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Report**



# **Community Acceptance of Medium Density Housing Development**

**Simon Opit, Penelope Carroll, and Karen Witten  
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1222 Moonshine Rd, RD1, Porirua 5381  
Private Bag 50 908, Porirua 5240  
New Zealand  
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# Community Acceptance of Medium-Density Housing Developments

Simon Opit  
Penelope Carroll  
Karen Witten

SHORE & Whariki Research Centre  
Massey University  
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## iv. Executive Summary

This report examines the attitudes and experiences of residents living in neighbourhoods where new medium-density housing (MDH) developments were under construction or had been completed and occupied. The research was conducted in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland from 2018 to 2020 within the context of a shortage of affordable housing in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ). MDH describes a range of multi-unit dwelling typologies including attached housing and low-rise apartment buildings. While media portrayals of neighbours fervently opposed to new MDH developments in their street have fed a popular discourse of resistance to densification, it has been unclear whether such attitudes are widespread or reflect the views of a vocal minority.

### Community Opposition to MDH

Previous research has demonstrated the complexity of community opposition to MDH developments, with a NIMBY ('not in my back yard') label critiqued for reducing opposition to self-interest, ignorance and parochialism (Devine-Wright, 2009). Local resident fears and concerns commonly include physical aspects (built form, local environment, infrastructure, traffic and car parking), social aspects (tenure, social status, prejudices, lack of voice, interactions), and financial aspects (property values, affordability). Factors fuelling opposition can be highly contextual and are influenced by planning approaches (Davison et al., 2016) and the trust of residents in their fairness and transparency (Dolan, 2018; Ruming, 2014b). While few studies have sought residents' views after MDH developments have been completed and occupied, one in Sydney and Brisbane found, post-occupation, most residents reported little or no adverse effects.

### Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 114 people to investigate attitudes to, and experiences of living near new MDH developments. Sixty-seven interviews were undertaken across 8 study sites during the construction phase and 47 interviews across 6 sites post-occupation. Selected sites provide a diversity of environments (development size, distance from Auckland CBD, neighbourhood socioeconomic status (SES), and whether they included Kainga Ora dwellings). Participant demographics were collected and a short survey on attitudes to MDH administered.

### Findings

Higher-SES inner-suburban MDH sites generated most concern amongst residents, with fears around neighbourhood change, such as increasing traffic on local roads. Residents at lower-SES outer-suburban sites were more likely to embrace the developments as investment in the area, or to raise concerns about gentrification.

Residents' **construction-phase** responses:

- Location: sites in high-amenity areas with good public-transit infrastructure were mostly recognised as appropriate and generated higher levels of acceptance.
- Scale: when the size of developments far exceeded the surrounding dwellings or the design was perceived as out of character, opposition was more often encountered.
- Design and build quality: acceptance increased when developments were seen as well designed and of high quality, which many were.
- Parking: fears that more residents would bring parking problems and increase congestion on local streets were widely expressed.
- Uncertainty: residents at several sites were surprised by the height of the buildings and stated their distrust of the council, as they grappled with the complexity of zoning and consenting processes under the Unitary Plan.

- Sense of inevitability: a common reaction of residents to the construction of MDH on their street was that it was an inevitability. Awareness of a housing shortage in Auckland tempered what were often initial reactions of shock and distress. However, some interviewees remained anxious about potential impacts.
- Future neighbours: acceptance or resistance to MDH was inextricably linked with perceptions of the types of people who might move in. A firm association prevails between families, owner-occupation and stand-alone housing. Families living in homes they owned were perceived as 'good' and desirable neighbours. Some interviewees remained unconvinced that apartment living could offer spaces appropriate for 'Kiwi' families, with fears that MDH neighbourhoods would become rental 'slums'.
- Property prices: in contrast to media attention on the impact of MDH on property prices, this topic elicited little discussion at most sites.
- Construction impacts: developer and construction team practices varied greatly across sites. Interviewees praised developers who communicated with them and construction workers who were courteous. Equally, lack of communication from developers, and construction workers leaving rubbish, parking cars across driveways etc., were considered disrespectful. Whether or not developers and construction workers were seen as 'neighbourly' had a significant impact on attitudes (positive/negative) to the development.

**Post-occupation phase** interviews confirmed many of the above findings, and also revealed changes in earlier views, fears not realised and potential issues which had not materialised.

- Car parking & traffic: concerns about parking and traffic congestion due to the increase in the number of local residents continued to be an issue. Inadequate parking combined with poor public transport options sometimes resulted in streets full of parked cars. MDH designs with parking internal to the development were praised.
- Building impacts: impacts on privacy and sunlight from the new buildings were a concern during the construction phase and to a lesser extent in post-occupation interviews. The eventual impacts were often less than anticipated although windows with site lines directly into neighbouring living spaces was an enduring concern.
- New residents: there was only minimal interaction between existing residents and their new neighbours. Kāinga Ora developments generated the most discussion about the new residents, although most interviewees noted problems were minor and less than expected.
- Post-occupation attitudes: viewpoints spanned a continuum from residents who would move to avoid further intensification on their street, to those who saw change as inevitable, through to others who accepted and supported MDH development; but ambivalence predominated. MDH was commonly accepted as the only practical way to provide more housing for people. Loss of the traditional character of NZ suburbs was mourned, but after initial shock, new MDH developments appeared to be 'just part of the neighbourhood'.

The **survey** conducted as part of the interviews found that of the 114 participants:

- 64% thought MDH was a good way to solve Auckland's housing shortage.
- 53% believed their neighbourhood to be a good place for MDH.
- MDH 'near shops and public transport' was the most desirable location and 'in suburban streets' the least; (other options were 'inner city', 'new greenfield subdivisions' and 'other').

Comparison between construction and post-occupation phase survey results revealed a 10 point percentage increase in both participant agreement that MDH was a good way to solve Auckland's housing shortage and that their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH.

## **Conclusion**

Findings indicate that while New Zealanders remain apprehensive about the development of MDH in their neighbourhoods, there is increasing acceptance.

- Examples of MDH situated, designed and built well, lead to greater acceptance.
- 'Neighbourliness' from developers/construction workers can temper opposition.
- A disconnect between designs that minimise space for cars and insufficient access to good public transit options needs to be addressed for greater acceptance of MDH.



# 1. Introduction

This research examines the attitudes and experiences of residents in neighbourhoods where medium-density housing (MDH) developments were either under construction or had recently been completed, across Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. MDH, which includes typologies such as terraced housing, attached units and small apartment blocks, is commonly proposed as a way to provide increased numbers of dwellings in high amenity locations, and as a potential solution to issues of housing affordability. In recent years, MDH has been of growing interest in New Zealand as a potential means of providing a greater number of dwellings more efficiently within existing urban areas (Bryson & Allen, 2017). While there would seem to be widespread acceptance of the need for more affordable housing in Aotearoa New Zealand, when confronted with the prospect of MDH developments in their neighbourhood, local residents have often voiced concern and opposition (Bryson, 2017). A strong cultural attachment to standalone housing and low-density suburban environments has seemingly plagued compact city agendas. If MDH developments are to be successful and deliver liveable urban spaces in New Zealand, then their impacts on local resident wellbeing must be better understood (Allen & O'Donnell, 2020).

The study aims to:

1. understand the fears and concerns that underpin community views often expressed in the media about proposed MDH developments;
2. examine whether fears and concerns are realised or dissipate post-occupation;
3. identify benefits/downsides of new MDH developments for host neighbourhoods from the perspective of existing residents;
4. explore how the perceived benefits or downsides of MDH differ depending on the characteristics of the development and surrounding neighbourhood.

To address the aims of this research, a series of study sites of MDH developments across Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland were selected. The sites fell into two categories: (1) construction phase and (2) post-occupation phase. A case frame was established to ensure the selection of a broad range of MDH development types located in a variety of neighbourhood surroundings (eight under construction and six post-occupation).<sup>1</sup> Selection was based on development size, distance from the CBD, the socioeconomic status of the host neighbourhood, and whether the development included Kainga Ora (previously Housing New Zealand) properties.

For each MDH site neighbouring residents were interviewed using semi-structured interview schedules varying slightly depending on whether the MDH development was under construction or post-occupation. Interviews aimed to identify whether specific attributes of MDH elicited greater or lesser expectations of amenity loss or gain, whether pre-completion fears or hopes were realised post-occupation, and factors that mitigated objections and increased acceptance. While a longitudinal study involving follow-up interviews with residents who had experienced both construction and post-occupation phases at the same sites would have been the ideal, this was

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<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 lockdown resulted in data collection being limited to six and not eight post-occupation sites

considered impracticable because of research time frames and the unpredictability of construction timelines.

Research findings on the attitudes and experiences of residents who live around new MDH developments will be of interest to local government planners, designers and developers and can inform design decisions concerning the interface between an MDH development, its residential surroundings and local government amenity provision. Findings can also potentially inform consultation with host communities where new developments or zoning changes are proposed. This guidance will be particularly useful for developers seeking approaches to mediate community objections and fears concerning MDH developments. Equally, knowledge of the characteristics of MDH developments that neighbourhood residents perceive as potentially enhancing rather than diminishing their wellbeing and local amenity access will be useful for communities as they engage with developers and local government during consultation.

## 2. Literature Review

The purpose of this research is to go beyond simplistic understandings offered through a discourse of 'NIMBYism' and investigate the highly contextualised nature of local resident opposition to MDH. It is informed by research literature, discussed below, that relates to community/neighbourhood opposition to MDH developments, particularly those designed to be more affordable. Due to the contextual nature of resident reactions and development characteristics, the literature reviewed primarily focusses on the drivers of community reactions to MDH developments in NZ and Australia. However, reference is made to wider international literature where appropriate, particularly research from the UK and the USA. The reactions, concerns and experiences of residents living proximate to new MDH developments are the topics of primary interest. Related literature on general opposition to urban intensification, and the diverse literature on the potential benefits, challenges and problems of higher-density residential dwellings, are not discussed in detail here as they are tangential to the primary aims of this research.

### 2.1 Medium-Density Housing

In NZ as elsewhere, MDH is increasingly being seen as a relatively affordable and sustainable option for accommodating population growth (Bryson & Allen, 2017). MDH uses land more efficiently and reduces costs associated with infrastructure delivery and services compared with traditional standalone houses (Kupke et al., 2011). While detached housing remains the predominant housing type in NZ, consents for townhouses, units and flats have been steadily rising in Auckland, making up a quarter of all new homes consented in the year to August 2019, closely followed by consents for new apartments (Statistics New Zealand, 2019).

MDH can be defined in terms of a design typology of a variety of multi-unit dwellings up to six storeys (Bryson & Allen, 2017), or by density in relation to dwellings per unit area. For this research we have adopted a typology definition as it provides clear examples of the visual impacts of MDH developments – useful when examining the attitudes of residents in host neighbourhoods, which is the focus of this research.

A recent survey conducted by BRANZ suggests MDH has yet to be accepted by the majority of New Zealanders, with resistance both to various MDH typologies and to increasing neighbourhood densities. A lack of visual appeal was identified as a significant issue; although the survey also found that lived experience of MDH was likely to increase residents' acceptance (Bryson, 2017).

This literature reviewed below examines the complexities of local opposition to MDH developments – physical, social and financial. While the research presented in this report covers a variety of MDH developments, the existing literature focuses primarily on community opposition to affordable housing developments (Monkkonen & Manville, 2019).

### 2.2 Community Opposition

Community opposition to unwanted developments has traditionally been referred to in academic research and the media as 'NIMBYism' – an acronym for 'not in my back-yard', and often used pejoratively. Dear (1992, p. 288) defines NIMBYism as "the protectionist attitudes of and oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighborhood". 'NIMBY' residents are seen as self-serving in their opposition to buildings or

infrastructure potentially beneficial to the city as a whole, but which they consider detrimental in some way to their local environment (Davison et al., 2013).

The NIMBY concept has been critiqued as reducing local resident opinions to simple self-interest, ignorance and parochialism (Devine-Wright, 2009; Ruming et al., 2012). Pendall (1999, p. 113) argues for beginning with a presumption that “no single motivation can explain all opposition to new housing”. When asked about their motivation to oppose, people will often run through a series of arguments and discuss them all at once, making it difficult to decipher the reasons that carry greater weight (Monkkonen & Manville, 2019). It might be that the motivation is purely obstructionist, but people may also see their objections as consequences of each other. For example, increasing traffic may cause transportation delays, but could also be seen as decreasing property prices, leading to higher resident turnover and weakening community connections, all simultaneously. Therefore, it is argued that we must probe the “complex drivers, associations, and interactions that frame resistance” to understand the motivations of residents (Ruming et al., 2012, p. 421).

In situations where government agencies have attempted to discredit local community opposition through labelling protesters as ‘just NIMBYs’, there are accounts (e.g., Gibson, 2005; McClymont & O’Hare, 2008) of local opposition groups adopting increasingly complex strategies to avoid the NIMBY label and characterisation of being selfish and narrow-minded (Ruming, 2014a). Adopting the concept of framing from social movement research, Westermarck and Borell (2018) argue that to avoid the NIMBY label and neutralise such attacks, community opposition groups have increasingly resorted to framing their opposition by drawing on more universalistic and hegemonic discourses (e.g., climate change). Ruming (2014a) found that in Australia such groups have captured academic/planning discourses, for example, around the concept of social mix, to strengthen local resistance and legitimise local concerns. Findings from Nguyen et al.’s (2013) research are similarly suggestive of increasing complexity in community opposition group strategies. Their investigation of resistance to affordable housing in California reveals local concerns in relation to traffic and property values. Yet, they argue these professed concerns mask underlying conceptualisation of affordable housing tenants as undeserving and deviant. The studies by Westermarck and Borell (2018), Ruming (2014a) and Nguyen et al. (2013) provide evidence that understanding community oppositional activities requires looking beyond simplistic concepts such as NIMBYism.

### 2.3 Oppositional Complexities

Drawing on investigations of factors that escalate local community opposition to affordable housing in Sydney, Davison et al. (2016) argue opposition is not uniform and that planning approaches play a considerable role in influencing levels of resistance. Opposition that begins with only a few individuals will escalate if a collective entity is formed. This increases the number and unity of objectors and the resources and influence of the campaign (McClymont & O’Hare, 2008). Davison et al. (2016) found that through strong leadership, and often pre-existing lines of communication (see Coppens, 2011; Pruitt & Kim, 2004), even a relatively small number of objectors can create the impression that such opposition is far more widespread than it actually is. To counter this escalation, Davison et al. (2016) recommend a more streamlined and de-politicised planning process that allows input from the host community, so the process is perceived as fair and legitimate.

