

Urban Ridge Case Study



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1 Background

1.1 Development summary

This paper summarises the results of resident and stakeholder interviews conducted in relation to Urban Ridge. Urban Ridge Stage One is a medium density development in Tauranga.

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Information</i>
Developer	Thorne Group
Address of development	Stage One - Jude Way off Miller Rd, Brookfield, Tauranga
Management	No Body Corp.
Location type	Greenfields development. Fully detached homes on freehold sections. Shared ownership of private access road.
Demographics of residents	Residents are mainly singles and couples, with a small number of families. Ages of adults in the development are mid 20s to late 80s. The ages of children in the development are very young (babies and toddlers) and teenagers (14+). There are no children in the 6 to 13 age bracket. There is a mixture of working people and retired people in the development. The average age of residents is estimated as 50+. All owners have previously owned their own homes.
Tenure mix	All homes in Urban Ridge Stage 1 are owner occupied.
Number of units	25
Parking ratio	All homes have garaging for one or two cars. There is some room on forecourts for additional parking. No parking is permitted on the private road. Visitor parking is available near the entrance to the development.
Mix of unit sizes (number of bedrooms and or floor space areas)	2 or 3 bedrooms (120m ² to 165m ²); 30% of homes are 2 bedroom.
Price range	\$300 to \$400k
Site area/density	Sections range in size from 230m to 440m (average of 325m); 15 dwellings per hectare.
Stage of completion	One section still available.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Residents

Interviews were conducted face to face with residents in their homes. Respondents were recruited by means of a letter delivered to the homes with the offer of a \$100 incentive to take part. Individuals then called to make an appointment and the researcher visited them in their homes. The Developer had approached some residents and asked them to take part in the research. Respondents included people who had been approached by the Developer as well as people who had only been approached by the researcher.

Interviews typically lasted for one hour and were recorded and transcribed for later analysis. Details of the sample composition are outlined below.

Eight interviews were conducted with residents of Urban Ridge Stage One. Two interviews were conducted with renters in Thornton Villas (sited on Millers Rd). The two interviews with the tenants in Thornton Villas were included to gain a perspective from those renting. These two interviews will be discussed at the end of the Urban Ridge case study.

Gender: three couple interviews, and 5 interviews with females

Age: ages ranges from 30s to late 80s; predominantly 50+

Household composition: five couples, two single people and one family (young children)

Working status: working (including working from home), home based, retired.

A number of factors had prompted the owners of Urban Ridge to look for a new home. These included:

- Having recently moved to Tauranga;
- Down-sizing either to reduce maintenance and gardening, or to free up capital;
- Wanting a change or to live somewhere new. Some people spoke of moving frequently as they like the process of creating a new home or just a change of scenery.

“We like houses, we like developing them, colours and landscaping. We like all that, we like doing that and we get to the stage where we just feel we want to move on again and do it again. That’s why we’re here.”

1.2.2 Stakeholders

Stakeholders included the developer, former chair of the residents’ association and local authority planners.

2 Inside Urban Ridge

This section summarises the characteristics of the development divided between what works well and the concerns, as expressed by residents in the Urban Ridge development.

2.1 What works well?

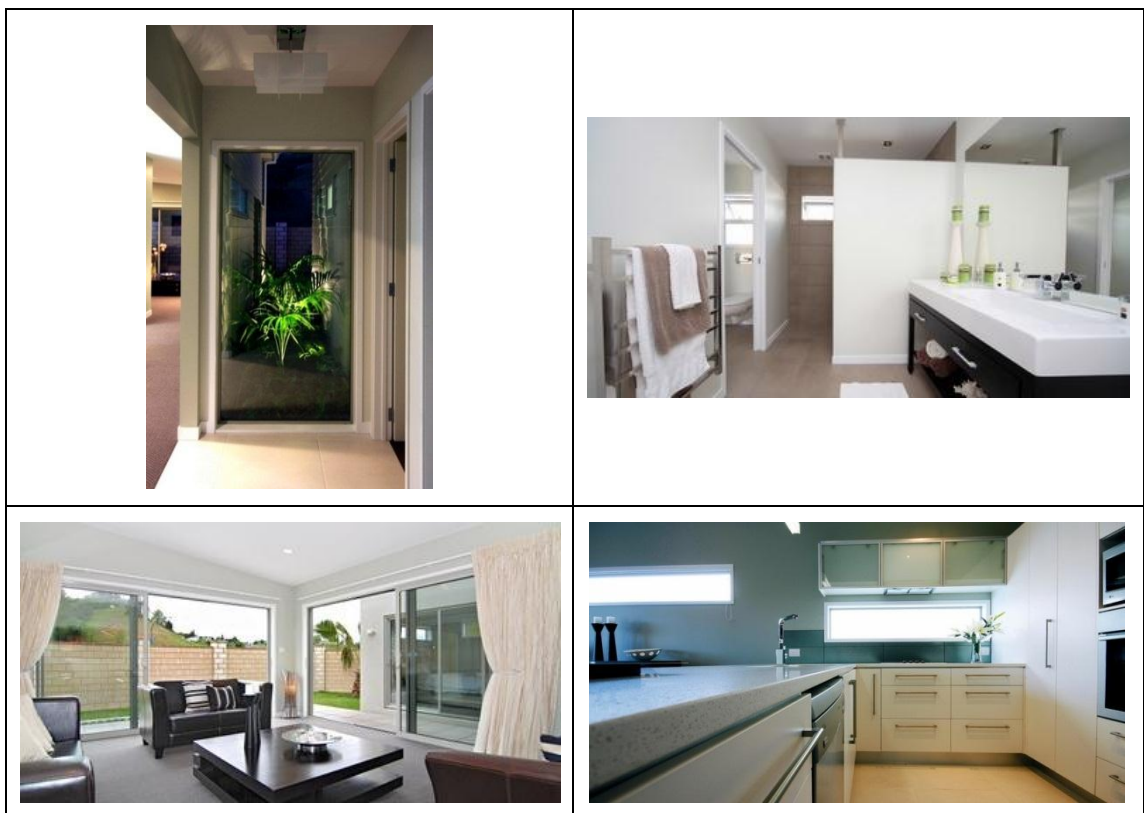
This section highlights what works well from the residents' point of view. Bullet point summaries of the comments are provided and illustrated with photographs where possible.

