

A place to call home

Home ownership has traditionally been part of the Kiwi dream, but it's fast becoming out of reach for many. For the first time in a generation we are in the midst of a major housing crisis, with BRANZ estimating a current national housing shortfall of around 80,000 housing units. So finding housing solutions has become an urgent priority for local and central government.



Craig Walton

There are a wide range of housing needs in any community, and many ways to meet them. One of the ways this is working in our community is through Hutt City Council's Council Controlled Organisation, Urban Plus Limited (UPL).

With two key functions - bringing new houses to market and providing low cost rental accommodation for the elderly - UPL operates as an independent company with a social mandate. Any profits from the sale of UPL's property development activities are pumped into low cost rental accommodation with 150 rental dwellings across Lower Hutt. This positive cycle of reinvestment into public housing means UPL is not only contributing to meeting demand for new houses for purchase, it is meeting demand for rental property for elderly people with high needs and low income with developments, like 126 Jackson Street, Petone due to be built this year.

PUBLIC HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY



Urban Plus is embarking on a new type of housing initiative which will see 52 rental apartments built in Petone's Jackson Street [image above].

UPL Chief Executive Craig Walton says the project at 126 Jackson Street will enable elderly residents to enjoy apartment-style living in a central location, with a ground floor of commercial premises adding to the already vibrant and unique Jackson Street precinct.

With a fully committed building programme for the next four years UPL has applied for a record number of building consents since July last year. These developments will result in almost 170 new dwellings for purchase or rent in Lower Hutt making a big contribution to Hutt City Council's housing targets in the Urban Growth Strategy.

Mayor Ray Wallace says developments like the ones led by Urban Plus are contributing to a current building boom in Lower Hutt, which is expecting to see an additional 1535 new dwellings built in the next two-three years. "It is an exciting time for new housing developments in Lower Hutt and great to see our city growing with more people wanting to live in our fantastic city."

Fairfield Waters is one such development. It comprises a medium-density development of 20 two-storey townhouses, single-storey homes and two-storey terraced housing. One third of the homes were released to market below \$400k, making home ownership a possibility to buyers who had previously been shut out of buying a property.

FAIRFIELD WATERS - MEDIUM DENSITY HOUSING THAT WORKS



Urban Plus Chief Executive Craig Walton says Fairfield Waters is a pioneer of medium-density residential development for Lower Hutt and attracted healthy buyer interest.

"People's taste in housing is evolving. Fairfield Waters is an example of how high-quality, architecturally designed housing can be built on a relatively modest area of land and still offer a very high quality of life for residents."

The next project in the pipeline, Central Park on Copeland in central Hutt, is a 34 dwelling development comprising two and three-bedroom townhouses. Over half of the houses are under contract, mostly with first home buyers. Five of the 10 houses earmarked as affordable have already sold after being on the market for only a fortnight. "Ten houses at Central Park on Copeland have a set price of \$550k allowing more people to enter the property market and grow their asset from there," says UPL's Senior Development Manager Dan Moriarty.



The Lane in Waterloo Lower Hutt, a subdivision featuring 27 modern townhouses, is attracting strong buyer enquiries. UPL released some of these at a discounted price to enable first home buyers a chance to get on the property ladder.

"The current level of demand for our properties demonstrates there is a market for architecturally designed, low maintenance properties that are relatively affordable with modest sections compared to the traditional New Zealand family home. At between 80m² and 90m² first home buyers are telling us developments like Central Park on Copeland are the ideal property size for their modern lifestyles. With parks and reserves adjacent to each development there is still plenty of green

space for families to enjoy the outdoors but not have any of the upkeep."

The priorities for UPL are housing design which makes the best use of available land and locating developments close to amenities and public transport networks.

UPL's Chief Executive Craig Walton says, "Higher density housing clearly allows cost savings in land, infrastructure and energy. Preserving green spaces in urban environments combined with higher density housing can also have a positive impact on communities. Well-designed housing developments have many social benefits including lower crime, greater safety and, through greater social connectedness, we see more vitality in our urban environments with people clustered together lessening the burden on transport networks and reducing emissions.

"In 2019 an urban location is seen as the preferred lifestyle choice for the majority of people. The key for Urban Plus is to be responsive to market preferences and bring more affordable properties to market through our new housing developments providing more choice for consumers."



UPL development Parkview at Avalon sold out earlier this year with 24 dwellings in the development, with one home already completed and seven now under construction.

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