In New Zealand, debate surrounding urban intensification and its impacts on local residents has regularly played out in the media, with a particular focus on Auckland following the adoption of Auckland Council's 'Unitary Plan' (Auckland Council, 2013), which increased permissible levels of development density in many suburbs across the city. Typical examples include local residents opposed to a five-storey apartment block in Birkenhead (Orsman, 2015); a mixed residential-commercial development on Dominion Road in Mount Eden (Orsman, 2018); and the then-Housing New Zealand's five-storey apartment complex plan in Epsom (Dunlop, 2018). Common arguments made against such developments include inappropriate size and height for the neighbourhood, projected increases in traffic volume, and the lack of available parking. Responses from developers commonly emphasise the need for more housing, greater housing choice, and affordability for first-home buyers. While the pace of intensification has been strongest in Auckland, community opposition to plans for greater urban intensification has been noted across all New Zealand's major urban centres (see Early et al., 2015).

Consistent with Davison et al.'s (2016) Sydney findings, an Auckland study suggests that the perception of a fair and transparent process can have a greater impact on community acceptance of MDH than specific outcomes and designs (Dolan, 2018). Salmon (2015, p. 54) reaches a similar conclusion regarding Auckland Council's proposed Unitary Plan, stating that a "lack of social trust in Auckland may have been a barrier to achieving higher levels of residential density" during the consultation period. In Ruming's (2014b) study of new housing developments planned through the Australian Federal government's Social Housing Initiative, he found local community opposition mobilised debates around principles of democracy and rights, rather than the nature of the social housing itself. Of particular concern was the intervention of the Federal government in local planning matters, seemingly negating local democracy and representation embedded within local planning arrangements. Similar underlying feelings of injustice were found by Davison et al. (2016) in Parramatta, where state urban policy making overrode local government controls. These findings align with arguments made by community groups about Auckland Council's consultation process for the Unitary Plan (e.g., Orsman, 2016).

### 2.3.1 Local Resident Concerns

In a review of the Australian literature, Nematollahi et al. (2016) categorise resistance to MDH as either physical and/or social. Physical aspects attracting concern include traffic, parking, privacy, light, building heights and building forms; social concerns relate to the (often presumed) future residents of proposed developments as students, renters or low socioeconomic groups, and the anti-social behaviour often believed to be associated with these types of residents.

### 2.3.2 Physical Aspects

Davison et al. (2016) analysed local resident concerns with affordable MDH developments proposed by the State Housing Authority in the Sydney suburb of Parramatta between 2009 and 2011. This involved reviewing 397 written submissions received across 47 affordable housing projects. The authors found that most concern focussed on parking and traffic, built form, neighbourhood amenity, planning process, crime and safety, property management, and the assumed social character and behaviour of the prospective residents of the developments. This is generally consistent with other studies of community opposition in Australia (Ruming, 2014a, 2014b), New Zealand (James, 2019), and elsewhere (Nguyen et al., 2013; Tighe, 2010). Parking and built form concerns featured in 85% and 73% of the submissions in Parramatta respectively.

Urban intensification in New Zealand in recent decades has occurred in a piecemeal fashion, with development often happening in areas with poor access to public transport and without adequate planning for infrastructure provision (Auckland Regional Council, 2007; Waghorn, 2011). Given the well-established culture of car ownership in New Zealand (Bean et al., 2008), without the provision of viable alternatives, residents of new MDH developments are likely to maintain their dependency on private motor vehicles for daily travel, placing extra strain on the local road network. A recent study of local resident reactions to new Special Housing Area (SHA) MDH developments in the Western Bay of Plenty sub-region of New Zealand (James, 2019) found that 69% of the 603 submissions on the SHA proposals were opposed, with the top concern being the road traffic impacts of the new developments. Increases in traffic volume, parking problems, and congestion and subsequent reductions in safety for pedestrians and cyclists were residents' main fears. Residents were quoted as saying the existing infrastructure was unsuitable to safely carry the extra traffic volume the new developments would generate. Following consultation, the local council agreed that the existing residential streets were inadequate and alternative road access would be constructed alongside the new developments.

Very few studies have sought residents' views after MDH developments have been completed and new residents have moved into their neighbourhoods. An exception is Davison et al.'s (2017) study conducted in Sydney and Brisbane, which found after MDH had been occupied for several years, 73% of the participating local residents had noticed little or no effect as a result of the developments. Of the 22% who had noticed negative effects, traffic and/or parking problems were a key issue (second only to increases in antisocial behaviour).

### 2.3.3 Social Aspects

Most studies examining social aspects of opposition focus on 'affordable' or mixed tenure developments. However, there is complexity in local resident reactions to social mix (as an outcome of tenure mix). For instance, such policies can receive support from local homeowners if they are seen to be encouraging the development of owner-occupier dwellings rather than social rental dwellings. The debate around encouraging social mix through tenure mix policies is well rehearsed, yet housing policies aimed at social and economic regeneration through tenure mix across a range of countries have failed to convincingly prove their efficacy (e.g., Arthurson, 2013; Lees, 2008; Lupton & Fuller, 2009; Musterd & Andersson, 2005). In his analysis of the *Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan* in Australia, Ruming (2014a) found that the discourse of social mix has transferred from the realms of policy and academic debate into public discourse on social housing developments. Through adopting an academic discourse critical of social mix, local residents can maintain existing housing policy power structures that emphasise the status and virtues of home ownership and oppose the construction of affordable rental housing in their neighbourhoods on the basis of technical issues rather than social prejudice against future occupants.

Achieving social mix within developments has most commonly been conceived as providing for tenure mix (i.e., private ownership, shared equity, private rentals and social housing). However, Nematollahi et al. (2016) found that social diversity within new developments was the least preferred option for existing residents and there was an unwillingness to socialise with new residents. Interestingly, in contrast with previous Australian studies (e.g., Ruming, 2014b), Ziersch et al. (2018) found strong support amongst local homeowners surrounding the redevelopment of

the Carlton Housing Estate in Melbourne based on a tenure-mix proposal. However, as the authors explain, essentially, social mix can be welcomed as an agent of gentrification, rather than opposed as a threat to existing property values.

Davison et al.'s (2017) conclusions concerning local opposition to affordable housing developments in Sydney and Brisbane align with other research (e.g., Jacobs et al., 2011; Nguyen et al., 2013; Tighe, 2012) showing that attitudes towards affordable MDH are primarily based on prejudice and stereotypes of the presumed occupants of such housing, rather than first-hand experiences. They argue that these prejudicial attitudes towards MDH can be confronted through exposing potential objectors to successful examples of affordable housing developments, by challenging stereotypes of their occupants, and by emphasising the value of affordable housing through promotional campaigns (see also Nguyen et al., 2013). More broadly, Legacy et al. (2016) demonstrate that early and regular involvement of local residents in the development of planning policy and its implementation can help connect their frequent support for affordable MDH provision at a city-wide level to the local level. However, research by Scally and Tighe (2015) counters this argument somewhat, with their findings suggesting that a more informed local community can also lead to greater levels of resistance.

The social aspects of resistance to market-rate developments has received much less scholarly attention. It is likely that some aspects of opposition to affordable developments will also be relevant to those that are market-rate – for example causing congestion or noise, or simply because it signals change to a familiar place (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2013). However, recent research has shown that market-rate developments fuel distinct motivations that are directed at the developers themselves, who are seen as imposing local burdens not just for a public good, but for their own *private* profit (Monkkonen & Manville, 2019).

#### 2.3.4 Financial aspects

An enduring perspective, largely associated with the North American literature, emphasises the influence that affluent homeowners have on planning through their motivation to protect the market performance of their property (Scally & Tighe, 2015). Conflicts often arise through proposals for siting so-called 'noxious' land uses, such as landfills or incinerators, which are deemed likely to reduce the value of surrounding properties through their negative external effects. However, similar responses are often generated to the siting of housing, raising the question of whether new housing built in a neighbourhood can negatively impact the value of the existing housing. A report from the UK by Bramley et al. (2007) provides evidences that changes in the physical form of neighbourhoods due to increasing density do impact on local housing prices. Yet, they conclude that, through improved social and environmental outcomes, redevelopments may actually increase house prices, particularly if levels of homeownership are increased.

In Australia, Kupke et al.'s (2011) multivariate study of the local neighbourhood impacts of MDH developments in Sydney and Melbourne found little evidence of negative effects on local house prices due to redevelopments. There was evidence that certain areas of MDH redevelopment were experiencing greater housing market performance than the rest of the city. Kupke et al. (2011) ultimately conclude that even neighbourhoods experiencing significant change in their built form were minimally impacted in regard to house price variation. A study in Melbourne by Cook et al. (2013) investigated the concerns of owner-occupiers of a low-density suburb who opposed higher-

density housing developments proposed in their neighbourhood. The reasons for objection ranged across social, financial and infrastructural aspects and impacts on their access to privacy and sunlight. It is noteworthy that residents' financial concerns were not primarily focused on any negative impact on land value, but rather that any financial investment they had made in renovating their home would not be recouped. This suggests that unanticipated neighbourhood change concerns residents more due to a heightened sense of uncertainty around the value of personal investment in their dwelling (practical, social and economic) than purely financial concerns. Cook et al. (2013) elaborate further that their participating homeowners felt they had rights to a say in the planning process not only because of their ownership of land in the neighbourhood, but because of the entitlement to territory that dwelling afforded them. The authors conclude that because dwelling confers informal, but ideologically powerful sets of rights, planning controls need to be more contextually informed, and procedurally clear and flexible.

With financial ties to their dwellings, homeowners are expected to have a greater concern about neighbourhood changes that might impact their property than renters. Research suggests this is the case, with homeowners more likely to oppose housing developments than private renters. In the UK, Matthews et al. (2015) found oppositional views were strongest from homeowners, with private renters more evenly split and social renters most likely to support local development. Such findings are consistent with the expectation that homeowners are the most motivated to protect the amenity and value of their dwelling, while renters are likely to be less well housed and to lack a financial investment motive. Matthews et al. (2015) conclude that whilst tenure divisions may conform to assumptions of economic rationality, resident opposition is also likely to be contingent on social variables, such as class, political support and age. Research in the USA by Hankinson (2018) indicates a more blurred distinction between homeowners and renters, with renters in higher-rent areas displaying equally oppositional attitudes to homeowners to the development of market-rate housing in their neighbourhood. Renters were found to be more likely to support the development of affordable housing at a city-wide scale. But for both homeowners and renters, support at the city-wide level does not necessarily translate into neighbourhood-level support for new housing. These findings broadly correlate with other studies that display a similar pattern of abstract support and specific opposition underlying resident attitudes to housing developments (Monkkonen & Manville, 2019; Pendall, 1999). Even in relation to market-rate housing, opposition can occur from both homeowners, who argue development will depress their property values, and from renters, who sometimes argue that it will increase their rents (Hankinson, 2018).

## 2.4 Imagined Aspects of Post-Suburbanisation

With the urban there has always been the suburban, which has existed in many forms. However, suburbia is usually narrowly defined and imagined in terms of low-density detached single-family housing, privatism and automobility (Keil, 2015). This myopic vision of suburbia has become hegemonic in many places, particularly in the cities of the 'new world'. But in recent decades it has been noted that these suburban landscapes and lifestyles have begun to transform both in form and function (Beauregard, 2006), and the terms 'post-suburbia' and 'post-suburbanisation' have emerged in acknowledgement of the multiple and varied contemporary processes of change (Phelps & Wu, 2011). Post-suburbanisation has been characterised as an incomplete, contextually varied set of transformations that are pluralising suburban space – including densification, complexification and diversification (Charmes & Keil, 2015). The emergence of smart growth and



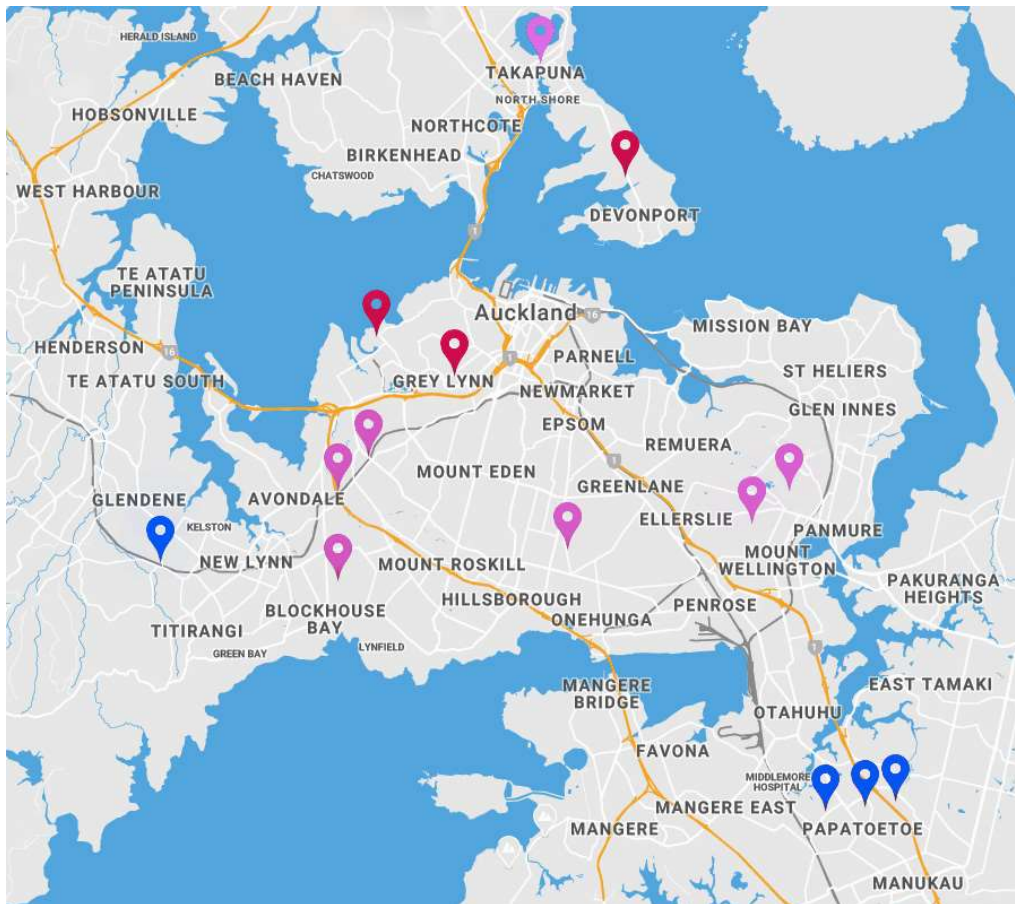
compact city principles, leading to a greater diversity of land-uses and greater levels of density in traditionally low-density residential suburban environments, can be seen as an example of post-suburbanisation (Johnson et al., 2018). In these spaces, 'traditional' detached single-family homes remain important, but are complemented by more diverse residential arrangements and land-uses (Kling et al., 1995). However, what is less clear is how to differentiate such processes from related concepts of 'technoburbs' (Fishman, 1987), 'edge cities' (Garreau, 1991), and 'edgeless cities' (Lang, 2003). Following Phelps et al. (2010), recent papers have made the argument for a move beyond a focus purely on material changes to include imaginative factors that enable certain urban configurations while limiting others (Johnson et al., 2018).