2.1.1 Internal Features

- Warm homes situated for the sun with indoor outdoor flow. One of the big advantages of modern homes is that they offer a warmer living environment than older homes. Urban Ridge has double-glazing and wool insulation; a number of residents mentioned that they were surprised and delighted at how warm the houses were even in winter.
- Stylish and visually appealing homes. Residents talked about a 'wow' factor they experienced when walking into the Open Home. Internal features such as the atrium, light open living areas, and stylish kitchens, were very much features that converted some prospective buyers.

"It's got the atrium that's really what we liked, having that atrium. It just changed it. So you've got your living on one side and you've got your bedrooms and that all on the other side, and it's just lovely."

"And from the moment we went in we found the 'wow' factor. Everything in it that we wanted, a kitchen just like this, the lounge just like that, and plenty of windows; gosh; a double garage."



An interior design service providing help choosing interior colours and fixtures was provided by Thorne Group. This was a service valued by residents, as the taste of the designer was acknowledged to be very good.

"I found her [interior design consultant] really tremendous, she was such a good help, she really was. She had the expertise."

- New builds. Moving into a pristine home that has never been lived in, is also an attractive option to many people.

New builds also offer the opportunity to design the home exactly how it is wanted; there is no need to compromise on layout, size, colours etc or live with someone else's choices. Some found it difficult to find what they wanted in established houses.

"I'm so fussy, I went into a house; nothing would suit me that everyone else has done."

- Good quality fixtures and fittings. Higher spec fixtures e.g. granite worktop in the kitchen, Bosch appliances, wool insulation, tiles etc. Fixtures in Urban Ridge homes are perceived to start at medium to high quality; most other developers offer low quality fixtures as standard, with additional cost required to raise the standard. This aspect of the Urban Ridge strongly under-pinned the quality positioning.
- The homes offer indoor-outdoor flow with patios positioned in the sun and sliding doors.



- House size. Many of the residents have either retired or are nearing retirement and have no children living at home. They no longer need a large 4 bedroom house and are looking for a smaller space in which to live. This frees up capital, provides a 'cosy' feel, and reduces the amount of housework required.

"To us, this was an apartment; it was never ever going to be a house."

"I live by myself so I didn't need four bedrooms and two bathrooms and five cats and all that."

2.1.2 External features

- Small sections. For many residents the small sections are a very big draw card. These residents were looking to escape lawn mowing and garden maintenance. In some cases they did not want any lawn; in some cases they wanted to avoid gardens (but were ok with lawn); and in some cases they wanted neither lawn nor garden. These residents feel that life is busy enough and do not want the hassle of a garden which needs to be looked after, or they feel that they are 'not gardeners' and would rather be doing other things.

"So this was a small section but we still wanted the normal sized house."

"No lawns, that was one of our big things, we just didn't want any lawns."

"So we started going into brand new homes with land agents. We found a lot of things wrong with them as well; the sections were too big, miles too big, and retired people don't want a lot of work."

While these residents do not want garden maintenance, they still want an area to sit outside with indoor-outdoor flow.

Other residents do want a small garden area. These residents often opted for slightly bigger sections (e.g. 375m²+). These residents have space for a patio plus lawn, garden, veggie garden, etc. However, they do not want a large garden. The photographs below show the amount of living space available depending of section size and configuration.



- Low maintenance homes. The homes in Urban Ridge are linea weatherboards and plaster over brick. This low maintenance construction is core to the requirements of many. Residents do not expect to have to spend any significant money on maintenance on their homes in the foreseeable future.
- Stylish and visually appealing homes. Many residents had considered other developments prior to buying at Urban Ridge. One of the advantages of Urban Ridge is that the homes are not traditional brick and tile buildings. Traditional brick and tile homes were described by one resident as 'boring boxes.' The homes at Urban Ridge are built of modern stylish materials with mono pitched roofs. This made the homes far more attractive to many purchasers who were looking for a contemporary home.



- Quiet. The private cul-de-sac means people are not using the road as a thorough-fare. This ensures that there is minimum road noise. It also ensures that users of the road drive slowly.
- Privacy. Despite living very close to one another, residents are relatively happy with the level of privacy achieved in the development. Outdoor areas are generally situated on the sunny side of the houses meaning they tend not to be next to each other. Fencing provides the privacy wanted. Noise was not identified as an issue. The double-glazing means residents do not hear others while inside their homes. Outside, people feel comfortable enjoying their outdoor areas and do not feel the encroachment of others.

“They’re all built so that you don’t overlook each other. Next door, their outdoor area looks onto our spare bedroom, we don’t see them.”

