

AFFORDABLE CITY LIVING FOR IWI BUILT IN CONCRETE

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A SOCIAL-DRIVEN GOAL OF PROVIDING AFFORDABLE CITY HOUSING FOR LOW-INCOME IWI HAS BEEN REALISED WITH THE RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF THE TE ARO PA PAPAKAINGA APARTMENT COMPLEX ON EVANS BAY PARADE IN WELLINGTON.



Entailing ten three-bedroom and four one-bedroom precast concrete units, the \$3.7 million project provides prioritised tenancy for those with lineage to Te Aro Pa iwi, who were forced from their land at the bottom of Wellington's Taranaki Street about 140 years ago.

Te Tumu Paeroa business relationship consultant Richard Wickens, whose organisation managed the project on behalf of the Te Aro Pa Trust, says the development is fostering a community of "various age groups, income levels and family structures".

"The market we have positioned ourselves in is not a high-end market and it involves building on Maori land," says Richard.

"The fact that we did not have to obtain a return on grant funding from the Maori Housing Network (Te Puni Kokiri) -- other than to provide accommodation to those in less-fortunate circumstances -- meant that there were significant cost savings. If we did not have such funding, this project could not have proceeded."

Elaborating on the point, Richard observes that without the Te Puni Kokiri grant, the Maori owners of the land would not have been able to secure a necessary bank loan and would therefore have been facing a significantly different outcome.

"Once all debt is repaid, the land owners will own both the improvements and the land. If they had entered into a joint venture with a developer, with nothing to contribute other than the land, they would have been only lessors and might never have owned the improvements or been able to accommodate their own people. This is a source of much pride for the approximately 1100 land owners."

Richard says a financial imperative has been to ensure the development can meet current repayments on the loan, which was obtained at commercial interest rates, with a sensitivity analysis also completed to ensure future interest rate rises can be accommodated.

"Rentals are currently \$310 and \$580 for a single and three-bed unit respectively. Many tenants are in receipt of Income Rent Related Subsidies (IRRS) from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and maximum rentals are governed by the MSD's limits for the area and quality of housing offered.

"We will adjust our rental rates at appropriate intervals to keep them aligned with market increases and MSD limits on rents based on location and rental offerings. At the end of the day, we also need to ensure that we are able to meet loan repayments, outgoings on the buildings, and provide scope for upgrading at some future date."

Richard acknowledges that the financial model used to develop and manage the Te Aro Pa Papakainga apartment complex makes



it relatively unique. However, to facilitate social-driven housing initiatives requires a different approach, one that sits outside of the commercial sector "norm" of profit maximisation.

The development was designed by Walker Architecture & Design, which Richard praises for "maximum use of the site" and delivering "two imposing and modern concrete structures, that are unique but not out of place in the neighbourhood."

Two of the three-bedroom units have been positioned above the single-bedroom units in each block, so as to break up what would otherwise have been straight level rooflines, and the design also heavily features the use of precast concrete.

Homestead Construction general manager Daniel Lawry, whose firm manufactures that material, says this decision advanced the speed of construction over alternative methods -- particularly through "not being held up by weather as much as with wet timber drying out."

"Fire rating, sound and strength are other main benefits," he says.

"On top of this, long term there are savings on maintenance and upkeep."

Daniel says all speed-of-construction and longevity advantages were further appreciated given the challenging site environment.

"The site wasn't easy, as there was limited room, and being on a busy street required a lot of behind-the-scenes co-ordination. With the cliff behind, rockfall protection for the units needed to be considered and a 200mm thick precast wall was constructed."

"Being in a marine environment, concrete is the answer because of its durability."





Walker Architecture & Design head Roger Walker adds that precast concrete was selected due to the main factors of “robustness, durability, build time, projected appearance of solidity, sound attenuation between units and between floors, and cost effectiveness”. He adds that the rear retaining wall was completed with metal finishes of marine exposure compliance.

Furthermore, Richard notes the predominant use of precast concrete delivered a significant financial advantage.

“The interval between the commencement of construction and tenanting was shortened and therefore the period when interest could not be offset against rental income was correspondingly shortened. This helped to hold down total construction costs.”

“In fact, the erection of the precast concrete slabs took around two weeks. During construction, the weather was kind to us -- high winds do present a problem when wrangling large, concrete slabs into position by crane.”

“However, only six days were lost through bad weather. Using a fixed-price, fixed-term construction contract also helped this project stay on track.”

The finished design also features triangular motifs, intended to represent Mount Taranaki and its ranges.

“It symbolises the connection of the land owners to their iwi back in Taranaki,” says Richard.

“The two pou in the central garden area symbolise the concept of whanaunga or community which is one of the objectives of this development.”

In regards to occupants’ feelings on the use of precast concrete in the build, Roger Walker says feedback has been “very good”, with Daniel Lawry noting the material has proved “very durable and gives the feeling of security and a sense of strength.”

Adds Richard Wickens: “The owners I have spoken to are appreciative of the opportunity to live in a brand new home unit. There have also been some who are openly delighted to be able to connect through the apartments to their iwi.”

Having commenced in October 2015, the development was officially opened on March 19, 2016.