An MDH development in the Auckland suburb of Three Kings has been used to explore imaginative practices at work in policy representations, media and advertising, and in the personal imaginaries of key stakeholders in the development (Johnson et al., 2018). The authors argue that imaginative dimensions of post-suburbia can play an essential role in reconstructing notions of suburban life and in the solutions offered to pressing urban problems, including MDH developments. They argue that historical and geographical trajectories will need to be disrupted to avoid an ongoing urban entanglement with automobility and hegemonic ideals linking desirable and acceptable family life with the detached house (Johnson et al., 2018).

### 3. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this research aims to generate new knowledge to build on and extend existing literature on the local impacts of new MDH developments.<sup>2</sup> While property values have previously been used as a proxy for the neighbourhood impacts of new MDH developments (Davison et al., 2017), this study explores neighbourhood impacts drawing on local residents' first-hand observations and experiences at study sites (both under-construction and post-occupation) across Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. To capture these accounts, each participant took part in a semi-structured interview followed by a short questionnaire on their attitudes toward MDH in their neighbourhood and in Auckland generally. This research approach has allowed us to investigate the fears and concerns often expressed anecdotally in the media about proposed MDH developments and examine whether such fears and concerns are realised or dissipate post-occupation. It has also enabled benefits/downsides of new MDH developments to be identified from the perspective of existing local residents, and the exploration perceptions of benefits relating to the characteristics of different developments and their surrounding neighbourhood.

**Figure 1: Map of Study Sites**



Map key: Red pins = Inner-Suburb sites; Purple pins = Mid-Suburb sites; Blue pins = Outer-Suburb sites

<sup>2</sup> Massey University's Low Risk ethics notification number for the study is 4000019548

### 3.1 Selection of Sites

The study sites fell into two categories: (1) construction phase and (2) post-occupation phase. A case frame was established to incorporate a broad range of different types of MDH development located in a variety of neighbourhood surroundings (eight under construction and initially eight, subsequently reduced to six, post-occupation). Sites were selected based on development size, distance from the CBD, the socioeconomic status of the host neighbourhood, and whether the development included Kainga Ora properties.

Tables of Residential Assessment, Council Code of Compliance and Building Consents for MDH developments in Auckland obtained from Auckland Council provided information on developments of varying sizes, completed and yet to be completed, and at various distances from Auckland's city centre, which could be considered as potential sites. Using these tables, the size of each development was assessed and categorised based on the number of units they contained, from small (3-15), mid (16-40) and large (40+). Distances of each study site from the city centre were classed according to three bands, as follows: inner (2-5km), mid (5-9km), and outer (9-16km). The geographic location of each site is displayed in Figure 1. The New Zealand Index of Multiple Deprivation 2013 (NZIMD) (Exeter et al., 2017) ranking of the census area units containing each site was used to determine a socioeconomic status category (low, mid, high). Google and LINZ remote sensing imagery and Google Street View provided information on construction levels at potential sites and on surrounding environments. We sought MDH developments with adjacent residential areas where residents would likely be affected by the proximity of the new housing. On-line resources related to the developments, such as real estate websites, were also accessed for information.

**Table 1: Table of Study Sites**

Phase	Code	Location	Size	Distance	SES
Construction	CSD	Devonport	Small	Inner	High
	CSO	Otara*	Small	Outer	Low
	CSW	Westmere	Small	Inner	High
	CMP	Papatoetoe, Charles St	Mid	Outer	Low
	CMM	Mount Albert, New North Rd	Mid	Mid	Mid
	CLG	Glen Eden*	Large	Outer	Mid
	CLM	Mount Albert, Soljak Pl	Large	Mid	Mid
	CLT	Takapuna	Large	Mid	High
Post-Occupation	PSP	Papatoetoe, Shirley Rd*	Small	Outer	Low
	PSR	Royal Oak	Small	Mid	Mid
	PMG	Grey Lynn	Mid	Inner	Mid
	PMB	Blockhouse Bay*	Mid	Mid	Low
	PLW	Mount Wellington	Large	Mid	Mid
	PLS	Stonefields	Large	Mid	High

Code: 'C' = construction, 'P' = Post-Occupation, 'S', 'M' & 'L' = small, medium and large development, and the third letter represents the suburb, e.g. 'O' = Otara. An asterisk (\*) demarks a site that includes public housing.

A heterogeneous selection of 15 potential under-construction and 15 potential post-occupation study sites was then drawn up. Site visits followed to check what stage individual developments were at (what might seem promising on-line was not always so in situ) and to observe surrounding environments. As displayed in Table 1, eight under-construction and six post-occupation MDH developments were then selected to ensure case studies were diverse in terms of the size of the development (number of dwellings), distance from Auckland's city centre and the socioeconomic status of the surrounding area. Kainga Ora developments were included. For the post-occupation interviews, it was important that the impacts of the new development remained fresh in the minds of the participants, so only developments constructed within the previous three years were selected. Further, so that residents could effectively evaluate impacts of a development, they were only interviewed if they had been living at their address for a minimum of six months.

## 3.2 Resident Interviews

For each MDH site, neighbouring residents were interviewed based on semi-structured interview schedules (see Appendix 8.1), which varied slightly between the construction phase and post-occupation phase. Interviewees were asked about their perceptions and experiences of the relevant nearby MDH development. The interviews aimed to identify whether specific attributes of MDH elicited greater or lesser expectations of amenity loss or gain, whether pre-completion fears or hopes were realised post-occupation, and factors that mitigated objections and increased acceptance. Interviewees were also asked their views on whether or not (and where) MDH should be constructed in Auckland. Each interviewee was provided with a participant information sheet, consent form and a short questionnaire asking them basic demographic information and five questions related to their acceptance of MDH generally and in their neighbourhood (see Appendix 8.2).

Maps showing the address of each development and dwellings in the surrounding streets were generated using Google Maps. All adjacent dwellings were systematically canvassed. Demographic information was collected on each respondent. To ensure participation was not biased by employment status, dwellings were visited first on a weekday and then, if no-one was home, revisited on a weekend. All residents who agreed to be interviewed received a participant information sheet, signed a consent form and koha on completion of the interview.

The construction phase interviews were completed between September 2018 and September 2019. Post-occupation phase interviews, which began in November 2019, were interrupted by the Covid-19 lockdown in March-April 2020 after five sites had been completed. Initial analyses of post-occupation interviews showed a diverse range of residents (in terms of age, ethnicity, employment status and length of residency) had been interviewed and accounts across sites were largely consistent. In light of ongoing COVID-related health and safety concerns, a decision was made to add only one more site to cover a specific gap in the case frame, thus reducing the number of post-occupation sites to six. The final study site interviews were completed in August 2020.

Interview transcripts were loaded into NVivo 12 to manage the data and a thematic analysis of the interview data was undertaken. An initial coding frame was created through drawing on the key aspects of community opposition and acceptance that emerged in the literature review. The themes included in this initial coding were expanded through multiple readings of transcripts and

discussion between research team members (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Independent analysis was undertaken of the under-construction and post-occupation datasets.

### 3.2.1 Participant Sample

In total 114 residents were interviewed across 14 sites. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in residents' homes and the conversations digitally recorded. Interviews were fully transcribed. For the eight construction phase sites, 267 dwellings were canvassed, contact was made with 114 residents, and 67 agreed to be interviewed. For the six post-occupation sites, 189 dwellings were canvassed, contact was made with 74 residents and 47 agreed to be interviewed.

Across all sites 65% of residents participating in interviews owned the home were living in and 35% were renting their home. The ages of participants ranged from 17 to 99, with 27% aged 34 and younger, 45% aged between 35 and 64, and 28% aged over 65. Slightly more females (53%) took part than males (47%). There was a diverse range of ethnicities represented in the sample. Of the interviewees, 50% identified as Pākehā/New Zealand European, 7% as Māori, 11% Pacifica, 18% Asian, and the remaining 14% were other ethnicities.

## 4. Findings

The results from the short survey (Appendix 8.2) found that, across both phases, 64% of participants agreed with Q1, that MDH is a good way to solve Auckland’s housing shortage. When asked Q2, whether they thought their neighbourhood was a good place to build MDH, 53% agreed that it was and 35% disagreed. When asked what the best locations would be to build new MDH, 37% of participants indicated near shops and public transport, 26% said in new greenfield subdivisions, 19% indicated inner-city areas, while very few believed suburban streets were the best place (8%) (10% selected other places would be best). Agreement with both Questions 1 and 2 was higher in the post-occupation phase. For Q1, 60% of construction phase participants agreed that MDH is a good way to solve Auckland’s housing shortage, and for Q2, 49% agreed with Q2 that their neighbourhood was a good place to build MDH. For the post-occupation phase participants, agreement with Q1 increased to 70% and agreement with Q2 increased 59%.

In the following sections we outline themes that emerged from the construction and post-occupation phase interviews.

### 4.1 Construction Phase Findings

This section begins with a photograph<sup>3</sup> and brief description of the eight construction phase study sites. The number of interviewees, their housing tenure, length of residence and ages are noted. This is followed by a thematic analysis of the data gathered from 67 participants living near the eight construction phase sites.



**Charles Street, Papatoetoe (CMP):** a medium-sized, three-storey, 47-unit development, in an outer and low socioeconomic suburb. The site is a redevelopment of an unoccupied commercial building. Proximate to a busy main thoroughfare and commercial centre, it is surrounded by older standalone bungalows on full sections and newer infill bungalows. Most of the 9 nearby residents interviewed (6 owner-occupiers and 3 renters, length of residence 4 months–35 years, age range 18–80s) thought MDH could be a good solution to Auckland’s housing shortage, but were generally not in favour of MDH in their street – although were nevertheless pleased the unoccupied building was being renovated and repurposed.

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<sup>3</sup> Photographs were taken by the authors or sourced from Google Street View



**Clayton Avenue, Otara (CSO):** two small three-storey, eight-unit Kainga Ora developments (one under construction and the other completed) in an outer and low socioeconomic suburb. Each MDH development has replaced a standalone house. Many of the residents had lived in their homes, which surrounded a triangle of park land, since they were built during the 1960/70s and had a strong sense of community. Of the 8 nearby residents interviewed (5 owner-occupiers and 3 renters, length of residence 6 months–54 years, age range 20s–80s), 4 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland’s housing shortage, 3 disagreed, and 1 was ambivalent. In terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 3 agreed, 3 disagreed, with 2 ambivalent.



**Waikumete Road, Glen Eden (CLG):** a large two-tower development of 162 units, predominately for private sale with a lesser amount of public housing, in an outer and mid-socioeconomic area. Adjacent to Glen Eden’s town centre and train station, the site was previously used for mixed commercial and light industrial activities. Of the 10 nearby residents interviewed (6 owner-occupiers and 4 renters, length of residence 6 months–46 years, age range 20s–70s), 3 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland’s housing shortage, 5 disagreed, and 2 were ambivalent. In terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 1 agreed, 3 disagreed, with 6 ambivalent.

Image data: Google



**Lake Road, Devonport (CSD):** this small, three-storey development of 6 units, adjacent to an existing MDH development of a similar size, in an inner and high socioeconomic area. A mixed commercial-residential development, it is situated on an already congested arterial road. Of the 8 nearby residents interviewed (6 owner-occupiers and 2 renters, length of residence 18 months–20years, age range 30s–70s), 4 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland’s housing shortage and 4 disagreed. In terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 3 agreed, and 5 disagreed.



**Lemington Road, Westmere (CSW):** the smallest development of our construction-phase case studies (3 three-storey town houses replacing a standalone large bungalow), this site is in an inner and high socioeconomic area. An old suburb with traditional bungalows and some public housing, Westmere has gone through several stages of gentrification which is continuing alongside the increasing density of new dwellings. Of the 8 nearby residents interviewed (all owner-occupiers, length of residence 3 years–33 years, age range 50s–70s), 6 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland’s housing shortage, with 1 ambivalent. In terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 2 agreed, 5 disagreed, with 1 ambivalent.



**Soljak Place, Mt Albert (CLM):** this large development of three four-storey buildings comprises 150 units. The site is a mid-distance, mid-socioeconomic area. Located near the shopping areas of Mt Albert and Avondale, New North Road (a busy arterial route) runs down one side of the development. The predominant dwelling type is standalone bungalows. Of the 9 nearby residents interviewed (3 owner-occupiers and 6 renters, length of residence 8 months–62 years, age range 17–90s), 6 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland’s housing shortage, 1 disagreed, with 1 ambivalent. In terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, all except 1 agreed.



**New North Road, Mt Albert (CMM):** a medium-sized five-storey corner development of 32 units. The site is in a mid-distance, mid-socioeconomic area. It is a built-to-rent development surrounded by a variety of housing types, including some remaining villas on full sections and more recent infill standalone dwellings and low-rise MDH. Proximate to the development are many amenities, shops and restaurants, including Mt Albert train station. Of the 7 nearby residents interviewed (6 owner-occupiers and 1 renter, length of residence 2 years–34 years, age range 30s–60s), 6 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland’s housing shortage and 1 was ambivalent. Similarly, in terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 6 agreed, with 1 ambivalent.