“It’s probably better than what we thought because we were a bit ... not concerned, but because of the closeness we hadn’t had any this close to us and we hadn’t overlooked anybody. You never hear anybody, they’re so well insulated and it’s double glazed, and even when the windows are open you can’t really hear.”

- Safe and secure environment. Many residents, especially women, identified safety as a key requirement for their new home. This something Urban Ridge is delivering particularly well.

There are a number of factors thought to contribute to this:

- The private cul-de-sac means strangers are not using the road as a thorough-fare. It also means that strangers could be asked to leave if residents so wished. The following photo shows the entrance way to Jude Way, the private access road.



- Being close to ones neighbours means it would be easy to call for help if you needed to;

“I feel so secure, and having the houses so near and knowing all the people.”

- Most homes have visibility from inside the house out on to the street;
- Everyone in the street knows everyone else and would notice if they didn't see a particular neighbour, or saw something suspicious;
- There is a Community Watch scheme;
- People trust the other residents in the street; one resident commented, *"there is no one in this street who I would not be willing to lend my car too, if they needed it."*

Some residents provided additional security for themselves by fencing access to their front doors and/or gardens.

There had been some discussion as to whether Urban Ridge should be a gated community. Some residents felt this was a bit too much like a retirement village for their tastes and did not want to have to pay for its maintenance. Other residents felt the additional security would have been good.

- Freehold sections. This is a core ingredient in the appeal of Urban Ridge to the existing residents. Most of the residents spoken to indicated they would not have considered Urban Ridge if the sections had not been freehold. Freehold sections provide a clear ownership which greatly appeals to people; residents are able to do what they want (within reason) with their own property. Another advantage is that there are no Body Corp fees.
- Good value. The Urban Ridge development was widely acknowledged as providing very good value for money. The same money spent elsewhere in Tauranga would have purchased either a good house in a not so good area or an older, more traditional home (i.e. not such a good house).

"We were watching the market and we decided it had reached the point where the market was just about down to the bottom and it was time we bought something. We liked the look of what we saw here as value for money ... It was very good value at the time, there was no doubt about it. You couldn't get anything under 400 in Tauranga that you would want to live in, that we would want to live in and this came in just under 400 and we said, look, we really can't go wrong with that."

The factors contributing to the assessment of value include:

- Higher spec fixtures.
- Good quality materials e.g. linea weatherboards.
- Good workmanship. Residents in trades related to building industry, and those who had built previously, believe the methods of construction they observed show good workmanship and methods. Other residents referred to the Masterbuilder guarantee as an indication of quality, while others indicated that nothing of any significance had gone wrong with the property. Another feature of the quality perception was that when minor issues were raised with the developer, these were addressed very quickly.
- A good street. The tidy environment and obvious care people take in presenting and maintaining their properties has added to the appeal of the development. People want to live in a safe, tidy environment and judge the quality of a 'neighbourhood' on the appearance of the existing properties and knowledge of what other people are living in the area. Urban Ridge appealed to prospective buyers as a good neighbourhood which would be quiet, tidy, and safe.
- The Developer. The developer approach has been a major part of the success of Urban Ridge. The developer is perceived by residents as offering quality builds, delivered on time, with speedy resolution of issues (which seem to only have been minor). Residents feel that the developer has 'been straight'

with them, in that the things have happened as the developer has described (e.g. Stage Two). Bob Thorne is described as personable, focused on keeping residents happy, willing to accommodate special requests, visible (e.g. “Bob gets out and waters the palm tree”), considerate (e.g. instructs builders to wash away dirt on roads from trucks, and to spray water to keep dust down during building process). He has sought opinion from residents of Stage One on how to improve Stage Two, and invited people to his home for a Christmas party.

“They [Thorne Group] are exceptional. They’re very, very good indeed. Even after you’ve been here a while, if you have something, they will come and sort it out and I’m not just talking about the house and the fact that you might want a washer on a tap or something, I’m talking about if you had something that was really not right around the property after you’d been here 12 months, they’d still come and see if they could fix for you.”

Consequently, three of the households interviewed had or will buy with Thorne Group (collectively) seven times.

- Street design. The interior designer also had role in helping residents design their external schemes. This role also involved moderating requests that could have reduced visual appeal of the overall development. The interior designer achieves this by suggesting slight alternations where necessary to ensure a fit with the overall development. This role is valued by a number of residents. Some residents noted the slight resistance to particular colour schemes requests, but feel they were listened to and their schemes included in the end.
- Good resale. Given the quality of the properties and community at Urban Ridge, good re-sale values are anticipated.

2.1.3 Community

The community at Urban Ridge is described by its residents as very friendly. Mutual respect for other people and a common desire to maintain the appearance of their property is apparent.

Differing needs for community were evident:

- Some residents spoke of valuing their privacy; they do not pop into each other houses every day, preferring to keep themselves to themselves.
- Other residents enjoy close ties and socialise regularly with their neighbours.

“Most people are quite friendly, there’s some that keep to themselves that are quite reserved, but on the whole most of them are pretty good.”

“It’s pretty quiet, it really is. Everyone sort of keeps very much to themselves really, but then most people here are quite friendly so you can stop and have a chat. There are a few of us that would see quite a bit of each other, we meet for a coffee or have a catch up. I’ve really got really nice neighbours, so we see quite a lot of each other.”

