

Streets ahead

Golden river run has given a classy look to the exposed concrete roadpaths.



Tauranga is expanding at astonishing speed, producing such mega-developments as The Lakes, a town-sized residential project that will become home to 7000 people. BY GAVIN RILEY

There is no other region in New Zealand quite like sunny Tauranga for unstoppable growth.

Its population has soared by 75 percent over the past 20 years and it is set to overtake Dunedin in 2008 and Napier-Hastings in 2012 to become New Zealand's fifth largest city.

Despite working to a comprehensive SmartGrowth blueprint, Tauranga is growing much faster than city planners ever predicted. For instance, SmartGrowth's projections were exceeded by nearly 1000 new homes in the four-and-a-half years to March 2006, the equivalent of 2500 new residents.

Much of the runaway increase is being driven by an influx of the later-middle-aged and elderly, raising questions about the types of infrastructure needed in order to keep up.

Meanwhile, local developers and contractors are doing their best to satisfy the demand.

A larger-than-life example of the upmarket residential development taking place in Tauranga is The Lakes, which on its 254 hectares will eventually have 2100 homes and a population of 7000 – equal to that of the neighbouring town of Te Puke.

The Lakes will also feature 56 large sections of 3000 square metres and two hectares of commercial buildings.

The residential area will comprise standard residential sections, medium-density sections, possibly some three-level apartments, and one or more retirement villages.

The commercial area will be a small suburban shopping centre comprising cafes, a garden centre, a hairdresser, and the usual convenience shops. There will also be a childcare centre and a comprehensive medical centre.

Extensive parks, reserves, children's playgrounds, lakes, walks and cycleways will be features of The Lakes, which is close to a proposed 71 hectares of sports grounds and recreation facilities.

Included in the project is the eventual 4.6 kilometre extension of Tauranga's Route K expressway to Pyes Pa Road, the earthworks for which are likely to begin in the near future.

The Lakes is being developed by Grasshopper Farms Ltd, which is also head contractor. Grasshopper has divided the project into three stages.

The 300,000 cubic metres of earthworks for stage one began in January 2005. RPL Services of Tauranga was responsible for some 230,000 cubic metres and Hick Bros Civil Construction of Auckland completed the remaining 70,000 cubic metres.



Some of Hick Bros' heavies ready for earthmoving action. By the time The Lakes is completed, Hick Bros will have carried out earthworks totalling nearly 1.9 million cubic metres.



Hick Bros began the stage-two earthworks last September and hopes to complete the task of moving 600,000 cubic metres of cut-to-fill and 200,000 cubic metres of topsoil and unsuitable material by the end of the season. The challenge of moving 1,000,000 cubic metres on stage three awaits the company in September or October.

Bob Hick is hoping stage three will be more straightforward than stage two, which has been hindered recently by wet weather.

"The weather was better from September to December [than now]," he says.

"Just before Christmas we started to get a bit of rain, and since then we've had some quite long spells of wet weather.

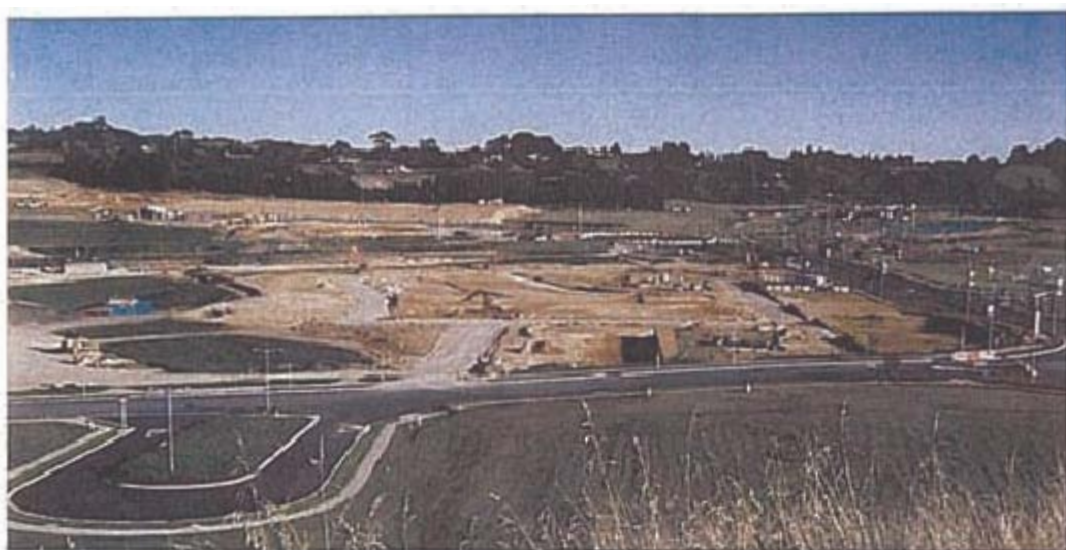
"The soil conditions here are quite wet. It's variable from good to materials that are much wetter once you get down a bit, so we're using a D7 with swampy tracks. You couldn't use a bulldozer on conventional tracks.

