

Corobrik's quality product used for largest all-facebrick social housing project in Pietermaritzburg

Hundreds of families in the Westgate Grange area of Pietermaritzburg will soon have access to affordable housing with the completion of Aloe Ridge, the largest social housing project in the city constructed entirely of Corobrik's facebrick. Conceptualised by non-profit organisation, Msunduzi Housing Association (MHA), construction of Aloe Ridge began in November 2014 in an effort to provide much-needed reasonably-priced rental accommodation for the lower to middle-income earners in the area. MHA is a social housing institution committed to meeting the needs of the community and, in addition to the conceptualisation and design of the project, MHA completed all the relevant funding applications, owns and oversees the development and will manage all the tenancies going forwards.

"We anticipate completion of the entire project by the end of May 2017," explained Ivor Caldecott, chief executive officer of MHA. "There is a huge housing demand for households earning between R2 000 and R7 500 monthly but not enough competitive private sector initiatives meeting this demand. Through this development, we are hoping to make a significant dent in this market."

Caldecott said that, in addition to the provision of housing, Aloe Ridge will create 500 jobs for unskilled labour during the construction phase, as well as full-time, permanent employment for six general workers, six cleaners, six security guards, a housing supervisor, two letting agent and one rental administration upon completion.

The first phase of occupancy will be available in October 2016, whereby 210 units will be released. Occupancy of the remaining units will be staggered until mid-2017.

The R353 million project – contracted by Stefanutti Stocks - has received funding from the Social Housing Regulatory Authority, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Human Settlements, National Housing Finance Corporation as well as Msunduzi Housing Association.

Aloe Ridge, which will house an anticipated 4 000 people, will consist of 952 two-bedroom apartments in three-story walk-ups separated into two villages. Of the 952 units, 287 will cater for households earning up to R3 500 per month and the balance of 665 units will cater for households earning up to R7 500 per month. Each unit, which is approximately 45msq in size, consists of an open-plan kitchenette, lounge, bathroom and bedrooms. The site is approximately 14 hectares in size, allowing for large, open spaces and play areas for children.

This is one of South Africa's biggest social housing developments which has been constructed entirely of facebrick, namely Corobrik's range of Burnt Apricot facebrick (3 800 000), Montana Travertine facebrick (200 000) and plaster bricks (3 965 000) as well as geolok 400 (10 000) and geolok 300 (10 000) for the retaining walls. Corobrik also supplied 2 000m² of pavers for the walkways joining the various blocks as well as parking areas.

Originally the development had been planned to be constructed as a plaster and paint development. However, the efforts of Corobrik's Rob Jardine, who worked with Lumen Govender and Aecom to demonstrate the benefits of a facebrick development and the lifecycle costing vs plaster and paint swung the selection to facebrick.

Lumen Govender of Architechno – who worked in association with Sandhu Architecture on the project – explained the brickwork choice: "We wanted a product that would prove to be both affordable in start-up and long-term costs. Corobrik's facebrick range covered both criteria as there are no future maintenance costs related to plastering and painting."

Govender said that, being a social housing project, the drive was to keep costs down while providing quality housing with aesthetic appeal. "The colour of the roof sheeting, aluminium windows and external doors was selected to blend into the colour of the Burnt Apricot facebrick, which worked well."

Explaining the planning behind the design of Aloe Ridge, Govender said the buildings were separated into two villages so as to manage the scale and visual impact more effectively.

"We wanted to create micro-communities within these villages as a way of creating a sense of place," he said. "These micro-communities were then defined by articulating internal courtyard-style layouts. Here we anticipate the residents will form communities supported by the central courtyard space. Each community will then have an individual relationship within the courtyard and a broader relationship to those living within the rest of the housing development."

To reinforce the broader relationship, Govender and his team created a major, central green space which can house related facilities for the entire community such as a community centre or crèche.

"Essentially, we wanted to create a more effective social housing scheme by incorporating micro-communities and green spaces that will evolve into a more pleasant living environment."

In line with new building regulations SANS 10400, Govender said that heat pumps were installed in all units as well as insulation within the roof spaces.

Allin Dangers, Corobrik's Director of Sales, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape said that the selection of facebrick would further reduce temperature regulation costs because of its incredible thermal properties.

"The thermal insulation properties of our facebrick mitigates the need for artificial heating and cooling, particularly important for the Pietermaritzburg climate," explained Dangers. "The sound insulation properties also ensure a harmonious living environment for all residents while the enhanced fire resistance creates a safe living space."

In addition, Dangers said the aesthetic quality of facebrick meant it was a sought-after product, particularly in the social housing arena.

"It is important that every apartment feels like home for the residents, that it is somewhere they are proud to call home. Corobrik's facebrick range meets this need every time."