Image data: Google

**Killarney Street, Takapuna (CLT):** a large six-storey development of 44 apartments, in a high socioeconomic area. It is a mid-distance from the city centre, but less than 500m away from Takapuna's centre on Auckland's North Shore. The development site is adjacent to a park and lake and is near schools and a pool and leisure centre. The surrounding residential area comprises relatively large new-build housing, with a few renovated older houses. There are a number of recently built MDH developments in the area, of which our study site is the largest so far. Of the 8 nearby residents interviewed (2 owner-occupiers and 6 renters, length of residence 2 months–34 years, age range 20s–70s), 6 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland's housing shortage and 1 was ambivalent. Similarly, in terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 6 agreed, with 1 ambivalent (one interviewee did not complete the survey).

#### 4.1.1 Development and Neighbourhood Fit

##### **Development Makes Sense**

A development's design, scale, location and likely future occupants all influenced whether it was considered a good or poor fit for an existing neighbourhood. The importance of design fit for acceptance is evident in the following comments:

"I'm not right next door to it, but the development looks appropriate, it looks quite nicely done" (CMP1).

"Those apartments up to three levels, they're not bad, the design is ok ... the design is fitting to the environment ... I mean they're not an eyesore ... when I pass, I like them" (CSD6).

Developments on or near main roads with good public transport links (e.g., a train station) were more likely to be seen favourably and zoning allowing intensification was more often than not seen as reasonable. For example, the majority of interviewees from the two Mount Albert sites (CLM, CMM) noted they were near a major transport route into the city and so: "with the planning rules that we have here ... we can't escape the fact that we live on a main rail and public transport arterial" (CMM3).

Some participants indicated that their views were changing on whether their neighbourhood was suitable for MDH.

"Before that one went up, I would have said 'no', but yeah, I think they do, but I think they should be more focused around the business centres rather than the suburbs. Because ... then people don't have to worry about transportation and that could ease congestion on the roads" (CSO7).

In neighbourhoods that were more amenity rich, there was also a greater acceptance of the place of MDH:

“There's a pool just over there, the mall's just over there, there's just so many things around here, and you're right by a train station ... I wouldn't want to leave here, and it doesn't really bother me that there might be a few more people living here” (CMM5).

A broad trend was greater acceptance when neighbourhoods were seen by existing residents to have good access to transport networks and other community amenities.

### **Development Out of Character**

The most common negative feature of MDH mentioned by neighbours was the perceived scale of a development. Even for those who supported an increase in compact housing, including public housing, in their suburb, the scale of the larger multi-storey developments was seen as out of character with the surrounding detached housing:

“I think if they scaled it down, absolutely ... there is a place for it, I'm not opposed to any of that Housing New Zealand stuff that's coming along, they are not as big, they're not as horrible, not horrible, I actually like that one, I think that's probably better designed than some of the others” (CLG10).

The development referred to above is a mixed tenure, 165-unit two-tower development. It is located adjacent to a train station, primary school and shopping strip. However, as the first tower block in the neighbourhood, it was frequently seen as out of scale for the area – even though the need for more housing was recognised.

“I know people need more affordable living, and ... it will have some more affordable [units], but yeah I definitely didn't know ... it would look as massive and out of place as it does ... maybe where we're heading ... but surely you start a little lower to the ground first” (CLG8).

Other larger developments were discussed similarly by some local residents.

As well as challenging a familiar suburban visual aesthetic, some participants also believed MDH developments generate a level of activity and busyness that negatively impacts on the suburban lifestyle, particularly increasing traffic and congestion on the road.

“Suburbs must be suburbs, where kids can still walk to school and feel safe, whereas all these apartments are coming up, and the little ones have to look twice before they cross a road ... so I don't even think that's going to be safe for kids” (CLT6).

The size, design or colour of 'infill' developments were all often remarked upon as being out of character or too imposing on the neighbourhood. Comparisons were sometimes made to Hobsonville Point, as well as other master-planned estates in Auckland, such as Stonefields, which were seen as examples of appropriate places for MDH because the whole neighbourhood was designed and landscaped to accommodate higher density dwellings. From this perspective greenfield developments were emphasised as the most appropriate spaces for MDH rather than brownfield, infill or 'pepper-potting' of MDH.

Informing this view, the capacity of local infrastructure to cope with the scale of developments was often questioned. Roads were the most common example:

“This [is] little street ... it's just a short street, it's a narrow street and it's ridiculous having an apartment with so many people in there” (CMP2).

"I'm definitely accepting of [MDH] as long as they can keep the infrastructure of like at least the roads going and everything, to be able to handle it" (CSD8).

Areas perceived to have better infrastructure or more space for development were sometimes suggested as more appropriate alternatives to existing suburbs.

### **Changing the Neighbourhood**

MDH developments were more likely to be welcomed when seen to be bringing in new shops and amenities as part of a broader commercial development of the area. For example, several neighbours near the Takapuna (CLT) and Glen Eden (CLG) sites saw MDH as part of wider social and economic development of the area. A Glen Eden resident commenting on changes in the area, said it was "not in a bad way", but "it depends on who's coming in here ... I mean it might improve the community" (CLG1).

Here MDH is seen as a sign of progress, and the suburb becoming a more attractive place to live. There was a similar reaction from neighbours near the Charles St. Papatoetoe site (CMP), where a disused existing commercial building was being repurposed and renovated. Both having an onsite security guard during the construction and more residents were seen as positive for the neighbourhood.

"I was quite happy when they start[ed] building this building because this area is so like it's not good area ... [and] when they started construction ... we are quite happy because we thought that 'oh now it's heaps of people moving in here'" (CMP3).

While more cars were not welcome, more people moving into neighbourhoods raised hopes, particularly in mid and higher socioeconomic areas, of more amenities and activity creating more of a local community.

"I'm hoping it's a good you know it's nice community feeling cause like it's been quite dead the past five years ... But I think ever since the apartments have come there's more ... like more positive people coming in" (CLM6).

"We've got with all these people coming, now we have a Zumba group that side, and we have groups this side, and more restaurants is opening up ... [it's] a positive hub you know ... it was grey before, very grey ... very dull you know" (CMM1).

"I hope that with everything going on in Takapuna, that Takapuna becomes a bit more lively ... hopefully it'll kind of boost ... Takapuna, because ... rent is just really expensive here ... there's not as many people that live here I guess, yet, so hopefully it'll kind of improve that" (CLT8).

However, not all residents saw the imminent changes positively. Some anticipated it would mean gentrification and feared their neighbourhood and community changing.

"[The neighbourhood is becoming] a very wealthy area, you know, there's still a varied mix ... [but when we move out] someone will buy this and flash it up and ... yeah the area's completely changed" (CSW4).

Others feared urban bustle would destroy the peace and quiet they enjoyed.

"This street [now] has a more city vibe, for some people it's great, for me it's not really my thing, so it is a bit sad, it takes away like that cosy sort of like quiet, neighbourhood

sort of feel, and makes it a bit busier and a bit chaotic but, yeah it's just the way it goes I guess" (CLT8).

How the neighbourhood might change due to the development was often unclear for participants. A lot of significance was placed on the character of the eventual residents.

"I mean visually it's changing it, I won't, I guess you won't know the full impact until I see the types of people that are living there" (CLG8).

The tenure, ethnicity and socioeconomic status of future residents were sometimes alluded to in derogatory ways.

### **Housing for 'Kiwi' Families**

A recurring association was evident between owner-occupation, standalone housing, a family environment and continuity in neighbourhood relationships. Families were seen as desirable as they create a community feel in the neighbourhood.

"Families help ... because you know they're actually going to put their roots down, more than just being transient" (CLG10).

The cultural connection made between detached housing in the suburbs as a 'normal' family environment compared to living in apartments remained a clear influence on perspectives.

"I quite like suburbs to be just normal housing for families. I don't mind apartments in Viaduct or in the CBD, I think that's more fitting" (CLM9).

Some interviewees remained unconvinced that MDH typologies could offer appropriate spaces for family life. The 'ghettos' trope was brought up several times when discussing some of the larger MDH developments.

"I totally understand that we have got to go up, but you are going to create ghettos ... with these tiny little it'sy-bitsy dog-boxes which nobody really can effectively live in. Like, you couldn't get married and have one or two children in one of these two-bedroom apartments because there is nowhere to put anything. Your kids couldn't have a tennis racket, they couldn't ... they probably wouldn't even be able to have soccer boots because there wouldn't be anywhere to put it" (CLT4).

The discussion of how to store children's sports equipment highlights different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate housing. In a few cases there was a suggestion that living in apartments simply wasn't a way of life in NZ suburbs and these developments might be catering for someone other than 'Kiwis'.

"It's just you know it's simply residential living and apartment blocks aren't the way of life here and you know even the construction of them is a bit abysmal really, you know you can tell that they're not ... really built for Kiwis either, you know, they stand out" (CSD2).

In several neighbourhoods, residents had lived there for many decades. A common theme for them when seeing a house demolished to make way for the new development was the loss of a familiar and meaningful place.

"That house was built when we shifted here ... your kids all grow up together, they go to school together, it just killed a lot of memories, a lot of memories. The one over here in

particular, my two eldest girls were very friendly with ... but all those memories just went down with the bulldozer" (CSO5).

This sense of loss and fear that change would destroy a cherished suburban way of life shows that the 'pavlova paradise' still has some traction.

#### 4.1.2 Building Impact and Characteristics

##### **Initial Reactions**

While there were participants strongly opposed to developments across the case studies, ambivalence, ranging from the more accepting to those who saw MDH as inevitable, was the most common initial reaction. For example:

"[We] have to accept the development, that's the main thing you know, you can't be in that same status for a long time ... that is my mentality" (CLM4).

Reinforcing the higher levels of acceptance in high-amenity areas, one interviewee stated:

"I was like oh it's quite normal ... when something like that pops up it's like oh ... it's just another apartments coming up. So yeah ... [with] the shopping malls and all the facilities you know it's quite standard to be honest" (CLG1).

A few participants were unaware a development was underway in their midst and unconcerned when their attention was drawn to it during the interview. Others knew of the development but beyond construction noise, reported a minimal level of disturbance. For example, one interviewee stated in response to the question about the initial impacts of the development:

"Nothing really. It's just there, but there is a lot of noise from it and sometimes it's through the weekend or sometimes it will be during the evenings as well which is kind of annoying, but when you live with it all the time you sort of just block it out" (CLG5).

As mentioned, initial reactions to developments were more negative in some locations than others. These negative reactions were commonly generated through the shock of the size of the building and how this might impact their home. In Devonport (CSD) several participants commented on the height of the development and expected that it would reduce their privacy and sunlight.

"[We were] absolutely horrified really cause we didn't really know how high they were going to be ... [When] we had an idea how high they were going to be ... we were horrified ... [they're] right in your face, I mean their windows look straight in to here ... we used to get lovely sun in here, but in the winter I won't because of this" (CSD4.)

Interviewees made similar responses about the size and site coverage of the buildings at the Westmere (CSW) and Takapuna (CLT) sites.

However, even in sites where a greater level of concern was expressed, there was acknowledgement of a need for more housing across the city.

"You're just conscious the whole time of 'NIMBY', and I mean they've got to build up, house the population and all the rest of it, so if all we have to do is suffer wealthy blocks of flats around us, so be it" (CSW7).

## **Building Design and Quality**

The designs of most study site developments were commented on favourably. A perception that the development was going to be of a 'high quality' was significant in improving local residents' acceptance.

"We're concerned, not concerned, but what's it going to look like? Is it going to look like you know a pretty average sort of house, or is it going to add value to the street?" (CSW8).

"Yeah some of these in the apartment actually, they really look cool, it's not like something I would personally move in, no, it's not for us, I more like an old villa or something, we always live in those like old houses ... and I like a garden" (CMM6).

Developments were viewed as acceptable by interviewees "as long as the new building is well designed" and "it's attractive enough ... and not cheaply built" (CSD8). Sometimes these favourable attitudes were tempered by concerns about other characteristics, such as size or location. However, even though the Soljack Place Mt Albert development (CLM) is large and dominates the surrounding area, mostly older detached housing, the development was seen favourably by most of the participants because it was considered a high-quality design and well-built.

"They've done a good job, it was a good construction" (CLM4).

Being on a main transit route and incorporating environmental features also added to its acceptance.

"I can see they put the solar panel on the top. It's quite good for the environment ... they're quite smart ..." (CLM7).

At another development in Mount Albert by the same developer, similar comments were made about the quality the build and design: "Going by my husband's words ... because he is a builder ... he said they're doing a great job, going by what he said" (CMM1).

Thus, believing an MDH development was well designed and of high quality seemed to help allay some residents' concerns.

## **Future Ghettos?**

Conversely, most negative comments about MDH related to perceived inadequacies of the design and concern that low-quality dwellings would not provide good places to live. Participants at study sites in higher socioeconomic areas were more likely to hold negative attitudes towards the liveability of compact dwellings, associating these types of dwellings with broader socioeconomic changes in the area.

"[Building] townhouses ... it'll just, it'll turn into English ghettos, all those, you know ... what happened in England in the 1970s ... I don't know why we don't learn from people that have already gone through this. They're exactly those ugly square blocks, which is basically like the Council flats in London" (CSW6).

As at the Takapuna site (CLT), the apartments being built on the Westmere site (CSW) are expected to sell for well over a million NZ dollars. It is therefore interesting that several participants at both sites discussed these MDH dwellings in terms of being future 'ghettos' and 'slums'. Given the increasing land value that has partially stimulated increasing densities in these suburbs, the

comments of these participants suggest that the presence of density is itself a signifier of a lower-class environment, regardless of the design, quality and cost of these new dwellings.

Additional comments suggested the dwellings were not appropriate for New Zealand lifestyles and would not be attractive to 'Kiwis'. For example, a Devonport resident:

"The architecture alone, it's a future box ... they just don't belong in NZ, they're future slums, they really are, they're just. I think the architecture alone ... the council has okayed you know substandard architecture, it's not nice" (CSD2).

Especially where it was thought MDH units were to be rented, there were concerns the buildings would not be maintained and would become future ghettos.

### **Dwelling Size and Adequacy**

Other comments focussed on the size and design of the buildings in comparison to their surrounding areas, with some interviewees questioning whether the developers could have done more to integrate the building with its surroundings. As noted earlier, large master-planned estates were often considered the ideal location for MDH.

Design criticisms were most commonly about the size of the individual dwellings. For example, smaller dwellings with fewer bedrooms were seen as inappropriate because they would not be suitable for families.

"What really bugs me is I think they should be at least two bedrooms, where they're housing families. You can't house a family in one bedroom" (CSO5).

