



# **Northern Territory Compact Urban Growth Policy**

A Reference Policy Document to clause 2.7  
(Reference to Policy) of the NT Planning Scheme

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<b>1</b>	<b>Policy Setting</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1	Context for this Policy .....	3
1.2	Why is this Policy Required .....	3
<b>2</b>	<b>Background</b> .....	<b>4</b>
2.1	What is Compact Urban Growth .....	4
2.2	What are the Benefits of Compact Urban Growth .....	5
<b>3</b>	<b>Operation of this Policy</b> .....	<b>6</b>
3.1	Policy Application.....	6
3.2	Use of Policy Performance Criteria.....	6
<b>4</b>	<b>Performance Criteria</b> .....	<b>7</b>
4.1	Accessibility .....	7
4.2	Neighbourhood Character .....	8
4.3	Traffic Management.....	9
4.4	Service Infrastructure.....	9
4.5	Constrained Land .....	10
4.6	Social Infrastructure.....	10
<b>5</b>	<b>Glossary of Terms</b> .....	<b>11</b>

# 1 Policy Setting

## 1.1 Context for this Policy

The Compact Urban Growth Policy is a response to the Northern Territory Government's strategic goals outlined within the *Framing the Future* document. Specifically, this policy implements objective one of the strategic goal titled "Balanced Environment", which sets out to develop an urban densification strategy.

These strategic goals complement recent Commonwealth Government commentary in publications such as *Our Cities – Our Future* and *Creating Places for People – An Urban Design Protocol for Australian Cities*. These publications aim to ensure that we create prosperous cities that support the wellbeing of current and future generations.

This policy also complements initiatives in regional land use planning in the Northern Territory, such as the draft Darwin Regional Land Use Plan 2014 and the Katherine Land Use Plan.

## 1.2 Why is this Policy Required

Population growth in our urban areas has been predominately accommodated in new low density urban suburbs or larger rural lots. This approach has seen extensive areas of natural vegetation and habitat replaced with human habitat.

However, land is a finite resource. Government policy needs to ensure that we are not wasteful in the way we use this resource, as using too much of it now may be detrimental to future generations and the environment.

Land capability issues within each of the Northern Territory's urban regions constrain land development, and dictate the extent to which an urban area can expand. Hence, it is important to ensure that we use the limited supply of developable land efficiently.

It is healthy for urban areas and towns to grow, as this indicates that positive economic and social conditions exist. Urban areas traditionally provide job opportunities and a means of earning an income. Earning an income allows people to interact with society in a positive way. Naturally, people from other geographic regions are attracted to the opportunities offered where such positive conditions exist.

It is acknowledged that population growth results in a demand for new housing, commercial and community floor space. Population growth also generates new demands on infrastructure and services, such as roads, power and water services, parks and other community facilities.

Therefore, the challenge is to ensure that existing urban areas and new broad acre land releases efficiently use valuable land and resources in order to cater for a growing population. Further, it is also important that the population of an urban centre has efficient access to the social and economic benefits of the locality, and can be supported by the services and infrastructure of that locality.

It is recognised that these issues need careful policy management - a policy that manages the issue of a growing population and compact urban development is required. Such a policy needs to establish a consistent and balanced approach to identifying localities where urban growth can be accommodated.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 What is Compact Urban Growth

Compact Urban Growth is aimed at the efficient use of land, and the efficient use of services and infrastructure that support land use.

Compact Urban Growth aims to create compact and mixed activity places that play a role in improving people's lifestyle, whilst creating healthy people, sustainable economies, sustainable environments and sustainable communities. Higher density residential buildings are encouraged, and are usually a key component of a Compact Urban Growth locality.

Figure 1 outlines the general philosophy behind Compact Urban Growth. In principle, Compact Urban Growth localities should:

- occur around activity centres and public transport nodes, where dwelling and activity density may be at its highest;
- occur along transport corridors that are within 400 metres of an activity centre;
- maximise cycling and walking access to public transport, commercial and community facilities; and
- include a transition zone, where dwelling and activity density will become less intense, and will transition to lower densities generally matching the surrounding locality (generally occurs 400 metres away from the activity centre and public transport node).

Areas outside of a 400 metre radius of an activity centre or a zone defined by an Area Plan will experience minimal change in residential density under this model.

Density of dwellings and activities at individual activity centres and transport nodes should be in keeping with changes that are reasonably anticipated within a locality. Densities should be respectful of the scale and character of the surrounding locality.

