

Qualitative research in the form of **focus groups** were conducted face-to-face with people from Darwin, Palmerston and Litchfield. The groups were structured as follows:

Household structure	Younger (17-45 years)	Older (46-70 years)	Total
Single or couple, with children living at home	1	1	2 groups
Single or couple, with no children living at home	0	1	1 group
Single or couple, with or without children living at home	1	0	1 group
Total	2	2	4 groups

Six to ten participants took part in each group. A total of 34 people participated across all groups.

A mix of genders were represented within each group.

Each group ran for two hours.

Focus groups were conducted on Tuesday 31st May 2023 (in Darwin) and Thursday 1st June 2023 (in Palmerston).

The focus group discussion guide and stimulus material was approved by Intrapac, photographs of potential inclusions in a housing community were sourced online to show examples of features of planned communities and amenities available elsewhere.

Executive summary

Potential buyers need to know how Lloyd Creek will deliver an ideal neighbourhood



There is a clear market need for smaller rural living options in Darwin, namely blocks bigger than a standard housing block but less than five acres (seen as more affordable and easier to manage), based on the evidence of this qualitative research.

Rural living provides many of the features people identify for their ideal neighbourhood

Rural or semi-rural living, with the connotation that this means a block of land that is larger than suburban blocks, gives people the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations for their ideal home. The additional space works on both a practical and emotional level.

On a practical level more space means:

- Room for a garden and a pool (not choosing).
- Room for a large shed for safe storage of cars, motorbikes, ATVs or boats, or large-scale hobbies
- Peace and quiet and privacy, defined as close enough to wave to the neighbours but not hear their day-to-day lives.
- Safety, by being far from those who might be responsible for 'opportunistic' criminal activity (often described as property and car theft) or anti-social behaviour (drinking or gathering in public parks).

- Being able to pursue hobbies, such as extensive gardens, owning dogs or horses, or other hobbies.
- Safety, with like-minded neighbours who are owner-occupants and keep an eye out for each other, and no government subsidised housing in the vicinity.
- The opportunity to acquire (or build) a new (often larger) house, with the new house able to correct the design flaws of an existing dwelling, including the ability to incorporate sustainable or environmentally friendly home build design features.
- A new build offers an escape from the flaws and maintenance of older properties.

On an emotional level (often for parents), rural living can mean:

- Recreating the desirable aspects of one's childhood in order to raise the next generation with similar benefits.
- Creating the opportunities for recreation without having to leave home.
- Achieving (sometimes long held) aspirations to have more land and potentially a bigger home.
- Living the outdoor and active way of life that is attractive to many people in Darwin and attracts people to come and live in Darwin.

To encourage consideration, education is needed to reset understanding about living in rural areas



There are many assumptions about what is available (or not) in rural areas and how people live

Although people do recognise the desirable aspects of moving to rural (or semi-rural) areas, there are many assumptions about what is missing that will prevent some people from considering the option.

The additional challenge is that with little or no experience of the type of development planned for Lloyd Creek, people will not expect what is planned and think that there will be a greater loss of urban amenity than will actually occur. Their frame of reference will be what they've seen, not something new and different.

It will be essential to educate people about how the Lloyd Creek development will be different from existing developments and how it will deliver many aspects of urban living that people enjoy, for example:

- There will be options for different size blocks, from as little as (for example), 1,000 to 4,000 square metres – the benefits of space and privacy without the maintenance of five acres, you don't spend all weekend maintaining the block.
- There will be shops nearby, and within walking distance for residents, with ample parking.
- Developers will encourage retail tenants such as cafés, supermarkets and other businesses.

- Will have recreation facilities such as parks and bike paths, with ample parking for those who drive to the venue, (for example to transport children and their bicycles), permanent well-shaded seating and BBQs.
- Underground power and town water for reliable supply.
- Building standards will ensure high-quality housing compliant with all required building codes.
- Planning for wide, safe streets (for example courts or cul-de-sacs to reduce passing traffic).
- The provision of a community hall (with small kitchen as well as bathrooms) available for residents to rent.
- Provision of a community garden for all residents (with information about who pays for the water).
- Provision of information (or sample plans) from a highly regarded Darwin architect to build a modern house that offers the highest levels of comfort with sustainable design features to minimise power consumption.
- With the popularity of solar panels for several people, and complaints about the declining solar feed-in tariff, consider negotiating favourable prices for inclusion of solar panels or storage (either at a household or community level – for example community batteries).

Roads, travel time, mobile phone and internet service are key concerns related to rural relocation



The issue of distance cannot be entirely mitigated

The perceived problem of being too far away from work or accessing services can be addressed in part with road infrastructure and links that allow residents quick and uncongested access to main highways.

Demonstrate favourable travel time to key destinations (Coolalinga, Palmerston, the airport or Darwin CBD) compared to other rural or semi-rural locations.

Inform potential purchasers about the infrastructure for mobile phone reception and internet access

While the experience of poor mobile phone reception or slow internet speeds is not limited to rural areas it is believed to be far more prevalent there. Reassuring people about how these problems have been addressed in the design and construction of Lloyd Creek, if at all possible, will be a driver for people to consider the location. A key benefit will be that it will allow the opportunity to work from home.

