

DOMINIC McKENZIE ARCHITECTS

COURTYARD VILLAGE

The Courtyard Village tackles issues of social disconnection sometimes found in rural housing developments, especially those combined with a large rental community. Instead, in order to foster a greater sense of inclusion for the residents, the site is broken down into a series of courtyards to create smaller and more intimate communities. Each courtyard is formed from 'Houses' which are arranged around a central communal garden. All the courtyards are connected via a circular walk which rings the site and encourages interaction between the different sub-communities.

Terms used in the brief – 'rural character' and 'suburban ideals' were suggestive of traditional vernacular buildings and affected design choices of scale, repetition, formal arrangement, constructional approach, materiality and precedent. Unlike more formal residential Squares in urban settings, here the intention is to evoke the loose arrangement of buildings found in traditional villages or farmyards, with an apparently haphazard mix of sizes, forms and orientation. The Houses facades are clad in a single basic material - either stone or brick veneer – to give the buildings a visual simplicity and to unify them despite the informality of their arrangement around the Courtyards.

The Houses are small blocks of flats containing two or three dwelling per building. There are 6 standard types of House which are arranged in a variety of configurations across the site. Inside the Houses, the flats and maisonettes reflect contemporary lifestyles, with Modern open plan arrangements and living spaces designed to be as large and flexible as possible. Some dwellings feature double height spaces, adding visual impact but also allowing them to be easily adapted with further bedrooms if required. As the flats are arranged in larger Houses there is the opportunity for each building to be occupied by a single family rather than subdivided.

The shared communal garden at the centre of each Courtyard is the focus for the Village sub-community. Over time it is hoped that the Courtyards will develop individual characters, perhaps with different types of planting or facilities adding variety and interest to the circular walk around the Village. The covered pavilion within each communal garden would encourage residents to come together for community parties, dinners, bring and buy sales, farmers markets etc. As well as the communal garden, in the corner of each Courtyard there would be communal storage facilities and managed guest rooms which would allow further flexibility for the rented dwellings.