Interestingly, this participant was not against the building of MDH and comments below quite favourably about another development where the dwellings are larger:

"My sister had a unit ... they were two-bedroom and they were beautiful little units. You could have a little family in there and everything. And then [here] they build one-bedroom unit, well, that's not a family home to me" (CSO5).

These comments align with those of participants from several other sites, who displayed an aversion to dwellings they deemed inappropriate for a family to live in.

### **Property Values**

Given media attention on the impact of MDH on property values it was surprising this topic elicited little discussion at most sites. Property values were most discussed by participants from the Westmere site (CSW). All interviewees here were homeowners and commented on their shock at the planned density of the three townhouses, while one suggested the house next door to the development would have lost considerable value because of it.

"[With] that thing built next to it, well they've got to have lost half a million dollars' worth of equity out of their house, because ... who would, when they rock up there go ... 'oh well it's a nice house but I've got 3, 3-bedroom houses next to it, that could be all renters'" (CSW6).

These residents also felt misled by the lack of consultation for a development several interviewees suggested was out of scope for their zone.

"We would have quite liked to [have known] ... what the plans were because then ... we might have sold the property two or three years ago ... Now if it's an eyesore and it's awful ... we've lost the view... [and] it's more difficult to sell" (CSW3).

At sites further out of the city, however, the impact of MDH on property values was often viewed more positively, with MDH seen as an investment in the area.

"The market price for these houses will be going up eventually ... it will definitely go up, 'cause I mean there will be more people coming out this way" (CLG1).

The most significant building impacts expected by interviewees, including most homeowners, related to their sensory experience rather than the value of their property.

#### 4.1.3 Future Residents

Possible neighbourhood impacts of MDH were inextricably linked with interviewees' hopes and fears about the types of people who would move in. A hierarchy of preferred residents emerged, with homeowners, families and professional couples generally being more favoured and renters, including public housing tenants and students, less favoured. Correspondingly, larger and 'higher-quality' dwellings were considered more likely to attract the former and smaller, poor-quality developments the latter. Public housing tenants as new neighbours were often discussed unfavourably.

The connection between the attractiveness of the development and the potential future residents can also be seen in the following quote. When asked whether the dwellings were attractive places, this interviewee stated:

"If they're maintained and I make that very, very clear, because it's the same as ... state houses, they look great, they get all done up and then someone goes in and then oh there's a broken car on the lawn then there's a tarp and then there's this ... So yes, if they're maintained, [if] people look after it" (CSD3).

While the hope that new residents would bring vitality to neighbourhoods was voiced in some sites, elsewhere residents only hoped their future neighbours would be quiet and tidy.

"What I'm thinking of it should be older couples would be better, yeah less problem for us, less disturbance for us" (CMP8).

A desire for the neighbourhood to remain unchanged underpinned these views, which revealed that many residents had little expectation or interest in interacting with their future neighbours.

"[I'd like] people that keep to themselves ... As long as they're quiet and non-disturbing that's fine" (CMP5).

"I have no idea [who will live there] ... all I'd like them to be is quiet" (CSW7).

When discussing the tenure type of future residents, it was clear that homeowners were always favoured over renters across the study sites. These comments were mostly, but not always, made by homeowners rather than renters. Repeating a familiar trope from the housing literature, renters were perceived as less desirable as neighbours due to higher turnover, a perceived lack of commitment to their local area, and for being less likely to keep properties tidy.



"Renters don't care. Owners on the whole do care a little more about their places and about the tidiness of their places ... when people own their own home, or when they used to own their own home, they kept it tidy at the front and on the street" (CMP2).

"Too many people to know. And in a way I'm assuming not everyone's going to be in that apartment for a long time. It's going to be different people in and out, in and out. So, new personalities, new relations every time. I don't think it will be the same. It won't be that family-orientated. It's going to be just really foreign" (CSO6).

In keeping with earlier comments there was an overall expectation that families, especially 'kiwi' families, would not be attracted to living in most of the developments. This discourse was particularly common in discussion about the larger developments.

"I can't see how you can bring a family up in one of those, in apartments but of course we're old school ... I mean they do overseas but ... we're not overseas ... this is N Z, why bring the overseas culture, or whatever here and try to make us do what they do" (CLT7).

These participants reveal the enduring attitude that attached housing typologies are not attractive to families, even when they offer similar levels of amenity as standalone housing. Further, considering whether families might be living in the new dwellings, some participants expressed negative viewpoints regarding the types of families they envisaged living there.

"They won't have a good life but also it won't attract... it just won't attract sort of ... it will attract itinerant people. People who come and go and maybe... it just won't attract the right sort of family" (CLT4).

These comments speak to the strong views that some residents hold against living in higher-density dwellings and the people they believe reside in them. The above quote suggests a logic that MDH offers a poor quality of life and therefore won't attract stable families, in turn leading to high turnover and problematic neighbours.

### **New Resident Numbers**

The potential for the numbers of new residents to impact the area was discussed with interviewees. Across the developments there were varying levels of concern. Traffic and parking woes and an expectation that the roads would be busier and noisier were key concerns. The level of concern had less to do with the development size and more to do with location. For example, while the Takapuna (CLT) and Soljak Place (CLM) developments were amongst the larger of our case studies, there seemed to be relatively little discussion about the number of new residents in the area. As noted earlier, the location of both these developments was mostly seen to be appropriate due to their proximity to main roads, public transit lines and amenities, such as supermarkets and shops.

Conversely, the Devonport (CSD) and Westmere (CSW) developments were the smallest sites, yet we found concern about traffic due to these developments was much more widespread. The argument being made centred on the geography of the neighbourhoods and the nature of the roads. Devonport interviewees commented on the area being a peninsular with an already congested single main road. Additionally, a discourse around Devonport as a 'village' and therefore an inappropriate place for development was evident.

"these [future residents] ... they don't know what we have to endure and it is, it's endurance. Devonport is a village, it should remain a village, it cannot handle the amount of traffic" (CSD2).

Positive attitudes towards new residents were also evident where it was anticipated new people could bring new amenities to the neighbourhood, a greater sense of community and increase the feeling of safety.

"I'm hoping it [will bring] a nice community feeling, 'cause like it's been quite dead the past five years. And a lot of bad things happen on our streets sometimes it's ... But I think ever since the apartments [are coming] there's more like what's you know like more positive people coming in" (CLM6).

As apparent in the following excerpt, greater diversity of residents in the area was also signalled as a possible and positive outcome of neighbourhood change.

"I want to see a mixture of people, I think for me getting older I want to see younger people around me, and hear younger ideas, instead of always hear the same ideas from the same old people ... I think it's good for everybody" (CMM7).

However, as noted in the follow sections. interest in diversity could be selective.

### **New Resident Demographics: Socioeconomic**

The socioeconomic position of potential new neighbours as well as household type determined where they fitted on the hierarchy of favoured new neighbours. Residents of higher density developments were at times assumed to be those unable to afford to rent or buy a standalone dwelling. Even where developments were being built as high-end luxurious apartments, such as those in Takapuna (CLT), there was discussion by some participants of them attracting undesirable neighbours.

"I think it's going to be a lower, a lower well yeah, a lower class of people" (CLT7).

Furthermore, these participants often made an association between higher density buildings in other countries and those being built in New Zealand, expressing concern that if lower socioeconomic households lived in the development it could become a 'ghetto' or a problem 'estate'.

"[It's] this huge kind of sore thumb sticking up and ... if you shove all these sort of lower income people inside of those things, do you get a situation like the estates in London, where it's like, they just go to shit?" (CLG8).

A counter-discourse was also apparent amongst participants who perceived the buildings to be high-quality, exclusive and aimed at high-end buyers – and more likely to be associated with owner-occupation and with families or single professionals.

### **New Resident Demographics: Ethnicity**

The impact of foreign buyers in the New Zealand property market has been an area of intense political debate, especially around the types of dwellings being built and housing affordability. A discourse relating to the housing preferences of new migrants was evident in some of our interviews, for example:

“Migrants might be happy living in those little apartments, but Kiwis probably wouldn’t, they’d prefer a little patch of land” (CMP5).

This discourse, usually with a disparaging tilt, was picked up in a range of interviews across all sites, but was particularly common in some. For example, several interviewees in Devonport (CSD) made comments such as:

“They’re advertising these as sort of like for the schools for taking Chinese students or taking in students and earning so much money that way ... I mean who would want it. But lots of Chinese probably would” (CSD4).

Similarly, in the Westmere site (CSW) an interviewee commented on how it was likely that these larger MDH dwellings would be occupied by “a large Asian family that’s multigenerational, or young Asian professionals that don’t mind living in a cramped [dwelling] ... at that intensity” (CSW5). Interviewees who commented that the occupants of the new dwellings would be “probably Asians” (CSD1) perceived direct relationships between this outcome and the development being an MDH typology. In several sites the developer and construction workers were identified as Asian or Chinese.

#### 4.1.4 Changing values, Changing Times

An increase in MDH developments was attributed by some interviewees to changing attitudes and expectations of New Zealanders, especially younger ones, towards housing. In particular, garden spaces were now seen as redevelopment opportunities. This was welcomed as a positive change and/or accepted as inevitable by some, while others bemoaned the loss of New Zealand’s traditional low-density property sections.

“[We have a] big garden, big back yard, full Kiwi, no it’s not a quarter acre but we’ve got everything here, [but] somebody [else] won’t see that ... [they] will take it away or bowl it and put up two or three units” (CSD3).

A more resigned perspective saw MDH as a necessary process in a growing city. Nostalgia for a previous urban form lingered but the necessity for change prevailed – so long as it was ‘done right’.

“It’s changing the feel of the central suburbs because characteristically Auckland always had villas and old bungalows and that’s what people love about it. But the demand is there for changing time, so I guess it’s a necessary change, but it has to be done right” (CLM9).

“I mean I’d love to have the old house back, and you know the hedge and everything, but we can’t all, one lady living in a house like that, where now we’ve got three houses there, you know it’s the way it is and we have to live with it and move on you know” (CSW8).

Critical for these residents was the need for the developments to be well-built and local infrastructure adequate or upgraded to cope with the increased density.

#### 4.1.5 Construction Impacts

Accounts of developer and construction worker practices varied greatly from site to site and significantly impacted on residents’ attitudes towards the development. Where existing residents had been informed that construction was about to begin and felt the construction workers were

'neighbourly', they tended to be more positive about the development. Developer practices most frequently mentioned related to: communication with residents during construction; noise and adherence to consented hours of work; the impact of construction workers' vehicles and delivery trucks in local streets; the presence/absence of building materials littering the street; and the courtesy, respect and neighbourliness of site workers towards local residents.

Participants praised the developers who had placed notes in local residents' letterboxes to inform them of occasions when there would be particularly noisy construction work or disruptions to local streets. The information was appreciated and seemed to reduce anxiety regarding these disruptions.

"They have sent us letters ... and said we can contact [them], but they are quite good in ... letting us know what's happening in the street, what's going to happen ... that's why I say I'm very impressed with them" (CMM1).

Conversely, a lack of information and knowledge about developments drove concern and anxiety and was read as disrespect for existing residents.

"[The developer] he's never come over and said anything to us, you know, knocked on the door and said this is what's going to happen da da da. No. I think if we were told what was happening, we'll be alright then I think, you know" (CSO3).

"We didn't have letters posted... all the people round here didn't know ... if they'd actually been really open with the community, I think the community would have been a lot more accepting of it" (CLG10).

Few problems, however, were reported in relation to construction noise or work going on at unreasonable or out of consented hours. In fact, it was common for participants to comment on their surprise at the lack of disruption to their lives caused by the development. Despite the larger size of MDH developments the disruptions were often seen as similar to the construction or renovation of standalone dwellings.

"No, I couldn't get over it, they didn't seem to be any hammering or anything, they've been very quiet, very clean and tidy" (CLM5).

Where there was a difference seemed to be with the work routines of the larger and smaller independent builders. For the larger MDH sites, construction work would follow regular patterns in normal working hours; however, at one of the smaller sites the work was reportedly being completed in a less routine way and this seemed to cause more issues for the local residents.

"Well the construction work has been interesting ... like work sometimes wouldn't start until 5pm ... and I think they're doing this as a separate project to their main line of work, so there was a lot of afterhours work going on, yeah 8pm it gets dark, so it's sort of gone on in fits and starts" (CSW8).

Significant differences were evident in developers' practices around construction workers' vehicles and the trucks coming and going from sites. At the Devonport site (CSD), a lot of the construction workers were being bussed in, which seemed to help with the traffic and parking situation in this busy area.

"Yeah and lots of, I mean they have their own cars, they park along this side, but they have buses actually bringing most of them as well" (CSD6).

The large development in Soljak Place, Mt Albert (CLM), is located on a small side street but considerate practices by the construction team were seen as limiting the disruption. Locals commented that they could see and hear the development was underway but as one interviewee observed:

"It didn't affect traffic or anything really. Sometimes they went over the road to get big trucks in or something like this, but it wasn't a problem ... I thought it would have affected the traffic with trucks and stuff, but it didn't really impact on it" (CLM9).

However, across other sites the story was quite different. The increase in traffic or disruption to the local roads caused by the construction work and construction workers' parked cars was a source of major irritation.

"...the biggest [problem] is the amount of parking on the road. Like the construction people ... have parked across our driveway ... we've had one towed" (CLT1).

In another large MDH development, construction workers had been parking on the grass in a local reserve, causing it to become muddy: "that whole area is just quite an eyesore, it's like a big mud patch at the moment" (CLM9).

There were also claims by residents at several sites that the construction workers were untidy and inconsiderate; as well as parking over verges and driveways, they left the area in a mess through littering. For instance, at the Takapuna site (CLT):

"Lots of the workers, while construction was happening, were parking here ... there was just nowhere to park. And an increase in garbage because they used to have their lunch here and then you walk down the street and there are cans of soda, packaging, gloves, lots of socks and all of those things on the street" (CLT2).

Construction workers leaving litter in the neighbourhood was mentioned by participants in the Otara (CMO) site as well:

"[The workers] have their lunch ... on the park and leave their rubbish there. So, my husband goes and picks it up ..." (CSO8).

At some sites, where local amenities, such as kindergartens and schools, were proximate to the development, there were worries about the safety of pedestrians, particularly children walking home from school.

"[At the kindergarten] the parents, they can't get their children safely out, children come out this back way from the primary school as well, there's a little walkway, and it's absolutely dangerous because they cannot cross the street seen ... because it's like wall to wall cars ... Yeah I've had many standoffs with the construction workers that are parked over our driveway" (CLG10).