"Even with diggers and Moxys you have trouble getting the softer layers in."

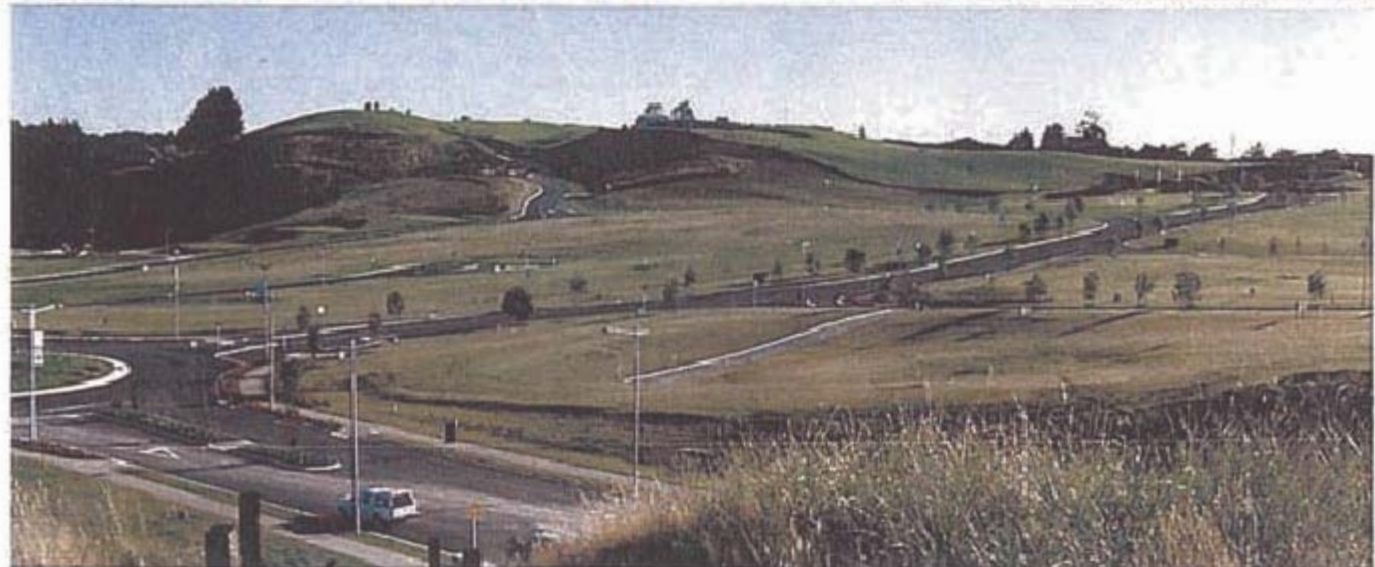
Hick Bros has four Moxys 35-tonners, four excavators, two 615 motorscrapers, eight D7 bulldozers with scoops and 28 staff on the job, but Bob Hick says he may have to call up "a bit more grunt" to finish stage two on time because "we're probably beginning to lag a bit behind due to the weather".

Award-winning Tauranga company Supacrete has supplied concrete for The Lakes project since February last year, initially for a pump station and bridge, then for the footpaths and associated work.