Nonetheless, everyone appreciates a friendly chat on their way to the letterbox and the feeling that they can depend on their neighbours in a crisis or have their neighbours keep an eye on their property while they are away. Urban Ridge is clearly delivering this. This sense of community is felt to be different from other streets/places where people have lived. People find it difficult to put their finger on exactly how this spirit has developed; following are some possible contributors:

- (Nearly) everyone living in Urban Ridge had been through the design and build process. There is a great deal of interest in what other people are building and the ideas that are being incorporated to different homes. This is very conducive to the development of good neighbourly relationships.
- The development has attracted the 'right' sort of people. Opinion on why this has developed are varied:
 - The price point required to buy in Urban Ridge is \$300k+.
 - It does not appeal to people who want more privacy or know that they will potentially bother the neighbours (e.g. people with teenagers who want to skateboard up and down the street, or people who want to throw noisy parties etc).

"I think it would put some people off to live here, the sort of people we don't want to live here. I think because everybody keeps their gardens nice and the place is always neat and tidy, everybody is landscaped and done as much as they can and they keep it nice ... so I think the place itself regulates 'cos of how it looks."

- There is a vague feeling that maybe the developer subtly (somehow) guides those not suitable away from the development.
- The size of the sections limits the appeal to families with active kids and large households. People who don't want large sections are often retired or approaching retirement or are couples working full time.
- In the first year of the development a Residents' Association was formed. While this Association has now been disbanded, the meetings held by the Residents Association did provide additional opportunity for people to get together and get to know one another.
- Community Watch. The police provide information on crimes committed in the area so that residents can take precautions. Neighbours keep an eye on each other.
- The access road is owned by those living in the community. This shared ownership results in a common bond and commitment to maintaining the pleasant environment.
- The scale of the development is small and therefore conducive to community.
- An informal coffee group amongst some of the residents who are home during the day has formed. This group gets together approximately monthly.
- Residents are willing to deal with issues and provide support to others in doing this. An example was a party held by a teenager which spilled over onto the street in the early hours of the morning. This was addressed by a group of residents approaching party-goers and then the family and challenging them about this behaviour.

The above example demonstrated the clear expectation that people follow the rules (e.g. not parking on the road), keep noise to a minimum (especially at night) and generally respect the needs of those around them. Some residents are willing to, with the support of others, deal directly with issues that arise.

"They had a problem with teenagers for a little while, but we sorted all that. We all got together and just went and told mum, "no parties." ... And there have been no more parties."

Communicating about bad behaviour is also viewed as a community responsibility by some.

"We went and talked to the children; I said, "hey, kids, do you realise the different ways you can have fun?" ... When you're in a normal street ... people close their blinds and just hide from it. it's a matter of looking after each other."

2.2 What doesn't work so well?

This section summarises the concerns expressed by some residents.

2.2.1 Internal features

- Smaller homes. Some residents purchased the properties without fully realising the impact that the smaller size would have on their enjoyment of their homes.

Despite of having lived in apartments in Australia and being used to living in small homes, the experience of living in a small two bedroom home at Urban Ridge left one couple slightly disappointed. The reason for this was that an apartment in Australia compensates for the small inside space by providing extensive amenities (pools, gyms) and local restaurants. The weather in the Gold Coast is also more conducive to apartment living as the weather allows you to get out more. As a result, this couple have taken the decision to move to a larger home in Urban Ridge Stage 2 with extra indoor and outdoor space.

This example demonstrates the importance of living near town centres and social hubs for some people.

2.2.2 External features

- Smaller sections. The section sizes are not seen as being suitable for everyone. Families may outgrow the sections as growing children require larger backyards in which to play. As a result of this, families with young children may find themselves moving to a property with a larger section as they move from being babies to toddlers.
- Development of vacant sites. Some owners who bought and built on vacant sites were taken back by the positioning of homes subsequently built on adjoining sites. This can result in owners losing more sunlight than expected when adjoining homes are built closer to the boundary than expected.

"[We want a] bigger garden area as opposed to this one, a bigger gap between the two houses."

- Limited turning space on the access road. Some feel that the access road is a bit too narrow; delivery trucks and rubbish trucks must either back down the access road, or turn into driveways (sometimes driving over front lawns) when turning at the end of the street. If cars park on the access road, then this can create access problems for other residents.

"We've got one big problem; ... the roads are too small, too narrow."

- The homes in Stage One all have a similar look. The houses themselves are all actually different, but a similarity is created through the use of the same materials and consistent use of mono pitched roofs.

"This here is totally different from any of the two bedrooms because we've put such a lot of input into it; we try to have a big point of difference. Even though it looks the same on the outside, when you walk in there's a difference. ... I suggested to him [Bob] that he changes the roof lines, he changes the styles, otherwise it's going to make it very difficult to sell them."

People not only want to live in homes that look different from one another, but they do not want to live in large developments with hundreds of other homes that are very similar.

- Storage. Space of storing items such as boats and campervans is limited. Also, many households appear to be using their garages for storage or living space as their cars are parked on the forecourts.
- Communal area. While in general a communal area is not wanted by residents as this would result in maintenance costs, there were some suggestions for communal areas:
 - Space for storage e.g. lockers, boats, campervans etc

- Seat near or on the way to the letterboxes where residents could chat (instead of having to stand in the street).
- Gardens. Some expressed disappointment with the quality of the land for growing plants (understood to be a by-product of the filling process). The land is very, very hard and difficult to dig into, and there is a clay pan which may cause future problems for plants/trees.

One resident suggested that land be put aside in future developments for allotments.

- Future development. There were some initial concerns about future development of Stages 2 and 3.

