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ONE RING TO BIND THEM ALL

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Tuscany Towers resident Howard Dickie is sick of broken promises to finish the job. Herald Picture /

Residents unhappy in their faulty towers

27.10.2001
 By WAYNE THOMPSON

Civic leaders hailed Tuscany Towers - a cluster of 97 terrace houses in New Lynn - as a visionary example of a new wave of high-density housing in Auckland.

A sales brochure talked about creating the "style of Europe" and promised residents a communal heated swimming pool, tennis courts and a village square.

But now a group of residents who bought their \$250,000 to \$330,000 units three years ago are talking about trying to stop the development from becoming a slum.

Work to finish the project stopped early this year and the developer, Ambrico Apartments, has gone into liquidation, owing \$2.1 million to unsecured creditors.

The builder, United Homes, also went into liquidation last month.

A director of both companies, Garry Grant, said Ambrico failed because it could no longer bear the costs of carrying 24 unsold units, which had been for sale for up to 12 months.

It could not pay \$1.85 million owed to United, which dragged it down.

A member of the residents' group, Alan Chambers, said they had been worried for about a year that they would be left with

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an unfinished and deteriorating neighbourhood.

Tradesmen had deserted the site, leaving three units without exterior cladding and others missing specified courtyard fences, glazing and balcony rails.

Apart from the derelict shells, which are untidy to look at and are attracting taggers, residents say a dusty road outside their homes is potholed and should be sealed.

The promised pool and fountain site is still a lawn. Changing rooms are in an Italianate tower of plastered panels, sprouting TV antennas.

The tennis court was finished.

One of the first to move in, Howard Dickie, said residents were sick of broken promises from the developer to build the pool and finish road works, including a service road off Rankin Ave.

"It's bad for the area, because it was supposed to be the flagship of such developments," he said. "It will go down quickly if we let it."

Residents were unhappy about the alternative - picking up the tab for about \$90,000 of pool and sealing work they had already paid in the purchase price to have done.

The Waitakere City Council has also been criticised for not forcing the developer to finish work that was a condition of the consent for the development.

"We are going to the Ombudsman about the council's role," said Mr Dickie.

Residents had found the council vague in its response to questions about getting relief from a developer's bond required under the subdivision consent.

Council spokesman Wally Thomas confirmed to the Weekend Herald that the council had required a bond of \$485,000 for the development.

The bond was not in cash but was registered against the certificate of title for unsold units.

Unfortunately, said Mr Thomas, the company's liquidation meant that even as a secured creditor, the council was unlikely to recover the \$120,000 needed for outstanding road works.

Ahead of the council in the queue for claims was the mortgagee of the three remaining partly finished units.

That mortgage was for \$420,000, so there might be little left over for the council.

A councillor from New Lynn, Derek Battersby, said the council had been left with egg on its face over the bond.

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It should consider finishing the service road off Rankin Ave and helping residents if they had to seal the internal roads.

Mr Grant said he understood the person who bought the remaining units from the mortgagee intended finishing them over the next few months.

He said part of the difficulties struck by the company had been brought about by the council allowing cheaper and higher density developments to be built around Tuscany Towers.

In a move to stop being built out, the company had bought a vacant site next door for a further 23 units and land for a public park, said Mr Grant.

That site increased the number of units for sale to 120, the market dropped and 24 were unsold.

Tuscany Towers is part of Ambrico Place, a former industrial pottery, where six medium density developments have produced 300 homes. A survey of residents by university researchers reported reasonable rates of satisfaction with Ambrico Place.

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