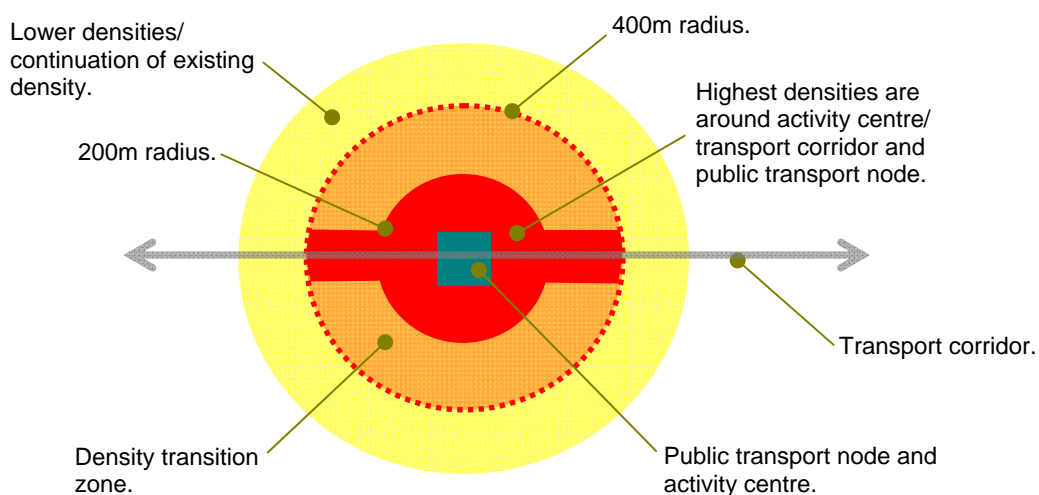


Figure 1 – Higher densities are encouraged within 400 metres of an activity centres and high frequency public transport corridors.

## 2.2 What are the Benefits of Compact Urban Growth

The Compact Urban Growth model described above has been linked to improving urban sustainability. Urban sustainability is not just about environmental concerns, it is also about economic viability, liveability and social equity.

For example, locating more dwellings close to shops, existing employment centres, public open spaces, public transport and schools allows improved access to jobs, services and facilities.

Compact growth localities add to the variety of housing products, which cater for the diverse aspirations of our socio-demographic.

The closer people are to local services, the higher likelihood that these services will be used, and the more viable it becomes to operate these services.

If more people start using their local services and facilities, the opportunity for safety via passive surveillance improves (ie. eyes on the street).

If you locate more people close to these facilities, the likelihood of people walking to and using local shops, using public open space and using public transport increases.

If people start walking more as part of their daily routine, it increases people's ability to exercise, which has many health benefits for the individual.

If people walk or use public transport to their daily destinations, people start reducing their carbon footprint.

Cumulatively, these factors result in the ability to access a greater social network locally. In simple terms, these factors in combination can lead to the development of stronger and more resilient communities.

## 3 Operation of this Policy

### 3.1 Policy Application

This Policy applies to higher density residential proposals in urban brownfield and greenfield localities throughout the Northern Territory.

This Policy will be used to assess the appropriateness of delivering higher density residential land uses.

This Policy will also be used to guide the development of Area Plans, Rezoning and Exceptional Development Applications where higher density residential land uses are proposed.

### 3.2 Use of Policy Performance Criteria

This Policy contains performance criteria for assessing applications and Area Plans at section 4. The performance criteria contain:

- objectives that express the high level aspirations to be achieved; and
- key performance indicators that provide a detailed check list for measuring compliance with this Policy.

The objectives and key performance indicators in this policy will allow the appropriateness of compact urban growth in a locality to be considered.

An application or Area Plan is to demonstrate compliance with the all key performance indicators listed in section 4 of this policy.

Where the key performance indicators cannot be met, the application or Area Plan will instead demonstrate an alternative solution that achieves the objectives of this policy.

Where an application proposes higher density residential land uses and compliance with the key performance indicators in this policy is not achieved, an Area Plan may be required. This Area Plan is to demonstrate the achievement of the objectives of this policy, despite any non-compliance with the key performance indicators.

## 4 Performance Criteria

### 4.1 Accessibility

#### Objective:

To allow for higher density residential proposals that are within a comfortable walking distance of:

- (a) an activity centre where commercial and community facilities are available; and
- (b) a public transport route (applicable in regions where public transport services are available).

#### Key Performance Indicators:

1. Is the proposal within 400 metres walking distance of the following:
  - (a) an activity centre;
  - (b) frequent public transport;
  - (c) public open space; and
  - (d) schools and other education/ community facilities?
2. Do local walking and cycling routes allow for direct, quick and safe access to public transport, commercial and community facilities?