2.2.3 Community

- The future. The residents are also aware of a certain level of vulnerability. Currently the development is home to people who are like-minded in their desire to respect the needs of their neighbours. When issues arise, individuals or a small group of residents address the issues and a resolution is found. This is achieved through discussion and a mutual desire to live in harmony. Should people move in who are ...

- noisy (e.g. parties, 'hooning' up and down the street),
- untidy (no pride in keeping their property tidy),
- persist in parking on the road (or allowing their visitors to),
- fail to respect other people's property (e.g. kids running up driveways, people driving on front lawns)
- use loud, bad language,
- AND don't care about their neighbours,

... then there is little the residents can do to enforce a change of behaviour. The houses are so close together that there is little protection for the neighbours of such residents. Such behaviour will inevitably impact on the enjoyment of living in Urban Ridge.

"What you've got to watch in a place like this is that if at some future date, for example someone bought a house as a spec and put tenants in and the tenants happened to be the sort of tenants that nobody wants to live next door to, we're all stuck with that and we're all very close to one another and it could be very unfortunate."

Some residents felt that even one such family could affect everyone's enjoyment. Others expressed the fear that the wrong sort of residents could see the quality of the neighbourhood decline as it had in other areas. Where streets have had a number of Housing Corp tenants move in, a decline in the tidiness and an increase in police presence was noted. This was not an expected future for Urban Ridge, but people are aware that when someone sells there is always a risk of someone unsuitable moving in.

Even selling to an investor was not viewed particularly favourably. Some renters may fail to take responsibility keeping their homes tidy, and be less considerate of their neighbours. Some people cite the Thornton Villa situation which has a mix of owner occupiers and renters. Many of the renters are families with kids while many of the owners are retired people. A group of kids aged 12-14 play together (ride their bikes, play tiggy and have water fights etc), and this is causing friction with retired residents who have experienced noise and some damage to gardens. This demonstrates how difficult it is to meet the needs of different demographic groups within the same intensive development.

"I've got this thing about rental properties, I think a lot – and I know – some people that do rent perhaps don't have that respect like they would if they owned their own home."

*“If you’re going to go for high density, if you’re dead cheap you’re going to run into trouble.
End of story.”*

2.3 Neighbourhood

2.3.1 Neighbourhood Benefits

Urban Ridge is situated:

- 850m (5 minutes walk) to Brookfield (small, long established shopping).
- 3km (5 minutes drive) to Bethlehem shopping centre (larger, newer shopping area developed to meet needs of the growing community of Bethlehem).
- Located next to Carmichael Reserve (wetlands area with boardwalks).
- 10 minutes walk to local playground and pond with ducks.
- Childcare facility on the border of the development, and another within 5 minutes walk.
- Brookfield Primary School within 5 minutes walk.



- Shops (dairy, hairdresser and liquor store) are also planned (to be located on the border of the development).

Supermarkets are located in Brookfield (New World) and Bethlehem (Countdown).

The development is located at the base of a large steep hill (not suitable for building) and next to Carmichel's Reserve. This gives the outlook from inside the development a rural feel. People appreciate being able to look up at the hill from their homes and enjoy the rural view.

“But the surrounding land I would say one of the biggest reasons I live here is because of the hill, and it can't be built on, and the park. So even though I'm living so close to the city and so close to other people, if that hill wasn't there and the park wasn't there I wouldn't be here.”

“I like the hill, the outlook. You've got a little bit of rural here as opposed to being close to the city; it's only five minutes into town. So you're central, you're close to many places really. I find it very, very central.”



The neighbourhood surrounding the development is varied. To the east is Brookfield which is a long established Tauranga neighbourhood. To the south is a relatively new neighbourhood with modern low maintenance housing. Parts of both these areas are not well regarded.

To the west is Bethlehem which is also relatively recently developed and is a well regarded area with highly priced property. Thus Urban Ridge is situated in between diverse communities.

2.3.2 Neighbourhood Disadvantages

Some neighbourhood issues less popular with residents included:

- As Urban Ridge is situated at the base of a large hill on land that was previously swampy, some residents were initially doubtful of its suitability as a home for themselves; *“at first I thought, ‘I’d never live down there!’”* However, on looking at the open home and meeting with the developers this view changed.

“It’s down low and it’s on swamp land, which we remember, we didn’t really want to come but the complex looked interesting enough for us to make a move ... cos we move about every two or three years anyway.”

- Brookfield and another street nearby are not considered to be particularly ‘good’ areas.

“A good neighbourhood. This is on the border. Because you’ve got the top of Millers Road there, that was very bad at one stage. They’re all rental. But gradually it’s getting better.”

3 Connectivity

Urban Ridge is about 5km from the CBD. It is:

- 5-10 minutes drive to town.
- 10-15 minutes drive to Mount Maunganui.
- The distance to other major destinations (e.g. the Hospital) is not felt to be far by car.
- Well situated for trips to Auckland and Hamilton.

Access to public transport is via the Bayhopper service which runs (between Bethlehem and Tauranga CBD every 30 minutes) along Miller Rd adjacent to the development.

“Having a bus stop right outside, a supermarket that way, supermarket that way, handy to everything in town that you might want. It’s actually turned out to be a lot better than we expected. The fact is it’s handy, the fact that we can get a bus into town if we want to or the supermarket or anywhere else is really quite important because as you get older you never know when you’re going to need to use these facilities.”

Having a bus service is particularly valuable to those in retirement as it provides certainty about future mobility.

