

Major milestone coincides with a green epiphany for Steller



11 Central Avenue

By Willow Aliento

5 August 2014 — Melbourne developer and builder Steller says its 11 Central Avenue residential project in Moorabbin has become a catalyst for a greater emphasis on sustainable design and green building principles, with the project also taking Steller's multi-residential portfolio up to the \$500 million mark.

Steller managing director and founder Nicholas Smedley said City of Kingston required the project to meet the high standards of the Moreland Energy Foundation's Sustainable Urban Development Framework, which incorporates [Sustainable Design Assessment in the Planning Process guidelines](#). City of Kingston is one of 16 councils that have agreed to implement SDAPP in relation to development applications.



Nicholas Smedley

Mr Smedley said the outcome has proven to be “quite a selling point” for the project and, furthermore, has given the firm a blueprint for sustainability that will now be rolled out across all its developments.

“We had to benchmark the project in each of five categories on a world scale and a local scale,” Mr Smedley told *The Fifth Estate*.

The five categories comprise energy, waste, sustainable transport, sustainable products and materials and sustainable water management.

“Council gave us the tools to achieve the outcomes, and there was a good collaboration between our sustainability advisors, council and the development team,” Mr Smedley said.

“It was not too much of a cost to do what was required.”

The \$22.5 million Central Avenue development is a six-storey building comprising 45 apartments and ground floor commercial tenancies due for completion in December 2015.

Following the implementation of the recommended design and specification refinements, it is expected to achieve a 6.5-star NaTHERS energy rating across the development. The use of natural light and ventilation has been maximised, and a solar hot water system will be installed on the roof.

The building design was oriented so there are no apartments with only south-facing solar access, improving both passive warming in winter and minimising the solar burden on glazing in summer. Internal corridors have been designed to be naturally ventilated, reducing the need for common area mechanical systems use, and improving the ability to cross-ventilate apartments. Energy-efficient LED lighting is being installed throughout all the apartments and common areas.

Bucking the general trend in terms of apartment appliance fitouts, electric clothes dryers are not being installed. Instead clothes drying racks are being installed in bathrooms and on balconies, and body corporate rules will allow outdoor clothes drying on specific days.

All apartments will have temperature and energy meters installed, and a “welcome pack” will provide information on how to best manage the apartment for energy efficiency. Mr Smedley said it is expected the majority of apartments will be purchased by owner occupiers, something which is generally the case across Steller’s projects in middle-ring suburbs.

Rainwater harvesting is being installed, with a 13,000-litre capacity storage. This water will be used for amenities flushing in the retail tenancies and 16 of the apartments in the lower floors, as well as for landscape irrigation.

As Steller is also the builder, a construction waste management plan is being implemented that includes refining the design to maximise materials resource efficiency, and making a commitment to a minimum of 80 per cent of any construction waste being recycled.

In terms of resident waste management, Mr Smedley said recycling would be encouraged through providing large receptacles for recyclables and only small receptacles for general waste

for each apartment. Information on waste separation will also form part of the residents' information kit.

The development is located within walking distance of Moorabbin train station, is serviced by five bus routes, and has a walkability score of 87 out of 100, reducing the need for car use. Secure bicycle parking is also being provided in the car park area.

As a general rule, Steller has selected all its development sites based on council growth zones, proximity to public transport, community centres and shopping centres. Every development site purchased within the last two years is located within walking distance to a major supermarket.

Local manufacturing trumps China

In terms of the materials footprint, Mr Smedley said for all Steller projects the kitchens and bathrooms including joinery are sourced from a local Dandenong-based manufacturer. This both reduces the carbon footprint in terms of transport and improves control of the project supply chain.

"We were tossing up offshoring of manufacturing, but we did the cost analyses and China could not beat the pricing in Australia," he said.

"Because we are our own construction company, we break everything down to its smallest element [in terms of costs]. And the easiest way to control costs and cut risks is to use local suppliers."

In the apartment interiors and common spaces, raw and exposed finishes including polished concrete will be used to reduce materials use. Where finishes are being applied, all paints, sealants and varnishes will be low in volatile organic compounds. Also, E0-rated particle boards and FSC-certified timber have been specified.

These sustainability initiatives have been standard across Steller's other developments, as is the use of timber flooring.

Assessed against the MEF's benchmarks, the Moorabbin development will achieve a 28 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from energy use, 66.5 per cent reduction in peak energy use, 101 per cent reduction in potable mains water use, and a 102 per cent improvement in storm water quality.

The downsizers

Steller was founded in 2006, and employs approximately 100 staff across the development, construction and property sales divisions. To date the company has delivered 402 apartments in projects in the established suburbs of Melbourne's north east, including St Kilda East, Frankston, Bentley, Glen Huntley, Carnegie and Noble Park – all part of the older, established suburban areas with excellent public transport infrastructure that Professor Peter Newman identifies as ideal for medium-density redevelopment.



Truganini Road, Carnegie, Melbourne

Steller also has in the planning pipeline 466 apartments across six projects in Bentley, two in Carnegie, one in Hawthorne and one in Rosebud, with construction on all expected to start by the end of 2014. These projects will incorporate the new sustainability approaches developed as part of the planning and design for Central Avenue.

As a developer, Mr Smedley says the firm has focused on delivering medium-density and low-density residential projects at prices around five per cent lower than market standard for the particular area. This, he says, results in a shorter holding period and a more rapid turnover, facilitating the ability to move quickly onto new projects.

The market for Steller properties has been largely owner-occupiers, particularly downsizers. For this reason, floorplates are generally large, and a focus put on ensuring a level of amenity comparable to a detached dwelling. This includes increasing the amount of private open space for each dwelling to ensure they can function as liveable outdoor spaces, and where possible leaving any large established trees on sites in place.

“Most downsizers will be looking to live in their apartment for 10-15 years. So they care about things like natural light, and the energy rating and the cost of heating,” Mr Smedley said.

“These are the people who two or three years ago would have been looking at a villa unit, but those are now selling for \$1.2 to \$1.3 million in somewhere like the City of Glen Iris, and their house is probably going to sell for around \$1.5 million, which means they do not end up with much left over to top up their retirement income after selling the house and buying a villa.

“A three-bedroom apartment – and we can’t get enough of the three bedroom apartments for this market, they are extremely popular – bought for around \$800,000 leaves quite a substantial amount left over from the sale of a home.

“Our whole mantra is a high quality product that is affordable. We would rather sell-through properties quickly and pass on the savings.”

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