

Developers sense a shift in sentiment



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Another tough year has failed to dampen the spirits of many in WA's land development sector, with key players gearing up for a brighter 2018.

TUART Gardiner acknowledges the past few years have not been easy for those in Perth's land development business.

He says 2017 was a good example, with the latest data from the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia showing a 17 per cent decrease in residential lot sales in the 12 months to September.

But Mr Gardiner, who is Frasers Property Australia's general manager for residential WA, said the latter part of 2017

Recovery may mean different things to different people; for me it's bouncing along at a steady pace with volume returning to the market - Stuart Gardiner

> had, anecdotally at least, proved more fruitful.

> The national property group made a decision last year to place home sites at its 30-lot Seaspray Island development at Port Coogee back on the market, having removed them from sale three years earlier.

> First released in 2008. five of the unsold 13 lots were re-subdivided to create eight smaller lots, ranging in size from 336 square metres to 582sqm, following a strategic review of the Perth property market.

The other five residual sites remained at 733-776sqm.

Mr Gardiner said all the properties had sold within the last six months of the year, with the larger sites averaging \$1 million per

"That has really given us confidence," Mr Gardiner told Business News.

"Seaspray is a high-end marketplace, but if that top end starts to move then the bottom end usually starts to as well, it's just a matter of time.

"We're now in a position to bring more stock to the market; within a month we'll be returning to Port Coogee with more stock.

"What we'll be releasing won't be waterfront lots, although they will be in close proximity, with pricing ranging from \$485,000 to \$515,000."

Beyond the Seaspray Island sales results, Mr Gardiner said the residential land market as a whole was starting to show signs of improvement.

"I'm seeing signs of recovery," he said.

"Recovery may mean different things to different people; for me it's bouncing along at a steady pace with volume returning to the market.

"It all comes back to confidence; if people are confident they're going to have their job in 12 months, get a pay rise, or whatever their (favourable) personal

situation, then that's great for property."

Emerging signs of improvement across a range of other industries in WA were assisting to spark consumer confidence, according to one of the state's stalwarts of residential development, Nigel Satterley.

Mr Satterley pointed to a number of drivers for rising sentiment in WA: the record amounts of LNG exports to Asia; overseas demand for WA's wheat and other resources such as iron ore, gold and lithium; and the \$5 billion worth of upgrades to the state's shopping centres, which will create jobs for tradesmen.

"These things are real things that are happening and helping to encourage confidence," Mr Satterley

"I think we can see the bottom in sight, and we'll start this year where we can see that people will feel more comfortable about their jobs and, hopefully, more comfortable about buying property.

"There's an oversupply of existing homes and rental properties are still high, so 2018 is still going to be very competitive and hard work.

"I don't think the volumes will pick up a lot, but I think at the end of it (2018) there'll be some good signs that we are now hopefully entering that soft recovery phase."

Activity

Data from the Urban **Development Institute** of Australia WA shows 2017 recorded the lowest number of lots under construction in 11 years, at 9,889 (excluding the December quarter), down from a peak of 26,826 in 2014.

Lot approvals also continued to decline in 2017, with 2,173 final lot approvals recorded by the Housing Industry Forecast Group in the June quarter - less than half of the 2015 peak of about 5,500 approvals in the same quarter.

The average price of lots has also dropped over a 10-year period from \$318,706 in 2007 to \$233,907 in 2016 - partially due to the size of lots decreasing from an average 527sqm to 382sqm.

The first micro-lots, at 80sqm, were introduced to WA last year. UDIA WA chief executive Allison Hailes said this reflected a broader market trend towards more product diversity on offer at new land developments, which had created different price-points and more affordability.

"While there were some decreases in sales activity in selected areas, for the most part 2017 was generally a year of stabilisation," Ms Hailes told Business News.

"Our data shows that, during the September 2017



CONFIDENT: Stuart Gardiner says he's seeing signs of market recovery, evidenced by the increase of sales at the developer's Seaspray Island in Port Coogee. **Photo: Attila Csaszar**

quarter, sales activity was steady and the decline in average prices ceased.

"In fact, the average price of land increased a moderate 1.1 per cent in the September quarter to \$234.837."

Ms Hailes said these results were despite the government ending its \$5,000 boost payment to first home buyers six months early.

"UDIA categorically called the bottom of the market during 2017 and we are now confident that we will see steady, incremental growth in the residential land market over the coming 12 to 24 months," she said.