“Must have, close to town, because as you get older you don’t know, if something happens and you can’t drive. We’ve got the bus, on Millers Road there’s a bus straight into town. That was important too.”

Residents do walk to Brookfield and take walks in the reserve. Some walk to Bethlehem, but most use their cars for this and for other trips.

4 Tradeoffs made in dwelling selection

Residents made a number of trade-offs when choosing to live at Urban Ridge. The following summarise trade-offs made by different residents or groups of residents.

- A couple approaching retirement moving from a house with a large section wanted a normal size house with a small section. Concerns about the neighbourhood (Brookfield) and being slightly further away from town than ideally wanted, caused this couple to hesitate. The quality and feel of the homes finally convinced this couple to buy (i.e. atrium, new build with opportunity to tweak and individualise, light, indoor-outdoor flow).
- Single woman looking for a lovely, modern, sunny home with a little bit of space around the house, and a sense of community. Did not want to feel 'hemmed in' and was able to select a site and layout that provided the space wanted. Urban Ridge was also very good value in comparison to other homes for similar money.
- Wanted a small section on which to build a modern, new home with a lot of visual appeal. At Urban Ridge this couple feel they got everything they wanted for a very good price.
- A couple who like to buy new builds every few years and felt that Urban Ridge represented very good value. It offered good quality construction, and fixtures and fittings.
- A couple who wanted to downsize to a smaller home and enjoy the process of creating a new home. They had bought from the Developer previously and trusted the quality.
- A single woman who wanted a smaller house (moving from large 4 bedroom home to 2 bedroom). This resident held some initial concerns about the location (at the bottom of the hill in the horse paddock) and the small size of the section. She decided to buy a largish section in the development and then worked closely with the Developer to obtain a small house that offered a good balance of indoor and outdoor living. Sun was important, as was having a visually appealing house.
- A retired couple seeking apartment living near the central city. Tauranga did not offer an extensive range of this type of housing; an old apartment was considered but this property was likely to incur significant maintenance costs. Instead opted for a two bedroom home in Urban Ridge. Thus traded-off location for low maintenance.
- A young family, new to Tauranga, wanted a new build home near family living in the Bethlehem area.

5 Post construction governance issues

The properties at Urban Ridge are freehold; there are no Body Corp fees.

The lack of a body corporate was seen by many residents as a plus. Avoiding unit titles and body corps means there are no fees and no difficulties with committees (e.g. trying to agree on issues where opinions differ wildly, having 'little hitlers' tell you what to do, having to pay for facilities you don't want or use etc).

Some residents spoke of good past experiences with body corps in that the weekly maintenance and gardening represented good value for money. However, this service was not wanted or required in Urban Ridge. The residents prefer to maintain their own sections and do not want extra facilities in the development which would create additional expense.

In the first year of the development a Residents' Association was formed. The Association formed in response to a suggestion from the Developer. Its purpose was to provide a channel to deal with issues should they arise, to welcome new people to the development, and provide a contact list of those living in the development. It also organised a Christmas party. As a part of its function, the Association collected a small amount of money for maintenance and the Christmas party. The Residents Association also voted on some issues and made some decisions.

"Now that I think about it we voted on the gate, that was the one causing a riot, and then we voted on whether to have the tree and the waterfall and the whatever."

One of the 'headaches' for the Residents' Association having to collect small amounts of money off residents.

"The second meeting ... I said, 'look, people are shifting and moving' so you go around and you say, 'can I have \$1 here, can I have \$1 here'. I mean, hello, we're all adults. ... I think that all just dispersed, and these things do 'cos there's nothing written in concrete, and we said ... that with the planting, if something falls over we'll just go and say, 'hey, this has fallen over and it's worth \$20, can you contribute' or something. Because I said to them, 'you know, no one can force anyone to put the money in'; that's the bottom line. And you're not going to chase people around because they keep moving."

The Association has now been disbanded; residents felt that there was no need for the Association as things are working well and people are mature enough to deal with any issues themselves if need be. This indicates a strong degree of trust between residents in that an Association to organise and 'police' the community is not necessary at this point in time. It may also indicate an unwillingness to invest authority in a formal committee or a regimented structure.

"But we don't need to have such a control on everyone. We're individuals, we're all sensible people, and everyone's aware that, hey, if they dig a hole in the middle of the road well they've got to fix it sort of thing. So I don't see that as an issue."

"So we, all of us, decided we didn't want it that regimented."

There is still a strong network of contacts and the list of residents allowing for good communication.

"But because the [former] secretary has the emails of everyone in here, if anything happens we can have a loose chat about it, she can just email everyone and say what do you think about this. So we still have a contact network, but it's loose."

Eventually, the private access road will need to be maintained. The road is unlikely to need maintenance for 10+ years. Residents realise that they will be responsible for the roads maintenance but currently there is no

provision being made for this. Many current residents are likely to move well before this investment is required, so it will be future residents that bear the cost of the road maintenance.

There is little concern about the restrictions that are part of living at Urban Ridge.

"The limits here are no more than you'd find in any normal subdivision that has things that you can't have, like you can't keep a bus out the front of your house or any trade vehicle parked alongside and things like that. That all applies here."

There is also recognition of the importance of restrictions in preserving property values.

"We think it's good to have those restrictions ... you've got to have restrictions, you can't have things parked out there or people doing things to their houses that are going to upset people 'cos people will just move out."

And that the restrictions are unenforceable.

"You have to remember, that all these things are unenforceable. It's hard really. If somebody came and parked a truck out here every day, really what can you do about it? You could make a noise but that's all."