The development site in Glen Eden (CLG) was the largest in the study and appeared to cause the greatest level of frustration for the local residents. The sheer number of workers and vehicles at the site impacted the local area in several ways: negatively, as noted in the excerpt above, but also positively as construction workers generated business for local shops and cafes.

Being seen to be respectful and tidy in the local area made a significant impact on local residents' attitudes towards the developer and construction workers. Activities like removing graffiti from

the worksite were seen as the actions of a good neighbour. The construction workers at the Mt Albert Development (CMM) were especially highly praised:

“Well I have to say they're amazing ... they're really tidy, there's a guy out there brooming stuff off the road, [he] comes to make sure that they can get in and out of their driveway, I mean probably [the developer] has got a good reputation for at least trying to be considerate, about the impact of dust and dirt...” (CMM6).

Key to residents' perceptions of developers and developments was the courtesy, respect and neighbourliness site workers showed towards local residents. An overall perspective was that suburban areas have a particular character and that developers need to respect that character, not only in the designs of the dwellings, but also in the way they act and interact with the neighbourhood around them. A lack of respect is highlighted in the comment below:

“[There has been] zero consideration for the fact that it's a residential environment. They're treating it like sort of mixed use ... mid-city development ... I work in construction, so I do understand, I do understand that you've got to build ... [but] If you're going to develop intensely in the suburbs you've got to respect your environment ...” (CSW5).

At specific sites, supervisors and managers were praised for being receptive to residents' issues – listening to residents' concerns and responding in a prompt and friendly manner.

“Yeah, so he will [sort it out] if we've got a problem with a truck or something like that, you know we've had countless ... He wants to keep us onboard as well, he wants to keep a friendly you know. I mean if there's any problem, I must admit he's very good” (CLT7).

Friendly and thoughtful construction workers at these sites were also noted:

“They have been very good, very clear, very friendly – I give them top marks. They haven't annoyed me in any way” (CLM5).

### **Developer and Council Practices**

A common perception of developers was that they were only interested in maximising profits and that there was little consideration of the local neighbourhood and the long-term impacts of the development: “they've just got dollar signs in their eyes” (CSD6). Interviewees had an equally common perception that council was not respectful of existing residents and unresponsive to their concerns.

Participants close to the Westmere (CSW) site felt particularly aggrieved at the council process. They had enquired about whether the building height was permissible under the Unitary Plan and remained unconvinced that it was – suggesting the developer had been granted consent to go over those limits by the council.

“Just how it's basically taken all the old rules out of blocking off your neighbours, looking in your neighbours you know all their back windows look directly in to their back yard, yeah just seems to be everything's out the window, the council just seems to change whatever they like you know” (CSW4).

The development was thought to be out of character from a legal standpoint, with the more active oppositional residents seeking information from the council:

“Our understanding of the zoning is that the intensification only came up to here and that that part of our street wasn’t supposed to have any, well it wasn’t zoned for that intensification ... [the neighbour] talked to council about it council said it wasn’t complying, but ... they still got a consent” (CSW5).

A perspective mentioned at the Otara site (CSO) was that developers and the council were overburdening places like Otara with increased housing developments because they weren’t respected as much as other suburbs:

“...they think, ‘Otara? Shove them all in Otara.’ Well, there’s nothing wrong with Otara. I’ve been here over 50 years as I said, and I will never shift out of the place” (CSO5).

There was a widespread perception that existing residents had no say – either with developers or council – concerning MDH developments being constructed in their neighbourhoods.

## 4.2 Post-Occupation Phase Findings

This section begins with a photograph and brief description of the six post-occupation phase study sites. The number of interviewees, their housing tenure, length of residence and ages are noted. This is followed by a thematic analysis of data gathered from 47 participants living near the MDH developments several years after the new dwellings had been occupied. Where views replicate those reported during the construction phase, they are given cursory coverage, with a more extended discussion of views directed towards changes over time.



**Raurenga Avenue, Royal Oak (PSR):** this small four-storey development of 12 units is in a mid-socioeconomic suburb, mid-distance from the city centre, and adjacent to the Royal Oak shopping centre. The entrance to Cornwall Park, the largest urban green space in Auckland, is only 200m away. Raurenga Ave is a residential street with mostly bungalows and modern two-storey houses. Many lots have been subdivided, with multiple dwellings down long driveways. Of the 8 nearby residents interviewed (3 owner-occupiers and 5 renters, length of residence 18 months–27 years, age range 30s–60s), 4 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland’s housing shortage, 1 disagreed and 3 were ambivalent. In terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 6 agreed, 1 disagreed, with 1 ambivalent.

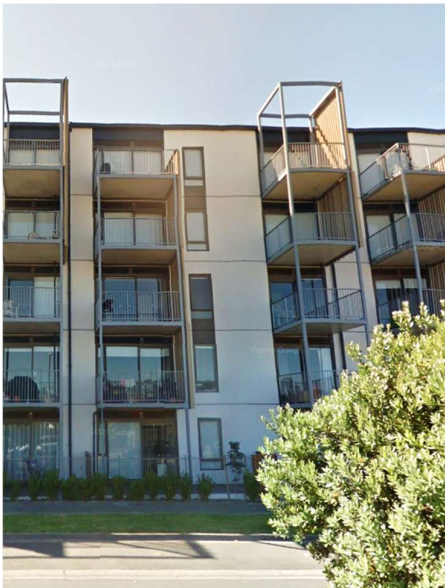


**Shirley Road, Papatoetoe PSP):** this small, three-storey 12-unit Kainga Ora corner-development is in an outer and low socioeconomic suburb. Many of the surrounding quarter-acre sections with their 1950's bungalows have been subdivided and infilled with single-storey multiunit dwellings. Of the 7 nearby residents interviewed (3 owner-occupiers, 4 renters, length of residence 2 years–16 years, age range 17–80s), 6 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland's housing shortage, and 1 disagreed. Regarding whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 3 agreed and 4 disagreed.



**Thompson Park Road, Mt Wellington (PLW):** this large four-storey 107-unit development constructed on a brownfield site previously occupied by storage garages is a mid-distance from the city centre and in a mid-socioeconomic area. Close to a park and opposite an early childhood centre, nearby dwellings are a mix of standalone houses on large sections and infill housing. Of the nearby 7 residents interviewed (3 owner-occupiers, 4 renters, length of residence 9 months–63 years, age range 20s–80s), 5 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland's housing shortage, 1 disagreed and 1 was ambivalent. In terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 2 agreed, 4 disagreed, with 1 ambivalent.

Image data: Google



**Bluegrey Avenue, Stonefields (PLS):** this is a large master-planned medium-density development mid-distance from the city centre with high levels of homeownership and high socioeconomic status. It is a mix of two-storey attached dwellings and five-storey apartment buildings. This site provides an interesting comparison to other sites because Stonefields has been specifically designed as a medium-density development. The residents living in the earlier stage two-storey attached dwellings surrounding the new rows of five-storey apartment buildings were those approached for interviews. Of the 9 nearby residents interviewed (all owner-occupiers, length of residence 10 months–10 years, age range 20s–80s), 8 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland's housing shortage and 1 disagreed. All agreed their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH.

Image data: Google





Image data: Google

**Great North Road, Grey Lynn (PMG):** this large, six-storey development of 24 large apartments with commercial premises (including a café and laundromat) on the ground floor, built on the site of a former car yard. On a corner of Great North Road, a busy arterial route, and a quiet residential street of well-maintained Victorian villas, it is in an inner and mid-socioeconomic area. Of the 7 nearby residents interviewed (5 owner-occupiers, 2 renters, length of residence 10 months–36 years, age range 30s–70s), 5 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland’s housing shortage with 1 ambivalent. In terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 4 agreed, 2 disagreed, with 1 ambivalent.



Image data: Google

**Holbrook Street, Blockhouse Bay (PMB):** a Kainga Ora development of 24 units in two three-storey apartment blocks and 5 attached two-storey dwellings on the corner of two residential streets, which replaced four existing state houses. Surrounded by single-storey bungalows, it is near a primary school and early childhood centre and in a low socioeconomic area, mid-distance from the city centre. Of the 8 residents interviewed (all except one of them owner-occupiers, length of residence 2–36 years, age range 20s–70s), 4 thought MDH was a good solution to Auckland’s housing shortage, 3 disagreed, with 1 ambivalent. In terms of whether their neighbourhood was a good place for MDH, 4 agreed, 2 disagreed, with 1 ambivalent.

#### 4.2.1 Development Characteristics

As in the construction phase, there was widespread recognition that MDH developments are best located proximate to a major road, public transit route, bus or train stop. The study sites that came closest to meeting these criteria tended to be seen as more appropriate and accepted by the residents. For example, a six-storey apartment building in Grey Lynn (PMG), a suburb known for the character of its many older villas, garnered a high level of acceptance, and location was an important contributing factor:

“The one in our area is very well designed, it’s new and it’s not that high and ... it’s on a very main road that leads in to the highway, so it’s not, doesn’t really encroach on our suburb even though it’s on the same block, it’s on a main highway, where you wouldn’t want to live anyway” (PMG4).

The apartment block is in a prominent position on a ridge, but it didn't replace or compete with the "beautiful old buildings" in neighbouring streets and was widely appreciated as being well designed.

"It's nice ... modern, it's pretty smart ... I did think it was quite interesting that it was on such a street where everything is quite old, you know sort of 1920s villas and bungalows ... but sometimes when older homes are no longer fit for purpose, the smart thing to do is replace them with a higher density property" (PMG2).

The notion of the new apartments being a better "fit for purpose" than the older homes and that it is "worthwhile to put money into good buildings" that will provide housing for a long time were also mentioned as positive attributes of the development.

It is noteworthy that the acceptance of this apartment block contrasts with the resistance noted during construction phase interviews in Westmere and Devonport, neighbourhoods with similar built environments and demographic profiles. A critical difference would appear to be the perceived appropriateness of the ridge location, which helped the apartment block fit well with the existing surroundings, as well as proximity to public transit. Residents had accommodated to its presence.

Being on the corner of a main road, the Royal Oak development (PSR) was similarly found to be mostly acceptable.

"It's not, it's not intrusive so to speak. It is on a corner site, it is on a main road, it's not blocking too many people's sun, all that kind of thing ... It is what it is" (PSR1).

As part of a large master planned environment, the Stonefields site (PLS) presented a different form of MDH to other study sites. The development – apartment blocks that were larger than the surrounding terrace houses – generated mostly positive responses. It was seen to fit well with the wider neighbourhood, and despite its scale, it was still complementary in character to the wider Stonefields development.

"I think in general Stonefields' [developers] obviously have thought about how everything looks relatively similar. So, it's nothing too offensive" (PLS7).

Local residents believed Stonefield's developers had worked hard to make sure the different dwelling types and sizes both fitted together and followed a consistent style.

In the construction-phase interviews, many existing residents commented that they didn't expect to have much interaction with the eventual occupants of the MDH development. In the post-occupation interviews, levels of interaction varied across sites. At the Grey Lynn site, little interaction was reported. One reason given was that there was no opportunity for interaction because the entrance for the apartment building faced the main road and not the residential side street.

"I suppose ... we know the neighbours in the houses, and I think that's important for community, but ... [we] never see the people [in the apartments] going in or out, there's somehow not the same opportunity to get to know them" (PMG5).

In Stonefields, interaction was again said to be low, with the apartment building's primary entrance through an underground and gated car park. This participant's only interaction so far had been to

tell one of the neighbours to be quiet: "I think the only time ... I have ever met someone was when we went out to tell them to be quiet at whatever ridiculous o'clock in the morning" (PLS4).

However, there were sites where interaction was noted by some of the residents. In Papatoetoe (PSP), an interviewee explained how she enjoyed having more people on the street and got to know a few of the residents from the new apartment building through the local church:

"I mean it's good, yeah, good to have more people in the street. Yeah, and interact with, get to know them, I mean we know a few people from those apartments, we go to church with them" (PSP6).

Likewise, an interviewee from Blockhouse Bay (PMB) said it was good to have new residents, particularly to have more families living nearby, and her child was now able to play with their children:

"I think more families, and old people as well, it's good ... because most of the people living there ... their child[ren] ... play ... here and they are good friends" (PMB8).

However, other residents reported little or no social interaction.

#### 4.2.2 Post-Occupation Impacts

##### **Car Parking and Traffic**

Car parking was the most consistent concern of interviewees in the construction phase and this carried through to the post-occupation phase.

"To put ... 12 units and five car parks, you know, it doesn't add up ... I mean you should see the street now ... you can't drive down here anymore, the cars ... [are] all over the place, on the grass and everywhere" (PSP1).

For many existing residents, more cars had had more impact on perceptions of neighbourhood change than more people. It was commonly thought that the increases in number of residents had led to an overflow of cars parked on the adjacent road. Even in master-planned MDH developments like Stonefields (PLS), the number of cars was causing concern on the roads and with on-street parking. As the following excerpt highlights, there was some suggestion that the type of households living in the homes at Stonefields may have differed to those intended by the designs:

"I've also noticed that there's more people living in dwellings in Stones, like there's a lot of flatters, so maybe if they're built for, say, three or four people, there actually might be five or six people living. So that, more than the apartments in a way, is putting pressure on the roads around" (PLS7).

The suggestion here is that were simply too many people now living and driving cars around the development for the infrastructure to cope with. As has been seen in other master planned MDH developments, such as Waimahia in Auckland (Witten et al., 2018), designing new neighbourhoods with reduced space for cars (i.e., narrower roads with reduced space for on-street parking) is problematic. When alternative transport is not provided, the car continues to dominate.

"There seems to be one bus ... so it definitely feels like it would take me a lot longer to get anywhere if I were relying on public transport, so hopefully more medium density

housing will enable people like [Auckland Transport] to better provide cost effective public transport as well" (PLS3).

Multiple cars per dwelling when only one space is provided per dwelling was noted across several sites. Parking was more likely to be identified as an issue than increasing traffic volumes. Notably, at sites located on a main road with good public transit connections increases in traffic appeared to generate little concern. However, it was a common concern for residents near new developments that were not located on main roads.

"Well it is mainly the flow of traffic ... the kids used to cycle around and play outside and there's no way any sensible parent would let them do that now ... it's too dangerous" (PLS4).

"...everybody is struggling with these things now, if I try to go out of my street, it always takes me like, 3-5 minutes ... even to get out my street" (PSP5).

