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The Potential of medium density housing in the Selwyn District

Medium density housing (MDH) is a current topic that increases in importance in New Zealand’s urban development. MDH, as a growth management approach to achieve higher densities, is already a common way of urban housing in the neighbour country Australia. In New Zealand this new housing form has not yet been accepted nationwide as it seems rather foreign to many New Zealanders, whose ambition is the so-called ‘quarter-acre dream’. MDH provides smaller houses on smaller sections and therefore supplies more dwellings and living space for more residents in a certain area. This is why this housing form becomes significant in terms of addressing population growth in a sustainable manner.

The thesis focuses on the potential of MDH in the Selwyn district. Since the earthquake events in 2010 and 2011 in Christchurch, a significant number of people have moved from Christchurch to the surrounding Selwyn district looking for housing. This development entails the need for buildable land and housing in general. Population growth combined with a trend towards smaller and affordable houses, a demographic change and increasing house prices enable and encourage MDH in Selwyn. The main idea is to provide a wider range of housing options in terms of MDH as an alternative to low density housing in the rural district to meet changing housing needs.

This thesis addresses the implementation of medium density housing in the Selwyn District, focusing on the principles to be considered. It outlines the potential and characteristics of medium density housing as a suitable housing form in the rural Selwyn District. Below there are some findings of this thesis:

- Changing the preference from low density housing towards MDH turns out to be the biggest challenge and key for a successful implementation of MDH.
- An implementation of MDH requires a higher level of collaboration and a right balance between restriction and flexibility within the provisions.
- As a tool of growth management, MDH has large potential in terms of sustainability, affordability, design and wider housing choice.
- The implementation of MDH depends on the living circumstances in each planning realm and provides different housing types relating to urban or rural areas.
- To establish MDH as a competitive alternative to low density housing, particular attention must be paid to privacy issues.
- Detached houses seem to be the most suitable medium density housing type in Selwyn in keeping with its traditional rural character.
- MDH bears significant potential for a sustainable Selwyn District, considering the trend for smaller and affordable houses and the purpose.