6 Development difficulties and possible solutions

This section considers ways in which the interests of the local community, developers, land owners and new occupants could be reconciled through better communication, design and closer attention to spill-over third party effects.

Concept

Thorne Group identified that 63% of Tauranga housing consumers have a household income which is able to support a house value of \$400k or lower. In addition, 69% of residents are singles or couples, or single parent families. The cost of developing 600m² or larger sections results in property too expensive for this target market.

Urban Ridge was developed by Thorne Group to address a gap in the market: affordable, good quality two and three bedroom homes.

The initial plan for Urban Ridge was for 30 unit title sites with two storied duplex townhouses with a body corp. However, this concept did not generate interest from the market. The decision was taken to change plan to 25 single story standalone houses.

All section/homes are sold as a package; purchasers have the option of altering layouts within the planned footprint. Support is provided for interior and exterior design. An Open Home show casing the quality and feel of the homes available is a core part of the marketing.

Three stages are planned. The first stage involved 25 homes built on Jude Way. Stage two is currently under construction. Stage two will be similar to Stage one, but with some variation in roof lines and the inclusion of zero boundary properties. Stage 3 will offer a wider range of housing including terraced housing, duplexes, 4 bedroom and two storied houses.

Site assembly and consenting:

- The land at Urban Ridge had previously been swampy so the extensive draining and filling was carried out.
- The Developer had experienced challenges in the past convincing council of need for small sections with smaller houses. As such, Thorne Group could not initially get permission for 25 properties on the cul-de-sac. In particular, issues centred on the size of sections and the width of the access road. Eventually this was settled and the development proceeded.
- The relationship with council officials is now working well (due to better recognition of the demand for small sections).
- Thorne Group has experienced negative reactions from Councillors toward the Urban Ridge concept.

Costs:

- Development contributions have risen dramatically which is affecting affordability.
- Thorne Group develops, builds and sells the properties. This ensures no margins are being paid to other suppliers and maintains affordability.

Finance:

- Banks are willing to lend to buyers for fixed cost land and build packages. However, the depressed state of the market is causing buyer properties to take a long time to sell (and buyers are sometimes getting less for their properties than expected). This has resulted in lost sales for Urban Ridge.

- Onerous conditions of some purchase and sales agreements require Thorne Group to finance the build until compliance i.e. an initial deposit is made but there are no progress payments until compliance.

Demand:

Twenty-four of the 25 properties in Stage 1 have sold; 18 of the 25 properties in Stage 2 have sold (as of April 2011).

Prices for Stage 2 properties range from \$330k to up to \$399k.

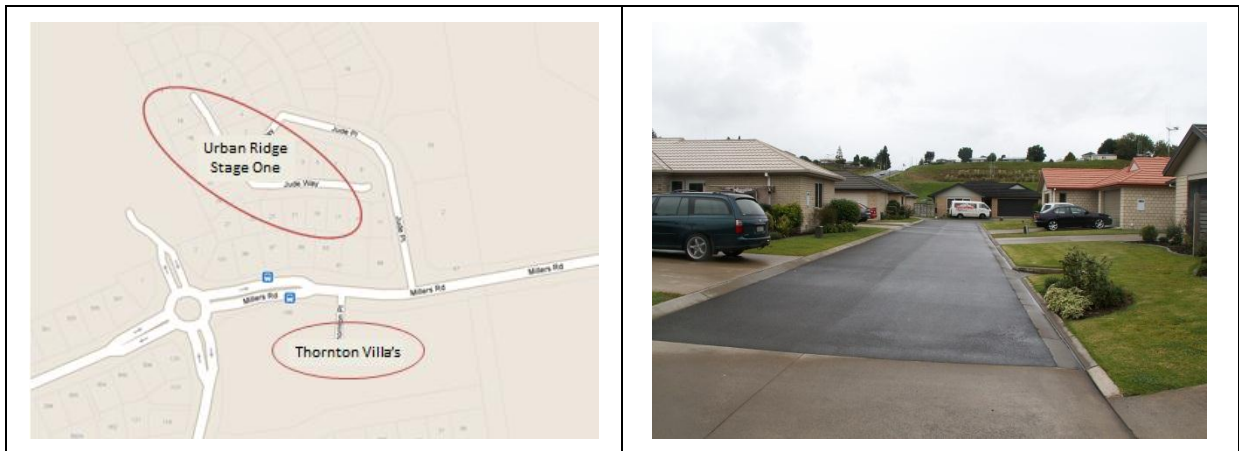
7 Thornton Villas

7.1 Background

Two interviews were conducted with residents at Thornton Villas to ensure the inclusion of renters in the Tauranga case study.

Thornton Villas are situated near Urban Ridge and were developed by Thorne Group. Thornton Villas are:

- A gated community,
- Mix of investor and owner occupied properties,
- Traditional brick and tile fully detached houses,
- Have a Body Corp and an on-site manager.



7.1.1 Respondent Profiles

The interviews were conducted with mums with children. One was a mother living with her partner with one child (approximately 12), the other was a mother of three children aged 11 to 14, also living with her partner. Both women work (one from home).

7.2 Inside Thornton Villas

7.2.1 What works

- A modern warm home.
- No maintenance.
- Safe environment. In particular, the gated aspect of the community was greatly appreciated by these residents. This provided a place for the children (8-14) to play with other kids in a safe environment. It also means that there are no unexpected guests (e.g. ex-partners, salesmen).

