



Taking the Long View to Affordable Living

By Poppie Johnson

January 2024

Wānaka is one of the country's most picturesque locations; stunningly beautiful, laid back, and a great place to raise a family. Yet for those who have lived here for many years, secure housing is an unobtainable dream.

QLCHT has over 1100 eligible households on its waiting list with an average income of \$73,000. With average house prices well over \$1.5 million dollars, that's simply not enough income to even think of purchasing. It also makes renting expensive - if the households are lucky enough to find a rental.

The Trust has had to think big, because this is not just a housing crisis, it's a social crisis that is affecting the community on a multitude of levels.

Longview is a development in Hāwea that has a chance of solving part of that problem through the Queenstown Lakes District Council's revolutionary inclusionary housing approach. The master-planned community offers a mix of one to four bedroom homes and is set to transform the lives of many families.

Among those who have benefitted are Luke and Rebecca Hughes. They have lived in Wānaka for more than 15 years, their daughter is about to start Year 7 at Mt Aspiring College, and after a long struggle, they are happily expecting their second child this year.

They're true locals, both employed at Mitre 10 where Luke has worked his way up from the shop floor to Retail Operations Manager, overseeing over 30 staff, whilst Rebecca works part-time on the shop floor.

Their journey to homeownership would have been impossible without inclusionary housing. "We found out we were pregnant with our second child and then got offered an opportunity to buy one of the houses

out at Longview within a space of a few weeks," shares Rebecca. "We'd been on the list for six years, and getting a home here felt incredible,"

Rebecca went along to an information night with Westpac and QLCHT, and followed up when an email came through about Longview options. They missed out on the first house but had a second chance when someone else was unable to follow through on the opportunity.

"This is our home. With properties way out of reach for working families like us, this is a great way to get on the ladder. And it gives us security," says Luke.

The Hughes family and their security are the goal that sits behind tremendous forethought, contributions and support from a range of stakeholders throughout the district determined to solve the problem. Universal Developments, under an agreement with QLDC, is gifting 58 sections to QLCHT - a collaboration that demonstrates the effectiveness of public-private partnerships in addressing community needs.

These homes are designed to cater to a range of housing requirements, including public housing rental, affordable rental, rent-to-buy, and the Trust's Secure Home ownership programme - the route the Hughes have taken.

The Hughes have bought the home and pay ground rent on the land, but save significantly on the cost of the land itself. It's a neat solution, which sees them in a brand new, warm, dry, and healthy home for under \$430,000 - a hard ask in any part of the country, let alone Wānaka.

Luke smiles as he talks about how fortunate he feels, "You could probably move somewhere and buy a house for that, but it wouldn't be a very nice house, it wouldn't be home. I don't want to move away from this district."

They were able to use their KiwiSaver and access the Government's First Home Grants, an advantageous scenario that neither really knew about before sitting down with the bank manager. "It was just so simple. The bank worked really well with the Trust, and they all made every step so easy," says Rebecca.

"The programme gives us both security and flexibility. We can sell back to the trust after three years and are guaranteed to get out what we paid plus an adjustment for inflation and maintenance. But for as long as we want, this is our home. Hypothetically, if the housing market completely utterly crashes and we have to sell, we'd still get out what we've put into the house so we won't lose any money. It's brilliant."

With baby number two on the way, Rebecca says she can finally feel secure, grow from the roots that she has established over the last 20 years and provide a warm, dry, and stable home for her family. "It's made a huge difference knowing that we've got that security, we can relax. We've got that bit more room, bit more space, and it's so warm."

"The emotional difference it's made is just immense," adds Luke, "I think, for me, having my own house adds a sense of pride."

The allocation of these homes has been a life-changing event for many. So far, eight Wānaka families have been successful, five of whom have been able to purchase under \$430k with an average ground

rent of \$117 per week. This achievement is significant, considering the rarity of such affordable home ownership opportunities in the Queenstown Lakes district.

Additionally, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is supporting the project with a 15-year interest-free loan through its Progressive Home Ownership Fund, an initiative to increase alternative forms of home ownership in New Zealand.

The journey for Longview is just beginning. More allocations are set to continue throughout this year, bringing hope to many more families. The significant support from developer Lane Hocking, who handed over 58 titled sections for community housing, further solidifies the project's foundation.

By providing affordable housing options and addressing the dire need in the Wānaka area, Longview is setting a precedent for how communities can come together to solve pressing societal issues.

Each section and home is a family that stays in the district and makes a lasting contribution. These are people like Luke and Rebecca Hughes who have inextricable links with the fibre of the town, its people, and its land—the essence of what makes Wānaka a community rather than just a tourist destination.