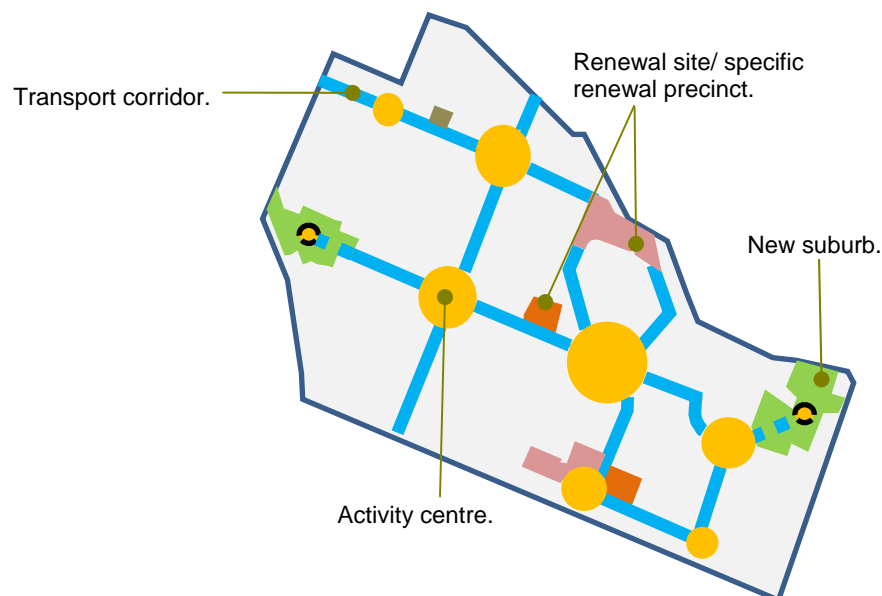


Figure 2 – A network of places where densification can be expected.

## 4.2 Neighbourhood Character

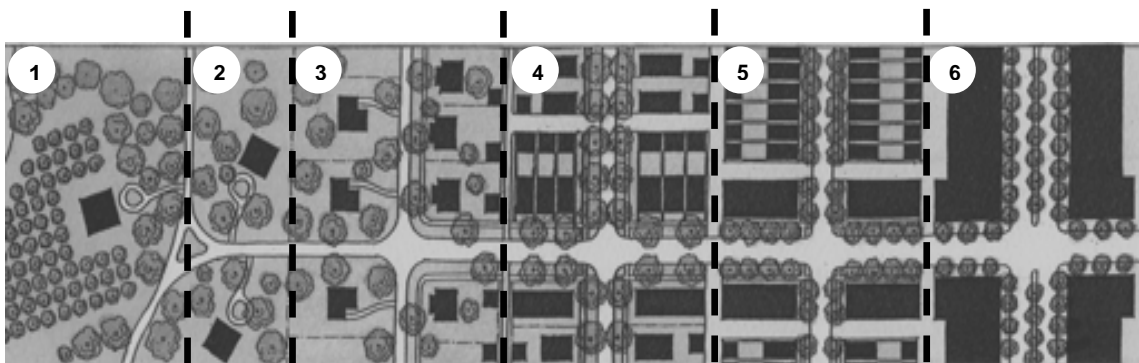
### Objective:

To encourage higher density residential proposals that:

- (a) positively respond to the established neighbourhood character;
- (b) integrate positively with neighbouring lower density localities;
- (c) positively contribute to the values of neighbouring heritage sites; and
- (d) are consistent with the current or future envisaged pattern of urban development within the locality; and

### Key Performance Indicators:

1. Will the proposal positively contribute to the neighbourhood character by:
  - (a) providing development outcomes consistent with the existing building height and building type in the neighbourhood, or a building height and building type envisaged by an Area Plan or Policy within the NT Planning Scheme;
  - (b) improving the neighbourhood aesthetic through landscaped setbacks and/ or active frontages; and
  - (c) ensuring that heritage places are not dominated or diminished in appearance?
2. Is the proposal continuing an existing town planning zoning sequence or is it consistent with a future development vision outlined by an Area Plan or Policy within the NT Planning Scheme?
3. Is the proposal providing a transition in density, height, bulk and massing where lower density localities are adjacent or adjoining?



1. Rural Lifestyle locality, where densities are 0.5 dwellings per hectare or less.
2. Rural Residential locality, where densities are between 1 and 2.5 dwellings per hectare.
3. Lower density locality, where densities are approximately 12 - 15 dwellings per hectare.
4. Low to medium density locality, where densities are approximately 30 dwellings per hectare.
5. Medium density locality, where densities are approximately 60 dwellings per hectare
6. Higher density locality, where densities are in excess of 60 dwellings per hectare.

*Figure 3 – An illustration showing how to structure a compatible transition of density and scale. A compatible transition is usually successful when it follows the sequence outlined above.*



### 4.3 Traffic Management

**Objective:**

To ensure that higher density residential proposals do not cause a detrimental impact on vehicle movement.