Consider how the development aligns with Northern Territory Government initiatives

Linking the Lloyd Creek development with wider Government plans may be appropriate in the approval process but perhaps not with locals (who may disagree with government policy).

Darwin residents reference examples of land releases by the Government in unsuitable locations such as floodplains or reclaimed mangrove areas as evidence of poor government decision making.

Examples of Government plans to mention when promoting the Lloyd Creek Rural Village Development include the 2018-2028 Northern Territory Population Growth Strategy and to grow the Northern Territory to a \$40billion economy by 2030. New residential locations seem strongly aligned with both.

Address local objections by transparency and demonstrating positive outcomes for existing residents



Local residents are likely to be inclined to suspicion about new property development activity. It will be necessary to address concerns and demonstrate a development that avoids the negative changes they assume (believe) will happen.

Views will tend to the negative because of previous development plans or existing developments (for example the small residential blocks in Humpty Doo) and certainty that new developments will repeat what they perceive to be past mistakes.

Local residents will need detailed information about how their fears are unfounded

Some examples of the information that could allay the fears of some include:

- Lloyd Creek residents will be on town water (and preferably not permitted to sink a bore). For the more suspicious it may be prudent to explain the source of the water (if not a bore) and that it will not impact their own water supply.
- The new development will be at a sufficient distance (for example with large area of undeveloped land as a 'buffer') so as not to impact or impinge on their way of life.

- New residents will be provided infrastructure such as roads, shops and recreational areas, avoiding added pressure on existing resources and possibly providing new options for existing local residents.

If existing residents cannot perceive impacts pertaining to a new development, then reasons for complaints about the development cannot be supported.

Suspicion and negativity can thrive in the absence of information, so a considered communication plan to engage and inform local residents could address negative perceptions early on.

Such communications may already include elected representatives as part of the approval process and contacting trusted voices in the media (such as Katie Woolf on Mix 104.9 radio station) may be also be an appropriate strategy.

A marketing billboard for the Lloyd Creek Rural Village Development to show expected and unexpected benefits



Next steps and recommendations for Lloyd Creek Rural Village Development: communications considerations



Educate potential buyers about the urban amenity at Lloyd Creek

Those considering a move to semi-rural or rural locations will likely appreciate the benefits but have pre-conceived ideas about what they might miss out on. Ensure they understand that the range of features and amenities will be different (and better) compared to other rural locations.

Communicate the options for lot sizes

With a frequent lack of awareness of options for land anywhere between a quarter acre and five acres, another education focus is for people to understand that they can have the larger block they want (garden *and* pool *and* shed) without the responsibility and work of a five-acre block.

Appeal to both the aspirational and practical purchase drivers

The emotional pull of having your own large space to do what you want and to provide a better lifestyle for your family is a big driver for those who aspire to rural life on a larger block. Promote the expected benefits as well as those they don't expect that are met by a master planned, quality built, sustainable community.

Improved roads, phone and internet will address a key barrier

While distance cannot change, improved or new roads can make the trip easier and faster. Any success in improving mobile or internet service (both speed and reliability) will be a positive feature for potential customers, as it will allow people to work from home and lessen the need to rely on a daily commute to Darwin.

Local residents need transparent and detailed information

Local residents will be inclined to assume that new developments will impact them negatively (more people on fixed infrastructure) and impact 'their' rural way of life. Illustrate that new residents will not impact them – ideally by being far enough away from existing residences and the development having its own infrastructure.

Next steps and recommendations for Lloyd Creek Rural Village Development: key amenities



Larger lots are desirable but thought to be unavailable

Some Territorians aspire to more space but assume the only option is five acres; and are concerned about maintenance. There is a gap in the market between the standard house block and larger rural lots; people want 1,000 up to 4,000 square metre blocks for the lifestyle benefits but without the onerous upkeep.

Recreation amenities are highly valued

Offer highly valued amenities near home, including unspoiled open space, walking or cycling paths, wide streets, parks with children's play options, BBQs, covered seating, recreation for all age groups (e.g. tennis courts) and dog-walking. A multi-use facility (like Fred's Pass), preferably with indoor areas, is a good example.

Access to schools is vital, existing schools seen as overcrowded

For families aspiring to more space for their children, the availability of schools is a key issue. New residents want schools near home, and existing residents (for example in Humpty Doo) already identify over-crowding in their local schools. Include ample land for the Government to construct at least a primary school.

Open space, conservation is highly desired

Having undeveloped open land delivers provides the feeling of space that drives people to leave urban areas and is highly desired in a development. It preserves natural environments through respect for native flora and fauna. Depending on placement, it can provide a 'buffer zone' between new and existing developments.

Effective internet connection (capacity and speed) is essential

Access to both phone and internet is essential. Mobile services rely on towers and base stations and conversations with Telstra may address this. For internet, the increasing popularity of the Starlink low earth orbit satellite broadband internet service (instead of NBN SkyMuster) should provide ample capacity (and speed).