“I find, you know those people that come and sell things, I actually find the quite annoying. We work shift work and sleep during the day, so it’s really comforting knowing that no one can come and knock on my door without me prior knowing that they are there.”

“That was a big security...that was the reason why we actually moved here and I could not believe that when we found this property, it was like, it was just so amazing.”

“No one else can get in unless they live here and have the combination code, so it’s really safe. But, he [son] was never out playing later at night, because you never know who’s around, but as soon as we came here they were all out at nine at night and then they’d sit out and it was like they had their own little ... this our street and we can do whatever, because no one’s going to come in. So, it’s just a real security thing for the kids.”

- The Villas have a number of families living there; good friendships have sprung up between the kids and as a result of this between families. The children play together and so are kept entertained; they ride their bikes, hang out with each other, play tiggy, have water fights, etc.

“As you can see, one minute you’ve got six kids in the house ... communal in a way, because of the kids, but that’s brilliant, because they all ended up the same ages within a year or so of each other.”

- Good value. The rent includes water, rubbish collections and mowing of the lawns.

“It was actually value for money. The home that we had been renting, which was really old and cold and it was that cold, that we had to have all the children sleeping in the lounge. It was two storeys and we were paying sort of around \$330 rent and this one wasn’t a lot more than that. It was only \$20 more in fact. There was that and the inclusions we get with this property were really attractive. Our rent includes our water, which we had to pay at the other rental property. We had to pay rent plus water. It includes our rubbish collection and our lawns are mowed.”

- The responsiveness of the on-site manager.

“If there’s ever anything wrong, they are just absolutely wonderful. They’re here within the hour basically.”

7.2.2 What doesn’t work

- The behaviour of the children in the development has created friction with some of the other residents. These residents have complained about noise and damage to their gardens. The mix of residents and expectations is leading to tension within Thornton Villas.

“We have one issue with where we are and that’s there is nothing for the kids to do. It is becoming quite a problem in this complex. We’ve got quite a mixture of elderly people and at the moment we’ve got a lot of families around our age with same age kids. All these kids are getting together, I mean they’re all lovely kids, but the elderly people, they’re not liking the noise and the sort of yelling – as kids do in play.”

- Related to this is the lack of communal areas in which children can play without annoying the neighbours e.g. games room, pool, tennis court, etc. While there is a reserve and park nearby, parents of children under 12-14 do not want them going outside the development.

“It really would be great if there was something close by or even in the complex. We’ve got a friend who lives in a complex in Bethlehem and they’ve got a swimming pool, a gymnasium and a tennis court. So it kind of gives the kids something to do.”

- Parking is also an issue as there is no visitor parking in the development, nor on the road outside the development. Visitors must park outside the homes of those they are visiting and there is room for only one car for this. This has also been a cause of friction in the past.

“We’ve only got enough parking for one visitor. It hasn’t really been thought out because anyone else who has more than two visitors, they have got to park out on the road but right outside they actually can’t, because the majority of outside our villa is yellow lines. That is a downfall because people have got to park quite a way away from the entrance of the property. Extra parking would be great.”

- The road outside the development is very busy. Despite speed bumps, traffic travels very quickly up and down the road. This creates noise (especially at night) and causes parents to be uneasy about their children walking down to the nearby park without an adult.
- Other minor issues include:
 - Natural light needed in the kitchen along with more cupboard space,
 - Better outdoor privacy,
 - Thin walls between rooms.

7.3 Trade-offs

The previous home was very cold and was not being well maintained by the landlord. The property at Thornton Villa’s appealed as a home with security with provided protection against unwelcome guests and a safe environment for children to play. The home was warm and modern and good value. The security and warmth of the home at Thornton Villas are clear benefits of the home.

The owner decided to move back in to the previous home. In the search for this home, a warm, open plan, modern home north of the expressway was wanted. This property offered these characteristics, but did not provide an ensuite. The safety for kids offered by the security gates added significant appeal.

7.4 Post construction governance and maintenance issues

The managers at Thornton Villa are very much appreciated by the residents spoken to. It is noted that landlords at other properties are sometimes slow to fix problems. At Thornton Villas, issues are dealt with very quickly, often within the hour. The lawns are maintained by the Managers and the development is always well maintained and tidy.

The manager also provides a way of having difficult issues raised and conflict dealt with.

“Because they’re there if something isn’t right ... the kids were actually down the other end and playing with balls in someone’s garden; that person went and saw [the managers] straightway and said we don’t want the kids down here doing this; if they [the managers] weren’t there they probably would be rude and grumpy and it would be not quite so easy to fix, but because [the manager’s] there, she got the kids all together and told them, and it was all sorted.”

8 Lessons from Urban Ridge and Thornton Villas

The following bullet points summarise the main lessons from the case study:

- The importance of providing smaller homes and sections to meet the needs of those seeking these. In particular, singles and couples and those in retirement or approaching retirement.
- The importance of ensuring that people buying sections next to lots not yet built on are aware of the impact of development on the adjoining site. Alternatively, use of a master plan to provide certainty on house positions.
- Communication tools for preparing people for small community living. This could be a resource provided by Central Government.
- Provision for future maintenance of shared property.
- The importance of good connections to social precincts and town centres.
- The need for adequate visitor parking.
- The Thornton Villa development demonstrated difficulties of meeting the needs of families with children (especially those aged 8-14) and other residents, especially those seeking quiet and privacy.
- The importance of council and developers working together toward a common plan for higher density housing.