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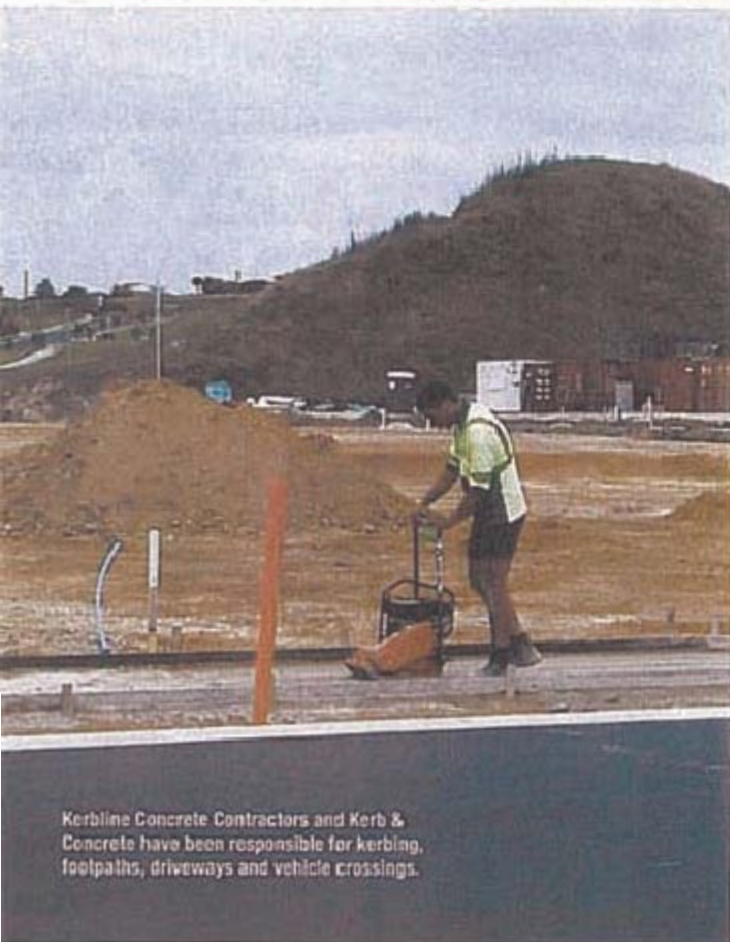


THIS PAGE: Some of the stage-one roads completed by Higgins Contractors.





Supacrete began delivering ready-mixed concrete to the site in February last year.



Kerbline Concrete Contractors and Kerb & Concrete have been responsible for kerbing, footpaths, driveways and vehicle crossings.

Supacrete associate company Kerbline Concrete Contractors and Kerb & Concrete between them laid eight kilometres of kerbing and 13,500 square metres of exposed aggregate footpaths, driveways, and vehicle crossings last year up to Christmas. Kerbline had 12-15 staff on the job and Kerb & Concrete 10-12.

"Tight time parameters saw concrete delivered to the site most days, keeping all parties working together to obtain the same goals," says Supacrete's Jeff Burgess.

He says an example of the quality of the The Lakes development is the golden river run supplied by Riverlea Sands in Hamilton for the exposed concrete in the footpaths. River run (round pebbles from rivers and creeks) is usually grey or black and Burgess says the use of gold river run gives The Lakes' footpaths a "high class" look.

Drainage contracts on the project have been carried out by Connell Contractors of Hamilton and Mitch Clements Ltd of Tauranga.

In the middle months of last year Connell installed a 300mm-diameter deep-trunk sewer main at depths of 8.5-10 metres, a task Dave Connell says was difficult due to the wet, heavy soils.

For the past 14 months Mitch Clements has had three three-man drainage crews installing stormwater and sewer pipes to a depth of three metres on stage one of the development. He estimates his company's work will be completed at the end of May.

Clements maintains last summer was wetter than this one but says his teams have had no difficulty coping with the heavy soils, even in winter.

"Because of the nature of the job you have to guts it out. We're pretty well resourced to handle all that stuff." >>>



Lakes will be a feature of The Lakes development.



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Higgins Contractors began work on the project's stage-one roading in early June last year and finished the last of the asphaltting in mid-February. In that time the company's Bay of Plenty team completed 30,000 square metres of pavement, which has a 25mm asphalt concrete layer as its finish.

As Contractor went to press, Higgins was preparing for pavement construction of 4500 square metres of roading in The Lakes' retirement village.

Higgins project engineer Mike Wellington says the stage-two roading programme is due to start in March. He is hoping that if the late-arriving summer is late finishing, "we may be able to carry on into May, by which time most of the [stage two] earthworks will be done".

Grasshopper's planning and development manager, Simon Maxwell, says his company is carrying out all the landscaping work at The Lakes, with four full-time staff and access to part-timers as required. Grasshopper also employs permanent survey and project-engineering staff and has two Leica global positioning systems on site at all times to enhance the speed and efficiency of the civil works.

Maxwell says The Lakes' 2100 homes will consist of 400 in stage one, 600-800 in stage two, and 900-1100 in stage three. Stage two should be completed in mid-2008 and stage three in 2012.

He estimates the civil works for the three stages will total \$80-\$100 million.

All this ongoing activity, not only at The Lakes but at other residential developments in fast-growing Tauranga, is good news for local contractors.

As Kerb & Concrete's Craig Calder says with undisguised pleasure: "It's the sort of work we like to see happening. I don't think Tauranga's alone in having this kind of growth."

"But in the last few years we've had some good developments happening around the place. I don't think it's going to slow down yet."