

## LOW INCOME RESIDENTS PAYING THE PRICE FOR INEFFICIENT HOMES

Preston-based Architect, Christopher Shields, says residents on low incomes including pensioners living in concrete panel homes are incurring huge energy bills as they struggle to keep their homes at a comfortable temperature. Mr. Shields says residents spending \$650/quarter was not uncommon.

“There’s no insulation so condensation develops on the inside walls, making them prone to mould and mildew growth. Tenants try to keep the growth under control, which includes keeping the house warmed to 18-19°, but the homes are so energy inefficient it’s extremely costly,” says Mr. Shields.

“Many of the current concrete panel public housing properties were originally intended to be used for up to 20 years, but some have now been in service for 50 years or more. The 1956 Olympic Village in West Heidelberg is a perfect example, and residents are getting sick of it,” he says.

The homes are also very difficult to convert for those with disabilities. Mr. Shields says these properties represent a major opportunity for the lower end of our housing market to be re-developed to service the community and benefit the environment for the next 50 years.

Mr. Shields says a five year housing strategy for suburbs in Melbourne that involves the systematic re-development of concrete panel public housing to community housing will carry multiple long term benefits for the city. This includes not only improving the living conditions for residents in the lower end of the housing market, but making a significant environmental impact in lowering the carbon emissions of each home while increasing the number of families that can be housed in a given area.

Mr. Shields, whose practice has a division that specialises in social housing, says that modern design and technology would ‘radically alter’ the public housing landscape to being re-developed as medium density, energy efficient housing with flexible modular design to accommodate a series of individuals or a family.

Mr. Shields also notes the growth of community housing as a way to manage these properties for the long term. He says the conversion of public housing properties to community housing means the State Government can build quality housing and have it managed by an approved housing organisation for the long term.

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