

Brownfield Development Scenario

Following a fact-finding tour of the UK, the Minister for Housing, The Hon. Olivia Fornow, learned that the UK (England and Wales) could get 1 million new homes out of brownfields sites without encroaching on their greenbelts. She returned to a bushfire ravaged state and recognised the danger of greenfields housing developments sending fingers out into the remaining forests. She placed a priority on mapping and supporting development of brownfield sites by making grants and subsidies available.

The Mayor of Burkesland, Des Prait, is keen to attract dollars to his local government area. With the lure of the available subsidies in mind, he has approached the owner of a disused gas processing and storage facility in the suburb of Kalamazoo, Mr Gaz Field, and a successful developer of old industrial sites for residential use, Mr Ian Dustree, with a view to developing a masterplan for the gas facility site.

The site occupies approximately two thirds of the 12 hectare property. The other third of the property has a scattering of mature trees which provide approximately 20% canopy cover over that area. There are tree-lined roads along two sides of the site. The street trees and the trees on the property together provide cover for nearly 10% of the entire site.

Burkesland Council's DCP has an urban forest canopy target of 35% for greenfield sites when they are developed for residential use. Canopy targets for brownfield sites are not prescribed but are considered 'on merit'. Mayor Prait is happy to relax the amount of tree cover required but the conditions of the subsidies require that "the proposal reflects the urban greening strategies of the government and the relevant council."

Ms Anne Sers, the council's strategic planner, is recommending that the canopy target for the brownfield site reflects that required for greenfield sites, given that the subsidies will compensate for the cost of decontamination and preparation of the site. Mr Ian Dustree believes there are many externalities that will blow out and claims that he cannot achieve the yield required to make the venture profitable if 35% canopy target is required. The initial design proposes the removal of the existing trees on the property as well as the street trees along one street frontage. It provides space for landscaping that would result in about 15% canopy within ten to fifteen years. Mr Dustree argues this is significantly more than the existing 10% canopy, and that he would be replacing the existing "old trees with new, young healthy trees." He is very happy to have lots of trees in the new development.

Gaz Field is keen to sell the property and considers the imposition of canopy targets as "unnecessary and ridiculous". Mayor Des Prait is getting concerned that Ian Dustree will move elsewhere if he can't get in-principle agreement to his design.

The council's arborist, Mr Tim Bermils, has been asked whether it would be acceptable to remove the existing trees on the property if they were replaced four for one. He has stated that four for one replacement would require smaller species to fit the available space and that a lesser number of larger species may be better. He has also objected to the proposed removal of the thirty-odd street trees that would be affected by a new footpath and driveways along one street frontage.

As a panel of urban forest and greening strategists, what advice can you provide to help facilitate a result that would achieve a healthy urban forest outcome while recognising the constraints faced by the developer?