**Key Performance Indicators:**

1. Can the existing road network support the proposed density increase (ie. is it likely that the development will result in road intersection failure)?
2. Is the road reservation adjoining the proposal wide enough to cater for on street car parking and vehicle movement? Higher density residential development is not encouraged:
  - (a) in cul-de-sacs; and
  - (b) on road reserves less than 17 metres in width for lower and medium density developments; or
  - (c) on road reserves less than 20 metres in width for high densities.

### 4.4 Service Infrastructure

**Objective:**

To ensure that higher density residential proposals do not cause a detrimental impact on the operation of essential power, water, sewerage and stormwater infrastructure.

**Key Performance Indicators:**

1. Have the relevant service authorities indicated that power, water, sewerage and stormwater infrastructure:
  - (a) currently exists to adequately cater for the increase in density; or
  - (b) will be provided to a level that will support the envisaged change in population?
2. Is reticulated sewerage infrastructure available within the locality? Higher density residential proposals are only encouraged where reticulated sewerage services are available.

## 4.5 Constrained Land

### Objective:

To discourage higher density residential proposals in localities that are affected by noise, public health or public safety constraints.

### Key Performance Indicators:

1. Is the proposal affected by any constraint where higher residential densities are discouraged? For example, higher densities are discouraged on land affected by the following constraints:
  - (a) Australian Noise Exposure Forecast Contours relating to aircraft noise;
  - (b) Primary or Secondary Storm Surge Areas;
  - (c) odour buffers relating to sewerage infrastructure;
  - (d) biting insects in greenfield developments; and
  - (e) riverine flooding in greenfield development.
2. Is the proposal in accordance with the airport building height limitations applied by:
  - (a) Defence (Area Controls) Regulations 1989;
  - (b) Airports (Protection of Airspace) Regulations 1996: Obstacle Limitation Surface; and
  - (c) Airports (Protection of Airspace) Regulations 1996: Procedures for Air Navigation Services – Aircraft Operations?

## 4.6 Social Infrastructure

### Objective:

To ensure that higher density residential proposals respond appropriately to the social infrastructure needs of a locality.

### Key Performance Indicators:

1. Where a proposal involves a land area greater than 1 hectare, is the social infrastructure (ie. park facilities, community centres etc.) of an adequate standard to cater for the estimated increase in population? Or, will further embellishment, planning for or the provision of new facilities be required?
2. Will the redevelopment of a site designated for community purposes result in an unacceptable impact on the provision of social infrastructure in a locality?

## 5 Glossary of Terms

To aid the use of terminology, frequently used terms are defined below.

<b>Activity Centre</b>	A location where a mix of activities occurs, such as shops, banks, offices, restaurants, cafes etc.
<b>Brownfield</b>	Previously used and disused urban sites that have been identified for new land uses and development.
<b>Comfortable Walking Distance</b>	As a rule of thumb, 400 metres or a 5 minute walk is classified as a comfortable walking distance universally. However, a comfortable walking distance varies, and can also be assessed based on: an individual's willingness to walk; the weather conditions; the aesthetics, attractiveness, directness and safety of the walking route; and the facilities at the destination.
<b>Frequent Public Transport</b>	Frequent services, particularly on key trunk routes linking major centres, along with local services reliably operating on exactly the same route, at regular intervals throughout the day.
<b>Greenfield</b>	The creation of new planned suburbs and communities on previously undeveloped land.
<b>Higher Density Residential</b>	Usually taller than two storeys in height and a neighbourhood density greater than 20 dwellings per hectare (or one dwelling per 300m <sup>2</sup> of site area or less).
<b>Neighbourhood Character</b>	The combined characteristics of built form, vegetation and topographic characteristics, in both the private and public domains, that make one place different from another.
<b>Public Open Space</b>	Areas of land reserved for the provision of green space and/ or natural environments and intended for use for recreation purposes (active or passive) by the general public.
<b>Public Transport Node</b>	A major stop on a public transport route in an activity centre.
<b>Renewal Site</b>	Usually a small site that is accessed from an existing road and only requires internal circulation driveways to support internal movement.
<b>Service Infrastructure</b>	Includes roads, sewer, water mains, power networks, stormwater or any other essential infrastructure that is required to support the basic living standards of a neighbourhood.

<b>Site Responsive</b>	A design response that ensures a new development responds to the characteristics of the site, and that the site can accommodate the proposed form of development to a standard that does not frustrate the achievement of other objectives.
<b>Social Infrastructure</b>	Infrastructure that supports the social service requirements of a population, and includes infrastructure such as schools, community centres, public open spaces, organised recreation facilities, community health services and child care centres.
<b>Specific Renewal Precinct</b>	Usually a large redevelopment site that requires its own local road network.
<b>Sub-Region</b>	A defined locality that forms part of a broader region.
<b>Transport Corridor</b>	A road or reservation containing high frequency public transport.
<b>Town Planning Zoning Sequence</b>	The uninterrupted continuation of a town planning zone from one site to adjoining sites.