The purpose of this brochure is to invite Canberra residents, particularly those in the older inner areas, to take part in a study of urban change over the next ten years. The brochure has been prepared by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), which is responsible for the planning and development of Canberra and by the Department of the Capital Territory (DCT), the city's leasing and administrative authority.

The Commission and the Department started investigating the need for change in the older areas of Canberra in January 1974. As a first step the two organisations set up a study group, which has undertaken an exploratory survey of needs and objectives based on discussions with a number of community and business organisations.

The Commission and the Department now want to involve members of the community in considering broad policies to guide urban change in Canberra.

To do this they need to know what the people think about urban change and what they want to happen in their own areas.

At this stage the areas involved in possible urban change are confined to north and south inner Canberra, with the exception of some areas developed since 1960.
What is urban change?

At some time or another urban change can involve everyone — it is a process which is going on all the time in most cities and towns. It can be as simple as adding a second storey to the house, or a flat at the back for a relative, but it can also mean the clearing of a whole block of houses for a large development of flats and town houses. It may involve change such as converting a house into an art gallery or a restaurant.

Change does not necessarily mean wholesale destruction but it does mean a change of some sort to the character of the area.

Change happens because people’s needs change: they grow older, children grow up and move away, large gardens and houses become difficult and expensive to maintain and the inner roads carry increased volumes of traffic from outer areas, disturbing existing residents.

In Canberra, probably the basic need is to reconsider the existing policies so that people can have a wider choice of life style.

It should be emphasised, however, that although there are reasons for introducing more flexible planning and administrative policies, there is no need — or intention — to introduce large scale changes in inner Canberra within the next ten years.
Why urban change in Canberra?

The present arrangements do not encourage residents to make a wide range of changes to their dwellings as their life style changes. Apart from this there are a number of reasons why the development of new and more flexible policies could be desirable so that change may proceed gradually. It could:

- Provide more medium density housing near Centre rather than in the new towns.
- The inner areas have a larger proportion of single person households than the newer areas. While many people in this group – the widowed, divorced, separated or unmarried – might prefer smaller houses but they may be reluctant to move to new areas.
- To some, the high proportion of single and two member households in the inner areas may seem an uneconomic use of existing housing which could be available for families or groups if there were the opportunities for existing residents to obtain smaller accommodation in the same area.
- Provide an alternative to increasingly expensive detached housing in the outer suburbs.
- Give a more clearly defined urban core – downtown area - which Canberra at present lacks. This could include increased retail, entertainment and tourist facilities, possibly some light industry, and associated medium and high-density housing similar to that being provided near town centres in Canberra's new towns.

Suggested guidelines for urban change.

Initial discussions with groups and organisations have enabled the NCDC and the OCT to list a number of important points which people think must be considered and given priority in future planning. They will also reassure people who may be disturbed at the prospect of urban change. Some of these points are:

- The rights of existing residents are most important: they should not be compelled to move away from their neighbourhood and friends. Those who do leave should be assisted to relocate and should receive at least market value for their leases.
- Those who need to live in the inner areas, but who may not be able to compete in the market for housing, should not be penalised and forced to move to outer areas where transport costs for instance are higher. This probably means the preservation of low cost public housing, or possibly the provision of new low cost housing.
- A character of an area should be protected. Change will usually result in some alteration of an area’s character, for instance some loss of private garden space. Similarly the type of housing – high rise developments, flats, town houses, etc. – will also affect privacy. These and other issues should be determined in consultation with residents.
- The garden landscape character of inner Canberra should be preserved as one of its most significant characteristics. It should not be destroyed by wholesale clearance of areas although it is inevitable that some vegetation will be removed.
- Canberra has few sites and areas of historic importance but what there should be preserved as they are typical of certain phases of Canberra’s development. It is also essential that premature demolition is not encouraged as this could temporarily worsen the accommodation situation.
- Residential areas might be improved by a greater variety of activities. At present occupational activities in these areas are only allowed conditionally provided the lessee lives on the site. There has been some pressure for non-residential activities to locate in residential areas because there is little low rent space in the commercial centres.
- Urban change is unlikely to occur unless there is some incentive for residents. But, opportunities for speculative gain should be limited.
- In other cities, all ratepayers have borne the costs of reconstruction of existing water and sewerage pipes. Those who directly benefit should pay these costs.