Perron Group chief executive Ross Robertson is also optimistic about the year ahead, after coming off a challenging 2017, with price reductions and rebates widespread across its two growth corridors – Piara Waters and Baldivis.

Mr Roberston said the group was preparing several of its land bank properties in Treeby and Baldivis to convert to active estates over the next 12-24 months, while its joint venture with Peet to develop housing authority land at Brabham was due to start this year.

"Overall we remain positive on the medium-term outlook and expect to see in 2018 an increase in volumes and prices to start firming," Mr Robertson said.

"Not dramatic but an upturn."

Cedar Woods Properties state manager WA Ben Rosser said he had started to see an uplift in activity in the second half of last year across the business's 12 active projects.

"We're seeing increased demand now and there have been opportunities where we've been able to increase prices, not everywhere but in two locations we have," Mr Rosser told Business News.

"If we would have said that 12 months ago, no-one would have believed us.

"Our employment numbers are now stable, interest rates historically low and the costs of producing land are as low as we've seen.

"Over the past six months, particularly within the north-east and inner south-east corridors, things are really starting to move again.

"There is stability coming back into the market"

Cedar Woods launched its new 273-hectare Bushmead estate located in Hazlemere off Midland Road in June last year, where two thirds of the

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land will be reserved as parks and a recreational reserve.

Mr Rosser said sales had been strong so far, with the site's natural bushland offering a point of difference to other stock on the market, such as the ex-farming land in Baldivis.

The group had another five projects in various stages of approval.

"We've got good sales strategies for our projects and the market is responding to that," Mr Rosser said.

Investment

Brown-Neaves

Investments, headed by residential veteran Gary Brown-Neaves, added to its land bank in 2017.

Chief operating officer Brad Headling said that, since its establishment in 2016, the business had grown its portfolio, which comprised its flagship Brightwood Baldivis project (1,165 lots), The Living Edge in Wellard (195 lots) and two other estates – Flamewood, Brabham, and Beenyup Grove, Byford, which were part of syndicates.

Brown-Neaves Investments' current pipeline will bring 3,800 lots to market in the next 10 years.

"We've been quite active and added more lots to the Brown-Neaves investment portfolio last year, so we're continuing to grow," Mr Headling told Business News.

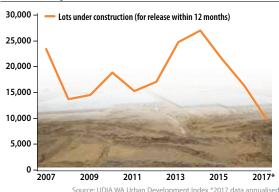
"Everybody is looking for an improvement and there have been early signs of that throughout the back end of 2017.

"I think there'll be greater consistency for 2018."



ACTIVE: Ben Rosser says sales at the new Bushmead estate have been strong. **Photo: Attila Csaszar**

Lot development



Mr Headling said the business was actively looking for more partnership opportunities.

"I think it's a good time to invest here," he said.

"And that's why you've seen a few deals by some of the listed players in the Perth market."

The state's most active land developer, **Stock-land**, made the largest public investment of 2017, acquiring three parcels of

land for \$91 million (see page 20).

The ASX-listed company purchased sites in Sinagra, Baldivis and Brabham from three different undisclosed vendors, comprising a total 385ha.

Stockland general manager WA Col Dutton said the business was constantly assessing opportunities, regardless of where the market was.

"We believe we're near the bottom of the land cycle," Mr Dutton told Business News.

"Established markets, the economy and jobs have shown signs of positivity, so it's about trying to make the right assumptions to purchase.

"We actively look for opportunities as part of having a longer-term rather than a here-and-now approach and track things like where infrastructure, like Metronet, will be provided, and where land uses may change."

The group currently has six active residential communities, where first home buyers had made up the majority of purchasers, but Mr Dutton said more upgraders and downsizers were coming back to the market and

expected this trend to continue across 2018.

Politically, Mr Dutton said the state government had made some good calls for the industry, such as the decision to pull together the two land agencies, the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority and Land-Corp, to target a more coordinated approach to development.

Planning Minister Rita Saffioti also announced the establishment of a new planning reform team in 2017 to better streamline the planning and approvals process.

"I think this has set the industry up well for the New Year," Mr Dutton said.

"The market feels more positive, but I think the real indicator will be the first two quarters of 2018."

Acquisitions fuel Urban growth

Urban Quarter has taken a countercyclical approach in building its project pipeline, securing more than \$70 million worth of freehold land developments in the past four years.

