

## PORTFOLIO Kelly Girdlestone

# Bush estate attracts homebuyers

### An innovative eco-friendly development in the South-West is launched

A \$100 million eco-friendly housing estate near Margaret River will be released to the general public this weekend.

The developers of Parkwater Forest have teamed up with the National Trust to provide a 65ha estate with 50 per cent dedicated to bush.

Parkwater Forest is eight minutes from the Margaret River townsite and six minutes from Gracetown's surf and family beaches.

It will offer a natural park and stream setting to the west of the Cowaramup village, adjoining vineyards, restaurants and olive groves and within walking distance of the centre of Cowaramup.

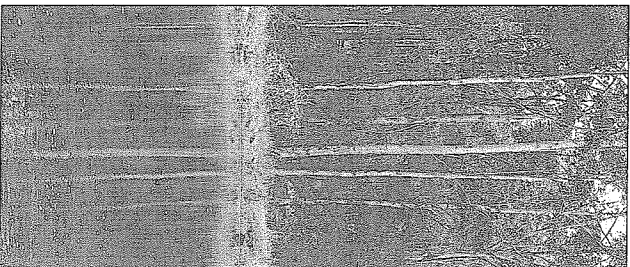
The first release of Parkwater lots was swapped up by locals late last year, with 130 lots selling quickly. A plan for the whole Cowaramup Structure Plan, was created in the late 1990s and approved in February 2003.

It incorporates a village centre and a \$55 million four-star resort designed by Jack Kent, of Grounds Kent Architects, who is famous for designing the Four Seasons Resort Hotel in Bali.

The Parkwater land is owned by a group of investors through Topsoth Holdings, and managing director Steve Palmer.

Mr Palmer has been involved in real estate, agriculture, viticulture and project management since the mid-1970s and his family has owned land in the region for just as long.

His idea with Parkwater was to create a low-density, large-lot residential development donating half of the land to the National Trust of



WA, which will place a conservation covenant on the title so that the nature park and bush are preserved and maintained by the Trust and the owners of the estate.

"Something we found when we became involved down here was the reluctance from councils to take on any financial burden to do with forest or conservation of public open space," Mr Palmer said.

"We heard the National Trust wanted to take on conservation areas rather than them going to CALM and we chose through negotiation a Parkland for the People, basically along the same lines as Kings Park. Rather than the conservation area being locked up, because it is alongside an existing town, it will be accessible to the public and the National Trust saw the benefits."



The National Trust is working with developers to preserve the forest setting.

**"It is such a unique and innovative way to prove that heritage and development can go hand in hand and it is a huge win for local government."**

TOM PERRIERO, NATIONAL TRUST

National Trust chief executive Tom Perriero wants more projects like it in WA.

"We thought it was a wise investment because it is such a unique and innovative way to prove that heritage and development can go hand in hand and it is a huge win for local government," Mr Perriero said.

"The National Trust has been trying to work with a developer for a long time and Steve had the vision to see the win-win. Too often people haven't thought laterally enough and this is possibly

the first time in Australia this has been done. I think it's going to be the way of the future.

"The National Trust wants to say to developers why can't we do this up and down the State? This will be a case study we will want to publish throughout Australia.

"Local Government don't have unlimited resources, they find it very difficult to look after remnant bushland and the concept that the community is the owners, will look after the bushland is the way to go for the future.

Project managers for Parkwater Forest, Westbrook Enterprises' chief executive Russell Hall said this project aimed to keep the key elements of why people wanted to move to the south-west in the first place — "the country environment and beautiful bushland."

A long-term management plan for the bush had been prepared and the National Trust would be primarily responsible for the overall management, but would have the help of the landowners within the estate and local community.

Landowners will automatically become members of the group and pay a \$200 annual fee that will go towards maintaining the bush and walking trails.

"This innovative management arrangement will result in the people gaining the most benefit from the bushland being able to have an active role in its management," Mr Hall said.

"The Peoples Park approach will hopefully become the template for other developments and help to conserve the bushland for future generations.

"Owners will have the opportunity to immerse themselves in nature, explore meandering trails through the surrounding forest, filled with native birds and wildlife and stroll by flowing, living stream systems winding through the undulating valley."

Bush trails will be installed to allow easy enjoyment of the area, with linkages to the Rails-to-Trails walks and the Cowaramup townsite. Soon a tourists road link will be completed joining the development directly to Caves Road.

Mr Palmer said under the West-Cowaramup Structure plan about 200 employment opportunities would be created, which came back to the self-sustainability principles they had sought to embrace and which would be carried through in the landscaping of the estate.

Titles will be ready later this year and the bulk of construction for the 242-lot project was due to be finished before winter next year.

Covenants on the blocks control the design of the facade of the homes and management issues with the National Trust.

Selling agent Terry O'Lary, of Acton Margaret River, said it would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Twenty-four lots, ranging between 800sqm and 2023sqm are to be released this weekend.

For more information, contact Acton Margaret River on 9751 9939.