Designs that kept the car parking internal to the development and concealed from the surroundings were praised by some interviewees for reducing the impact of cars and cars parking in the neighbourhood.

"I actually think the ones across the road are better looking ... you don't see the cars on the road because they have actually got the cars parked inside, which is better I think because you don't see all the cars on the road" (PMB7).

### **New Residents**

Post-occupation, most interviewees had little to say about residents of the new developments. Kainga Ora developments generated more discussion on the impact of the new residents than other sites. These comments mainly related to noise disturbances and the possibility of bad behaviour. However, at the post-occupation sites the majority of residents stated that their fears regarding apartments with public housing tenants were mostly not realised.

"I thought it would be a ... hole, that I'd be dealing with boons, broken bottles, violence, theft, yeah ... it had a negative impact on my mind ... [but] it's been, to be quite honest, it's been quite good actually" (PMB3).

Overall, any disturbance was considered to be on a par with what likely happened on other streets.

"There's just a few domestics, but you get that anywhere ... I think it's the norm ... You feel safe [here], you don't feel unsafe" (PMB7).

Noise disturbance was also mentioned at sites that were not Kainga Ora sites. However, beyond the aforementioned traffic and parking issues, the majority of interviewees had little to say, either positive or negative, about their new neighbours, with few having any level of interaction with them.

### **Building Impacts**

The impact of MDH developments on the privacy of residents in adjacent houses was a concern during both construction-phase and post-occupation interviews. Windows that faced directly into a neighbour's window were a particular concern and as this interviewee said, it affected the way they lived in their home:

"I can see [them] from here, and these people they never open those [blinds] either, they never open. Why? Because they have the same feeling probably like I do" (PSR7).

This participant had lived in MDH growing up in Europe and was supportive of building more compact dwellings, but objected to what they considered a design fault in the development next door, which reduced their privacy. They suggested that windows facing directly into neighbours' houses did not occur where they were from:

"They have to definitely [build] on another angle that you cannot [see] just straight [in], it is really like [looking] straight into the other person's life ... even if you don't want to you will" (PSR7).

Downsides of having an MDH development nearby were sometimes different to what had been envisaged. A Stonefields' resident, for instance, had anticipated they would suffer from the loss of sunlight due to the height of the new apartment building, however they reported that this "hasn't been an issue at all". Instead, they were surprised to find that:

"...the only issue that has really happened ... is the sound that travels from the apartments is phenomenal, so if there's a gathering in one of the apartments and we're in bed, it's like they're at the foot of our bed" (PLS4).

The impacts of MDH were therefore not always those anticipated. This includes impacts on property values. An anticipated negative impact of MDH developments on property values is regularly portrayed in the media as a great concern for local residents. However, the interviews revealed impacts on property values were considered both positively and negatively. Consistent with the hierarchy of favoured neighbours implied in the construction-phase interviews, owner-occupiers, in contrast to investors (renters), were seen as being more likely to raise values in the area:

"I personally like it ... it's bringing value to the neighbourhood ... especially ... where it's not investors that are coming in and just throwing money and leaving it and letting it rot if that makes sense" (PSR1).

Only one interviewee discussed a negative impact of MDH on the value of their house in the post-occupation phase interviews. Again, in keeping with the notion of a hierarchy, the development concerned was public housing.

Across most of the sites, the design and quality of the developments were often discussed favourably. Several interviewees noted that while they had been initially apprehensive, upon completion they had been pleasantly surprised by the design and quality of the building.

"Well it's funny because I ... [and] a lot of people who've been here so long, [we] think it's more attractive to live next door to that building ... actually I quite like the design of it, compared to a car yard ... I think it's nice that they've used black and wood, and it's not all just concrete" (PMG6).

A Kainga Ora development in Blockhouse Bay (PMB) received similar praise:

"To be quite honest, the construction when you look at it, generally is clean and tidy, they're million-dollar apartments, like they're built really well, and my initial fears, had been allayed because ... the construction looks quite good" (PMB3).

Conversely, the Papatoetoe Kāinga Ora development (PSP) was an exception, receiving mostly unfavourable comments from the interviewees.

Loss of sunlight due to the height of new apartments was a concern raised by residents in several construction-phase interviews, but in post-occupation phase interviews, (acknowledging they were not the same sites), the impact of loss of sunlight, for those who commented on this feature, was less than expected. For example:

“We were concerned ... [when] it became evident how high it was going to be ... But we lost probably half an hour to three quarters of an hour before the sun comes up over the top ... so it’s not a big deal” (PLS9).

Similar comments were also made by those who had been concerned about their privacy due to the height of the building, as shown in this excerpt:

“Early on ... we didn’t like it cause I actually thought that they’d be looking ... down on me, in the garden, in my nightie sort of thing. However, it hasn’t really turned out like that ... [it’s] not too overwhelming ... it does [overlook] but I don’t care, I don’t notice it any more” (PMG1).

In both of these examples, interviewees’ initial concern is partially realised but the impact is nonetheless acceptable to them. These comments illustrate how the effects of negative expectations regarding nearby MDH developments can diminish over time.

The impact of noise varied considerably within and between sites. Internal apartment noise worried the Stonefields’ (PLS) resident quoted above, but for others noise concerns did not materialise or were at acceptable levels, for instance:

“...even for the noise it’s just ... people talking, because we’re quite near to the apartments, but ... the noise is not really that much” (PSR8).

In Grey Lynn (PLG), due to the size of the apartments and their location on a busy main road, one interviewee commented that she felt it had probably made the street quieter by blocking out the sound of the main road and nearby motorway:

“Yeah I think we’re quite lucky, cause the developers done a really good job, like it’s up against a road that’s so loud and a motorway, so they haven’t done too badly, cause it probably blocks like some of the noise from the highway” (PMG4).

## **New Amenities**

New community amenities and more vibrant local businesses were positive outcomes hoped for in the construction phase at several sites. A more walkable neighbourhood and more amenities nearby was also a hope mentioned in post-occupation interviews. At the Grey Lynn site this had been partially realised with the addition of a drycleaners and a small café on the ground floor of the building. However, participants noted that café operators had struggled to turn a profit from the small space and while they appreciated having a new café in the neighbourhood, it had not become a popular local meeting point or part of the community.

“Yeah the café is a bit of a disaster ... it was a shocker ... The little laundromat’s good” (PMG1).

Several interviewees suggested that the space provided was neither practical nor large enough for the café to ever become a place the community would likely meet and socialise. In this instance the mixed-use goal of the development has had limited success in the eyes of neighbourhood residents. One participant commented:

“... having space to kind of congregate that’s actually [what] the neighbourhood actually enjoys” (PMG4).

In other areas there was still a hope that more people would help small business.

#### 4.2.3 Post-Occupation Attitudes

Viewpoints varied across sites from individuals who would move to avoid further intensification, to others who thought change was inevitable, through to those who accepted or supported it.

##### **Uncertainty and Concern**

In locations where the study site was the first or one of the only MDH blocks in the area, some residents feared that it could be the ‘thin end of the wedge’ and that the character of the neighbourhood would be lost. For instance:

“...this is probably going to get worse and worse ... eventually ... the whole area” (PMB2).

A participant who said they bought their home because of the open space was fearful that a Kainga Ora standalone dwelling next door might be replaced with MDH. If that happened, they said:

“that might be a trigger for me [to move] ... that’s too close” (PLW6).

In the two Kainga Ora post-occupation sites (PSP, PMB), there was some uncertainty expressed around how residents would behave and whether they would cause trouble in the street.

##### **Resignation**

A strong theme through the post-occupation interviewees was a shift from concern to resignation. Reasons for this shift in views included accepting that housing affordability and sprawl were major issues in Auckland and that maybe MDH would help. For example, while lamenting the loss of the neighbourhood’s old villas, the interviewee quoted below believed the pressure for more housing required increasing urban density:

“Well I do like this amazing old housing stock that we have here, I mean I think it’s really unique and interesting and as soon as you start to infiltrate it too much it sort of loses its character. But I don’t think it’s realistic for it to remain like this ... because otherwise you’re just going to get sprawled, so ... even though I like it as it is ... I can’t really say that’s the best thing, given the pressures on the city” (PMG1).

At most sites there was no known coordinated opposition to the developments. In the few cases where there had been some sustained opposition, the post-occupation phase interviews revealed resignation and the exhaustion of options.

“[Some neighbours] said they would [oppose], but in the end fighting it became quite stressful, so we just walked away ... [they] had done a lot of fighting ... we’re kind of over it, after yeah” (PMG6).

For those who maintained a sense of concern and antipathy towards the MDH development, there was a sense of powerlessness to change decisions through the planning process. Others had quickly realised they had few options available to oppose the development, and had little expectation that their individual concerns would be listened to:

“What would I say would to stop it? That’s what I feel. I’m only one person; ‘oh that silly woman across the road she’s moaning about it’s going to block out the sun, it’s going to make it difficult for parking, or people coming to her place, there’ll be cars all around’ you know? I’m just one person, would anything be done? Would they have halted it? I doubt it” (PMB2).

### **Ambivalence**

Residents often had much less to say about the new development and MDH in general during the post-occupation phase compared to during the construction-phase interviews. They would often note that since it had been completed, they had little interest in the building. Over time the development had seemingly become just another part of the neighbourhood for local residents.

“To be honest, I mean once you’ve seen it ... when you’re living here all the time, I don’t take any notice of it anymore” (PLS2).

The limited selection of interviews conducted with residents who had moved in after the development had already been completed revealed the presence of MDH in the neighbourhood was not an issue.

“I didn’t even think much about it when I moved here. I did say – ‘nice place’ ... no, I said ‘wow there are apartments there’ – because they are pretty new” (PSR2).

Although the thought of moving was an initial response of some interviewees who were neighbouring residents, pre-construction and pre-occupation, including the person commenting below, over time concerns dissipated.

“Well, to be honest, we were a bit [concerned] ... we were planning on selling because we thought it could potentially affect our property, but it hasn’t so we’re kind of glad we didn’t move” (PMG7).

The interviews did reveal some accounts of neighbours who had moved because of the construction of an MDH development; for instance:

“People panicked when that was going to be [built], they panicked ... [some neighbours] sold and ... re-bought [elsewhere] in Stonefields” (PLS1).

“As soon as [the development] happened ... they packed up ... I sort of felt a bit sorry for them, because they had a beautiful view from up the top of their place. Their kitchen looked straight across to the Waitakeres and it was beautiful. But they lost that” (PMB4).

Other interviewees emphasised that they never considered the option of moving: “No ... I’m not moving ... whenever [you] move to the next place, then a few years ... again ... people [are] going to do a large development there, at least I know the guy next to me ... I’m quite alright” (PSR5).

However, it must be noted that methodological constraints mean only those residents remaining either during the construction phase and post-occupation were participants in this study.



## Acceptance

Beyond ambivalence about MDH, there were also expressions of acceptance amongst interviewees at all study sites. In Stonefields (PLS), the master-planned nature of the development meant that the construction of new apartments was not a surprise and the level of acceptance was high.

“I’m not particularly concerned ... we knew that there’s that space there that’s going to be filled ... I think most people come into Stonefields knowing that those spaces are going to be eventually filled” (PLS9).

There was also a sentiment that MDH developments were being built all over Auckland and not just in their neighbourhood: it was to be expected.

However, at sites with fewer nearby previous examples of MDH, there were interviewees who were shocked at discovering an MDH development was being built nearby. It was particularly the case for those residents who first became aware of the development only as construction began.

“I just ... [remember] being shocked that it was being built all of a sudden ... not too much worried about it, but it was just a shock” (PMB6).

Although, as suggested above, after the initial shock, the eventual impacts of the development were often found to be less than expected. The statement below suggests that this positive experience of MDH might lead to greater acceptance towards future developments.

“The impact was actually less than we were imagining, which is a pleasant surprise. You know, I’m all for growth ... that whole ridgeline should be apartments ... they get great views and that sort of thing, but it’s just unfortunate for the people that have villas right next to them, I mean ... it’s kind of inevitable, growth, and so you just have to accept that” (PMG3).

There remained a common reverence for standalone housing, with statements about the traditional character of New Zealand suburbs, however, this was checked by a recognition of the general need for more housing in Auckland and the potential for MDH to provide more homes.

“Probably that’s about the only practical way ... people have got to live somewhere, so I think it’s inevitable that it’s going to go up” (PLW1).

## Support

Support for the development of MDH in residents’ neighbourhoods was rarer than acceptance, but it did occur in the Grey Lynn (PMG) and Royal Oak (PMR) developments, where major transport infrastructure and amenities were nearby, and at Stonefields (PLS), which was intentionally designed for MDH. Support for MDH as a way to meet future housing needs is evident in the comment below from a Grey Lynn local:

“It’s not just a bloody great box thing ... I quite like that, I think ... [these developments] might solve [affordability] problems at the right price ... because let’s face it individual housing like this is unaffordable in New Zealand, our children are never going to, the next generation cannot, but you know maybe [with MDH] they can” (PMG6).

Stonefields and its unconventional suburban form stood out for providing a master-planned neighbourhood where MDH is integrated with local amenities and green spaces. The variety of dwelling types, sizes and designs at Stonefields was also viewed favourably; it was seen as visually

attractive and provided “the opportunity for the community to be more diverse ... because not everyone can afford a \$1.5 million standalone house” (PLS3).

## 5. Discussion

Media portrayals of neighbours fervently opposed to new MDH developments in their streets feed a popular discourse of resistance to urban intensification. But do these portrayals represent the views of residents living near new developments that do not generate headlines? The aim of this research has been to answer this question. By interviewing neighbours of new MDH developments, we have provided a snapshot of views on acceptance and resistance to such developments across the socially diverse suburbs of Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Most previous investigations of neighbourhood reactions to MDH have focused on social and affordable housing. The unique contribution of this study is the inclusion of a broad range of MDH types and tenures.

Many of the common tropes opposing MDH in low density environments linger in our data set: that they do not provide appropriate housing for 'Kiwi' families; in time they will become ghettos; that they destroy the peace and quiet of residential neighbourhoods; and they lack privacy and will reduce the privacy of others. Counterbalancing positive views were also evident. For example, MDH can replace under-utilised sites and older, cold and damp housing with 'fit for purpose' warm dry homes; they are more affordable than standalone housing; and more people in the area was seen as good for local businesses.