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THE tide is turning on the oversupply of titled land in Perth that has resulted from slow population growth and challenging economic conditions since 2014, according to Urban Quarter general manager Stuart Reside.

The Perth-based developer currently has six major projects on the books, representing about 3,000 lots and an end market value of more than \$700 million, with half of these purchased in the past four years.

Formerly Wallis Property, Urban Quarter was established as a one-man consultancy by now managing director Jason Wallis in 2004, launching its flagship (and ongoing) project Bletchley Park in Southern River, 12 months later.

It has since grown to a team of 10, led by Mr Reside and senior development manager David Barham.

By keeping the team small, Mr Reside said the business had developed a culture that enabled it to operate on a more personal level with buyers, government agencies and stakeholders, which he saw as an advantage over larger players.

"We've been able to grow at a challenging time," Mr Reside told *Business News*.

"In acquiring new land parcels, Urban Quarter seeks to be counter cyclical and use the financial capacity of the group to set up low-geared projects. We always look for land with amenity.



FORESIGHT: Stuart Reside (left), David Barham and Jason Wallis have created a diverse portfolio they hope will put the business in a good position for the next market cycle. **Photo: Attila Csaszar**

We've been able to grow at a challenging time

- Stuart Reside

"We have a good range of projects delivered by a relatively small but experienced team, competing with some of the bigger organisations around town.

"If you're operating in this industry on a shoestring, or if you buy a project badly or get forecasts significantly wrong then you can come unstuck – fortunately we've been able to avoid those pitfalls.

"Everyone wants to be countercyclical; we're not pioneers by any stretch, it's just what we try to do and I think we've been able to execute it reasonably well over the past few years and hopefully put ourselves in a good position for the next cycle."

The group's latest acquisition is a 140-hectare parcel it has called East

on the Beach at Eglinton, 40 kilometres north of the CBD, which it plans to develop over the next 10 years.

Work at the Eglinton coastal residential precinct will begin later this year, with the potential to also include a major service commercial business park located between the future Mitchell Freeway extension and Wanneroo Road

Other recent acquisitions include the 1,150-lot Springtime in Haynes development, a private estate of three villages south of Perth, and Dunsborough Lakes, which the group purchased in 2014 and changed the masterplan to create larger blocks for families.

Mr Reside said projects across the group's total portfolio regularly provided a combined 200-400 developed lots to the market each year, placing Urban Quarter among the top land developers in the Perth market.

Urban Quarter is currently ranked seventh on the BNiQ Search Engine's list of land developers active in Western Australia, and is one of the youngest organisations in the top 10 (see page 20).

"In the six months to December 2017 we have seen sales increase some 150 per cent compared to the same period in 2016," Mr Reside said.

"That 150 per cent growth is on low values, so it's great to be up by 150 per cent; but we're not high-fiving just yet, we're expecting things to trend upwards slowly.

"Early signs are positive that this current level of demand will continue through 2018.

"We've seen major developments open up in most of the growth corridors, which has created a competitive marketplace in the land development industry.

"So although the oversupply position is being reduced, is not going to turn around quickly – it's going to take some time."

He said government spending on major infrastructure projects would provide a catalyst for growth and provide opportunities for the industry.

"Projects such as Elizabeth Quay, Perth Stadium, the Scarborough beachfront redevelopment and Busselton airport expansion will act to generate improved tourism demand, which will flow through to population growth," Mr Reside said.

"We've got a good pipeline and time will tell really.

"Perth is a unique location in the world; it's safe, has a great climate and is supported by industry exports that are needed all over the world, and for those reasons I think we'll keep growing."



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28 28

RANKED BY NUMBER OF WA LOTS EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETED FOR SALE, CURRENT FINANCIAL YEAR

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Managing infill-greenfield mix

LandCorp is boosting land supply across Perth's established suburbs, but it's just a small step towards achieving long-standing goals for urban infill.

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More than 4,000 dwellings have been created across LandCorp's infill development sites during the past five years, providing development opportunities on previously underutilised sites.

The chief executive of the state's land development agency, Frank Marra, said recent sales results for these sites had bucked sluggish market trends for residential land, new homes and apartments.

He said LandCorp's approach to revitalising established neighbourhoods close to existing or improved amenity and providing a wide range of housing choice – medium-density, townhouses, semi-detached and low-rise apartments – had underpinned the success of many projects.

"Western Australia is on the cusp of a new wave of thinking in the way we develop communities," Mr Marra told *Business News*.

