

A new way to live in Hamilton East

DEVELOPMENT
Charlotte Graham

Hamilton East’s first co-housing development is set to kick off next month, with the developers hoping the project will spark a change in housing practices.

Co-founders of Living Systems Development, Rick Fourie and Ben Preston, are on a mission to rethink how developers approach housing, by putting wellbeing, community and sustainability at the forefront.

“Peachgrove East is about rethinking what ‘home’ can be. My business partner and I want to bring a distinctive housing model to Hamilton that’s practical, reasonably priced, future-focused, and grounded in what it means to live in community with your neighbours,” Fourie said.

Preston said he believed the project, at 174 Peachgrove Rd, would highlight that things could be done differently.

“Peachgrove will really give people a tangible example that the standard of housing and the standard of community development that we see around is not an inevitable outcome, and it can be different.

“The changes that we want to see are not ones we can facilitate on our own. They require policy change, the private sector, developers and builders to come together to make different decisions and value different things.

“We all have economic realities that we are facing in how we build and develop, but how do we do that with an end in mind that gets a better outcome for communities and New Zealand? ... We’re hoping this development will be a step in that direction.”

In total, the development comprises 48



Hamilton East’s first co-housing development is set to break ground in May.

two- to four-bedroom homes, including apartments, townhouses, and three-storey multi-generational homes.

The developers plan to introduce rent-to-buy schemes. Prices will range from around \$530,000 for apartments to between \$725,000 and about \$1 million for townhouses and multi-generation homes.

They hope to break ground in May. The first 16 homes are expected to be delivered in February 2027, and the final houses by the end of 2027. Already, half of the stage one homes have sold. While construction costs are rising, they developers are prepared and do not anticipate any delays.

The design combines private homes with shared amenities, including a community house, lounge and dining space, laundry, children’s play area, edible gardens, workshop spaces, an orchard, and a wellness space with a sauna.

Residents can use the communal spaces as desired, but also have their own private ones in their homes. The developers hope that the shared spaces like the workshops or gardens will become places of mentorship between older and young residents.

“A lot of thought has gone into thinking



Living Systems Development co-founders Ben Preston, left, and Rick Fourie.

about how to provide a balance of psychological safety and space for interaction.

“What a lot of communities get wrong is they have either lots of space for social interaction, where it’s unpredictable whether you are going to bump into a neighbour or not, versus having a gated community, where you have no social interaction.”

Preston had been digging into 2009 Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom’s research into community spaces to consider the best ways to structure Living Systems’ own community.

“Maybe people will go to a shared meal once a month, while others will be retired and be in the garden every day, so people get to choose the degree of their involvement and interaction.”

The developers also consulted with the future residents throughout the design process. The team from designers to plumbers has been working together from the start of the project, so they all have input into how to maximise the design.

Community-owned EV’s would also be shared among residents, to reduce the number of cars families need.

Solar power and battery storage will power a significant portion of the houses. The developers also have a goal to build the most energy-efficient homes in the country, and are using Passive Home guidelines, which are approximately 80 to 90% more efficient than a standard home.

This is the first project the Living Systems Development co-founders have undertaken together, but it isn’t their first rodeo. Preston is originally from Northern Ireland, and said he grew up with a “strong sense” of the effects of social division, and how that was exacerbated by monoculture “cookie-cutter” housing estates. This drove him to study environmental engineering at Edinburgh, and to later become a consultant for sustainable housing projects in Australia before coming here.

“I’ve always been interested in understanding sites as a necessary organ within the broader body of a place, and understanding how we support the growth and development of that thing.”

Meanwhile, Fourie, originally from South Africa, studied biochemical engineering at Waikato University before forming Creators Educational Trust in his early 20s. It built an early childhood centre in Hamilton.

The focus was on creating energy-efficient buildings and creating community-led education. He later started Conscious Collective to focus on understanding how environments affect education, and continued to build early childhood facilities.

The pair met about five years ago, when they worked on an eco village in Raglan and realised they had the same philosophy.

They are hosting an open day on April 26 for the community.

Find it,
love it,
own it.

Don’t miss Homed for the latest local listings.