### 5.1 Housing Design, Quality and Location

Site location, perceived attractiveness of the design and build quality were crucial variables that determined acceptance or resistance to new developments. When the scale and style of new developments contrasted strongly to those of existing housing, they were more likely to generate a negative response, disturbing residents' affective relations with their local area (Devine-Wright, 2009). Also, as Gross (2007) observes, when such developments are perceived to be 'imposed' inappropriately upon a place by 'outsider' organisations or agencies, without public engagement, the sense that they are a threat can be heightened.

Location was pivotal to acceptance. Developments on a main road, close to public transport, a retail hub and other amenities were likely to be seen as appropriately located. The Grey Lynn development, situated on a prominent ridge on a site previously occupied by a car yard, was viewed as an ideal location on both counts. Conversely, MDH placed in the middle of a suburban street of mostly standalone houses was considered far less ideal.

Design appeal was also critical to acceptance and, while views varied within and across sites, positive comments on design and quality were forthcoming at 13 of the 14 study sites and several developments were highly praised by neighbouring residents for providing attractive, high-quality housing. The legacy of New Zealand's construction and legal leaky homes crisis, which has plagued public perceptions of MDH since the late 1980s (Bryson, 2017), was surprisingly absent in our dataset, possibly because the MDH case study sites were either under construction or relatively new builds. This may suggest the negative taint of past poor construction practices on new MDH developments is declining.

Residents' fears relating to MDH design discussed during the construction-phase interviews included loss of sunlight and privacy. There was concern that an MDH development next door, or nearby, would reduce participants' privacy as apartment dwellers could look down upon them from above. While acknowledging the post-occupation sites were in different locations, it is

interesting to note that reflecting on the impacts of the developments on their lives, it was not uncommon for participants to say their earlier concerns around privacy and sunlight had been less than they initially feared. However, a design feature that caused considerable angst was where the windows of their home faced directly into the living and bedroom spaces of the new dwellings.

## 5.2 Social Relations of Place

Viewpoints around housing typologies were inextricably linked to notions of who are 'good' and 'bad' neighbours and who lives in various types of dwellings. Housing discourses, commonly reported in the academic literature, relating to what we have called a 'hierarchy of favoured neighbours', were rehearsed, but simply recast in an MDH context. Homeowners and families were seen as the most desirable neighbours because of beliefs that they would be stable, contribute to the social relations of place, and keep their homes and gardens tidy. Also, because MDH complexes were often associated in participants' minds with small dwelling sizes and lack of outdoor space, they were considered unsuitable for 'Kiwi' families. Renters, including students (with investors and the state as owners) were the least favoured neighbours, as well as being the people participants considered most likely to be housed in MDH. These findings suggest shifting public attitudes towards greater acceptance of MDH will in part require decoupling, or at least loosening, associations between housing type and household type. Promoting examples of MDH lived in and loved by families would be a useful starting point. Similarly, greater exposure to well-designed examples of affordable MDH housing, and challenging stereotypes of their occupants (Davison et al., 2017), are needed to enhance the standing of this form of housing as a relatable and acceptable neighbourhood typology.

Kainga Ora has embarked on an ambitious public house building programme across Auckland. Homes on large sites are being demolished and replaced by new MDH developments, many a mix of state, affordable and privately owned homes. Resistance to Kainga Ora developments in existing neighbourhoods, and their inclusion in master-planned estates (e.g., Hobsonville Point, Waimahia), has been noted. During construction-phase interviews a number of interviewees talked of their fears for, or experiences of, state housing tenants (most notably in emergency housing) disturbing their otherwise quiet neighbourhood street. Two of our post-occupation sites were Kainga Ora developments and for almost all interviewees, the tenant-related problems they had anticipated prior to the dwellings being occupied had not materialised. In addition, the housing was generally viewed as being of high quality. The notion that MDH developments were being unfairly imposed on their neighbourhood was evident in several sites, but was more common at the Kainga Ora study sites.

The impact of MDH on property values was mentioned by only a few participants and differing views were recorded in higher and lower socioeconomic areas. In lower socioeconomic neighbourhoods the presence of new MDH was talked about as undermining the neighbourhood through gentrification (and increasing property values). On the other hand, in higher socioeconomic neighbourhoods there was some suggestion that MDH was undermining the social standing of the area and reducing property values. Although concern around property values is regularly reported in mainstream media, as noted it was a minority view in our study. It was apparent in our post-occupation data that where such concerns had been held, they had not been realised over time. These findings align with studies elsewhere that have found perceptions of

negative impacts on property prices from higher-density residential developments can be exaggerated and often do not eventuate (e.g., Bramley et al., 2007; Kupke et al., 2011).

The affordability of MDH over detached housing was noted and, given the high costs of housing in Auckland, providing more affordable housing was seen by many participants as a good reason to accept MDH in the neighbourhood. However, others felt that, irrespective of the building type, most new housing built in Auckland was likely to remain priced at an unaffordable level for many people looking to enter homeownership.

### 5.3 Transport Infrastructure

Adequate public transport infrastructure is essential to public acceptance of urban intensification. If public transport is inadequate, new developments generate increased competition on the roads. More people means more cars and more cars produce competition for on-street car parking spaces, especially where there is limited (or no) provision for on-site parking for MDH residents. Lack of provision for parking cars was a universal concern and the most consistent critique of how MDH is being rolled out in Auckland. There were also high expectations that more people moving into neighbourhoods should bring investment in new and improved commercial and recreational amenities.

From an urban planning perspective, MDH close to public transit and other amenities is advocated as a smart growth strategy with desired benefits for containing urban sprawl and reducing car dependency and traffic congestion. Although the desirability of locating MDH close to public transport was widely understood, the potential to reduce urban sprawl through more compact urban development was seldom mentioned. Siting MDH close to public transport was more likely to be appreciated for increasing general liveability and reducing traffic volumes than tackling sprawl, and this was mostly discussed in locations where the proximity of new housing to transit had been achieved (e.g., Mt Albert, Glen Eden, Grey Lynn). As has been found in medium-density master-planned developments elsewhere, there was some exasperation expressed over a perceived disconnect between residents' lived experiences of struggling to access workplaces and other routine destinations and council plans to reduce car parking spaces and encourage more environmentally friendly travel behaviours, despite viable transport alternatives being unavailable to residents (Witten et al., 2018). The urgency of improving public transport availability if intensification is going to work for residents, increase liveability gains and keep traffic volumes at bay, was obvious.

### 5.4 Council Processes and Developer Practices

In keeping with recent studies in Australia (Davison et al., 2016) and New Zealand (Dolan, 2018; Salmon, 2015), lack of trust in developers and the Council consenting process fed community opposition in several sites. Residents did not always understand the zoning rules for developments and were shocked when their expectations did not match reality. Suspicions were voiced at several sites that deals detrimental to residents' positions, such as development bonuses allowing for an additional storey, may have been done between council and developers. A lack of communication from the council or developer was interpreted by some as disrespectful.

However, there was also praise for the communication and on-site practices of several developers and their on-site workers. Being seen to be respectful and tidy in the local area made a significant

impact on residents' attitudes towards developers and construction workers. Activities like removing graffiti from the worksite, clearing construction and personal rubbish, informing residents when more disruptive activities were to occur, were considered to be the actions of a good and courteous neighbour. At some specific sites, supervisors and managers were also praised for being receptive to residents' issues – listening to residents' concerns and responding in a prompt and friendly manner.

## 5.5 Acclimatising to Density

Are Aucklanders becoming more accepting of higher density living? Our findings suggest a continuum of viewpoints. Opposition to MDH was still evident at one end of the continuum, with acceptance and support for MDH just as evident at the other end.

The research suggests processes of post-suburbanisation and a reimagining of suburbia (Johnson et al., 2018) are well underway with growing acceptance of a diversity of dwelling forms within Auckland's suburbs. While there is nostalgia for an idealised past of detached family housing on generously sized lots, it was also apparent that many Aucklanders now accept and expect to see greater housing diversity in their neighbourhoods. Pressing concerns regarding the crisis in housing affordability seem to be a driver of this acceptance, with MDH seen by many as having the potential to provide good places to live for a widening range of households. Prejudice against residents of MDH and renters of affordable compact housing types is well documented (e.g., Davison et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2013; Tighe, 2012) and similar negative attitudes about renters and apartment dwellers were evident in our current study, mostly in our construction-phase data. Renter transience, fear of MDH becoming future ghettos and a belief that MDH is only attractive to migrants and not 'Kiwi' families were all mentioned. However, our post-occupation phase interviews indicated these concerns regarding the future residents had not materialised. Interviewees displayed much less concern about the character of MDH residents, with several stating their relief to find the neighbourhood had changed little since the new dwellings had been occupied. The only exception was the impact of increased traffic and parking problems where this was attributed to the number of new residents. This replicates the findings of Davison et al.'s (2017) study of Sydney and Brisbane where host neighbourhood residents reported little impact from MDH developments on their neighbourhood.

In light of previous studies, we anticipated a high level of resistance when interviewing residents during the construction phase of development and that this would dissipate over time as new residents settled into their new homes and neighbourhood (e.g., Davison et al., 2017; Nematollahi et al., 2016). As said above, while this was largely true, what surprised us was the level of ambivalence many interviewees had to new developments, even during the construction phase. There was a recognition that Auckland needs more housing and it has to go somewhere. Some sites were favoured more than others and in general these were the types of locations being encouraged by local government – along main roads and close to public transport routes. Greenfield sites were also identified as suitable locations for MDH, with the success of master-planned developments like Hobsonville Point and Stonefields noted.

The MDH developments located on major roads, with good public transit connections and local amenities were the sites where the most positive post-occupation attitudes were recorded, indicating higher levels of local resident acceptance. The Grey Lynn and Royal Oak sites provide clear examples of this situation. The Stonefields development had high levels of acceptance

without good public transit connections due to the master-planned nature of the whole site and its medium-density neighbourhood design – however, there was ongoing major impacts on local residents from traffic volumes and on-street parking, likely due to the disconnect between design choices that minimised the space for cars when there remains insufficient provision of good public transit options to the neighbourhood.

Conversely, those developments that were located on local roads and not in proximity to amenities generated the least positive responses, with residents more likely to discuss their uncertainty and concern about the future of their neighbourhood. Both the Blockhouse Bay and one of the Papatoetoe post-occupation sites were Kainga Ora developments and sited at distance from a main thoroughfare, and this appeared to have increased the concern of local residents about how their neighbourhood was changing due to the new housing.

## 5.6 Limitations

Our classification of developments as small, medium, and large, was based on the number of individual dwellings in a development. While simple, this categorisation does not always reflect either the size of the development (as individual dwellings vary greatly in size), or its visual impact. For example, a row of three-storey terrace houses will have a different visual impact to a six-storey apartment block comprising the same number of dwellings. Nonetheless the diversity of developments included in the study has enabled an appreciation of the neighbourhood impacts of developments of various types, sizes and scale.

Ideally, we would have interviewed residents during construction and post-occupation phases at the same developments, but a non-alignment of development and research timelines make this difficult to achieve. Further, it is possible that some residents strongly opposed to the development may have moved from the neighbourhood by the time post-occupation interviews were conducted. If so, their views will be missing. Conversely the two phase methodology based around different sites allowed a broader coverage of MDH locations, development characteristics and resident groups.

## 6. Conclusion

MDH is being constructed at pace in Auckland's suburban neighbourhoods. As other New Zealand cities follow this path, experiences of increasing MDH development across Auckland's suburbs offer important lessons for the country. The growing acceptance of Aucklanders to more recent examples of MDH demonstrate practical steps that can be taken to increase community acceptance of new types of multi-unit dwellings.

The goal is to move people along the continuum from opposition to acceptance. The design choices made by developers and the actions of professionals involved in the delivery of new MDH developments can influence the level of acceptance or opposition they generate. Early examples of MDH in Auckland often performed badly for their residents and suffered from a range of design faults with lasting impacts on attitudes to increasing suburban density. However, our report provides evidence of growing familiarisation and acceptance of MDH within Auckland's suburbs, driven in part by a shortage of affordable housing in the region and better examples of MDH becoming visible across Auckland's suburban landscape.

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## 8. Appendices

### 8.1 Interview Schedule

1. How long have you lived in \_\_\_\_\_?
2. Have you heard of the new development? How did you first hear about this new development?
3. What were your initial reactions to the idea of a medium-density housing development being built nearby?
4. How has/is this development impacting on you and your household?
  - a. Noise and traffic?
  - b. Any positives?
5. How do you imagine the development will impact on you and your household once it's completed and people have moved in?
6. Do you keep an eye on the progress of the development?
7. Is there any local neighbourhood discussion or organisation related to the development?
8. Have you had any contact (formal/informal) with the developer or the construction company involved in the development?
9. Do you think the development will have an impact/put pressure on the local services, amenities or infrastructure?
10. Has it changed, or might it change, how you get around the neighbourhood?
11. Would you say there is sense of community around here?
12. Where are the local meeting places? Where are places you might bump into people from your street or nearby streets?
13. In what ways do you think the neighbourhood could change with the new development and its residents?
14. What could the developer do to make the development more beneficial to the neighbourhood?
15. How does the MDH development make you feel about your neighbourhood?
16. What type of people do you think will move into the development?

#### **Auckland Housing**

1. There has been a lot of talk in the media about a housing shortage in Auckland, do you think more housing is needed?
  - a. Could medium-density housing help provide more housing?
2. Do medium-density housing developments fit within Auckland suburbs?
  - a. If they don't, what is it about them that does not?
  - b. How do they fit? How could they fit?
3. Are there places that medium-density housing could be appropriately provided?
  - a. In this area?
  - b. Around Auckland?
4. Do you think medium-density housing, such as terraces, small apartment buildings etc., provide an attractive place for people to live?
  - a. Particular types of people?
  - b. People you know?

## 8.2 Questionnaire

### Community acceptance of medium-density housing



Name:

Location:

Demographic information:

Length of residency in current dwelling	
Tenure type*	
Household type**	
Age	
Gender	
Ethnicity	
Employment status***	

\* renting/ home owner

\*\*one person/couple/ family/extended family/other

\*\*\* working/ not working/ retired/ caregiving/ studying/other

#### Questions

1. Medium density housing is a good way to solve Auckland's housing shortage

Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree/disagree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

2. This neighbourhood is a good place for medium density housing

Strongly agree    Agree    Neither agree/disagree    Disagree    Strongly disagree

3. If agree – main reason why?

4. If disagree –main reason why not?

5. Which locations are the BEST location for medium density housing?

- Inner city
  - Near shops and public transport
  - In suburban streets
  - In new greenfield subdivisions
  - Other
-