"Density is no longer a dirty word as evidenced by the popularity of our infill products across Perth.

"Diverse infill housing can also improve affordability for a range of households, including young adults who may be entering the rental market or looking to buy.

"More housing located in inner and middle-ring suburbs will ensure our cities remain liveable into the future, and are able to support demographical changes, including an ageing population."

Across 2016-17, 88 per cent of the 777 dwelling unit equivalents LandCorp created were within its urban infill projects.

Among the city's most active developers, West Perth-based Blackburne says it has sold more than 80 per cent of the 143 Essence apartment development at Land-Corp's Claremont on the Park project, with construction starting last month.

In addition, all 72 lots at Land-Corp's Blackmore Park Estate in Girrawheen are under contract



RENEWAL: Subdivision and sales are already under way at the Parkside Walk infill project at Jolimont, located on a 3.6ha site which had sat vacant for more than 20 years. **Photo: LandCorp**

less than three years since the first release, and all lots are either sold or under offer across its first two stages at Shoreline North Coogee, which launched in 2015.

Other recent infill developments include St John's Wood in Mount Claremont and The Rise in Craigie, with all lots across both estates under contract within 12 months, and all lots at Regent Park in Wanneroo transacted in just over a year.

Within the past year, Land-Corp has also released lots at its 3.6-hectare Parkside Walk estate in Jolimont, land vacant since 1994 after the City of Perth nursery closed, and started work at its Montario Quarter precinct in Shenton Park, on the former rehabilitation hospital site.

Despite this activity, Mr Marra said current urban infill rates were still below the long-term target set by planning authorities.

In 2010, the Department of Planning and the state Planning Commission released the 'Directions 2031 and Beyond' report proposing an infill target of 47 per cent of new housing; the same figure was reiterated in the '2015 Perth and Peel@3.5million' draft document.

"Unfortunately, due to a variety of obstacles, current urban infill

4,000 + URBAN INFILL DWELLING UNITS CREATED ACROSS LANDCORP PROJECTS SINCE 2013

rates are around the 28-30 per cent mark in Perth," Mr Marra said.

He said Metronet would be key to facilitating future infill development across Perth, a catalyst for developing and revitalising activity centres, facilitating housing diversity and a move towards a more transit-oriented approach.

Innovative design also had a role to play in the next stages of Perth's evolution across both infill and greenfield sites, according to Urban Development Institute of Australia WA chief executive Allison Hailes.

"It's also important to think about future land development in the context of new technologies, particularly in terms of infrastructure provision," Ms Hailes told *Business News*.

"Rather than relying on a centralised system for power and water, new land developments will be able to use microgrids and distributed networks to service communities, enabling them to become

self-sufficient and less reliant on large, traditional infrastructure."

Ms Hailes said LandCorp's Shoreline North Coogee, the Rosehill Waters precinct in Guildford, and Yolk Property Group's Established Apartments project were among the infill developments that had used environmental and energy initiatives to achieve sustainability outcomes and EnviroDevelopment certification.

"There is a need for both infill and greenfield development as there is demand for both," she said.

"We are certainly seeing a growth in buyers that are looking for more compact living options in both new and existing areas, but we shouldn't forget that a significant proportion of Perth buyers are looking for a backyard and their own space.

"The success of Perth into the future will be dependent on us delivering homes in infill and greenfield areas in the most efficient, affordable and sustainable way."





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03 Jan 2018 by Katie McDonald

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LandCorp and MRA to merge

22 Nov 2017 by Katie McDonald

Government has announced a progressive merger of its two land development agencies, LandCorp and the ... central agency for land development. This, the government said, would reduce duplication and provide ... is placed on the key land development activities. "The planning and development functions will ...

6.000

M/Land launches with 67-lot Secret Harbour development 30 Jan 2017 by Dan Wilkie

The head of a new boutique land developer believes difficult ... is more opportunity for us," he said. "A successful land development company, whether it be big, ... Harbour will be issued in April. Mr Wroth said M/Land would target estates in the middle tier of land ...

Keen competition as developers navigate market stagnation 30 Jan 2017 by Dan Wilkie

Couldn't end soon enough for the state's land developers, who are banking on a break from adverse ... realities of the state's economic rollercoaster were perhaps most evident in the land development sector, ... area. Click here to see the BNiQ list of land developers. Mr Satterley said the current conditions being ...

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