INTRODUCTION

CSR. Built Environment recently completed a multiphase research project, undertaken by Landman et al., which aimed to determine the appropriateness and applicability of medium-density mixed housing (MDMH) developments in South Africa. The research identified and described five critical factors that various stakeholders—including residents, financiers, officials, and developers—consider necessary for MDMH projects to be successful. These factors are affordability; design and layout; safety and security; maintenance and management; and social inclusion.

The premise of this paper is that the quality of the built environment directly influences the people who use it. Good-quality spaces, for example, promote social inclusion, socially cohesive behaviour and citizenship, whereas a decline in the quality of urban space can contribute to anti-social behaviour.

Does participating in the development of Medium-Density Mixed Housing projects make a difference in the resident satisfaction with the quality of their environments?

METHODOLOGY

The views of residents were obtained through household surveys distributed to a sample of residents in the developments. The survey questionnaire was structured into seven sections, with the first section obtaining demographic and socio-economic information. The following five sections required the views of residents on the five critical success factors listed above. The importance of each of these five sections, linked to the critical success factors, was rated by the residents on a scale from ‘one’ (i.e. ‘not at all’ [important] or ‘fine’ [i.e. ‘important’) to ‘a large extent’).

The final section included three open-ended questions referring to factors that may have been missed. The survey questions were both closed and open questions. The closed-ended questions were closed and open questions. The closed-ended questions were designed to gather general information about the residents as they had resided in the developments for longer than a year and had thus experienced different conditions (i.e. summer and winter). The open-ended questions were designed to elicit more detailed information about the residents’ perceptions regarding the quality of their environments.

CASE STUDIES

Seven case studies were selected for the multiyear MDMH research project. These all adhered to the selection criteria, in that their characteristics encompassed medium density and various forms of mix (i.e. income, housing, tenure) within a low-rise development. Two of the seven case studies have been selected for this paper, because their characteristics and their development profiles were compatible. This ensured that more holistic views could be obtained from the residents in the way that had resided in the developments for longer than a year and had thus experienced different conditions (i.e. summer and winter) in their respective units.

Case Study 1: Amalinda Village Project

The Amalinda Village Project, constituting 598 units, was constructed in two phases between 2005 and 2006. The project is designed around a central open space situated on the highest part of a hill from where the blocks pan out into three-storey walk-ups. Some parts of the site are steep and consequently different platforms were created to accommodate the gradient of the natural ground level, with the majority of the buildings being three-storey walk-ups. (Landman et al. 2009b)

Figure 1: A view of the Amalinda Village Project from the circulation path

Figure 2: A view of the children’s play area within the Amalinda Village Project

Case Study 2: Sakhasonke Village Project

The Sakhasonke Village Project constitutes 337 units and was constructed in phases between 2003 and 2005. The construction of the development began with a ‘prototype’ house that was used to gauge the response of end-users. Members of the adjacent communities were invited to participate during the planning and implementation phase of the development. Although the units have similar design, the arrangement varies between semi-detached units and clusters with three units. (Landman et al. 2009b)

Figure 3: A view of the Sakhasonke Village Project from the main vehicular road

Figure 4: A view of the pedestrian routes between buildings within the Sakhasonke Village Project

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the resident surveys presented in the MDMH research report (Landman et al. 2009a; Landman et al. 2009b), particularly highlighting the ‘design and layout’ critical success factor, are outlined and discussed below. Overall, in terms of the ‘design and layout’ critical success factor, the majority of respondents from both projects rated this as important ‘to a large extent’ – Amalinda Village Project (97.9%) and Sakhasonke Village Project (100%). See Graph 1.

Graph 1: Proportion of respondents who viewed the ‘design and layout’ of their development as important ‘to a large extent’

Respondents from the two case study projects highlighted several sub factors as being important ‘to a large extent’, refer to Graph 2.

Graph 2: Design and layout sub factors viewed by respondents as important ‘to a large extent’

The graph shows that although a high proportion of respondents from both case study projects considered proximity to work, public transport and schools as important ‘to a large extent’, only the Amalinda Village Project respondents considered the ‘design and layout’ sub factors (i.e. unit layout, unit size and sound insulation), in their own living unit as important ‘to a large extent’. The quantitative findings were also supported by the following comments by the Amalinda Village Project respondents, as highlighted in the qualitative analysis:

• “This type of housing is fine, but it should be built closer to towns, the people feel as if they are still excluded.” (Female respondent, aged 33)
• “Builds material should be of higher quality, otherwise they are in any way just end being repaired and fixed the whole time.” (Female respondent, aged 24)

The quantitative findings were also supported by the following comments by the Sakhasonke Village Project respondents, as highlighted in the qualitative analysis:

• “This type of housing is fine, but it should be built closer to towns, the people feel as if they are still excluded.” (Female respondent, aged 40)
• “Our transport is cyclical because in the morning there is no transport but in the afternoon it’s closed.” (Female respondent, aged 27)

The quantitative findings were also supported by the following comments by the Sakhasonke Village Project respondents, as highlighted in the qualitative analysis:

• “I am close to work but my child is far from school. Our transport is cyclical because in the morning there is no transport but in the afternoon it’s closed.” (Female respondent, aged 44)

CONCLUSIONS

The Amalinda Village Project does not appear to have had any community participation during the early phases of the development, whilst the Sakhasonke Village Project included community participation by obtaining the view of residents from neighbouring communities. Although the Sakhasonke Village Project residents were involved by project, from comments made by respondents, they appear to have had more dissatisfaction with their immediate environment than those of the Amalinda Village Project.

The poster suggests that there are aspects of the MDMH developments that require improvement and that as the stakeholders with the most intimate use of these environments, residents may hold some of the answers to these improvements. This may be done in the form of feedback processes that ensure the professional team learns from the experience and performance of the completed building.

REFERENCES

• Landman, K. et al., 2009a. Medium-Density Mixed Housing in South Africa: the case of Amalinda, Pretoria: CSIR.
• Landman, K. et al., 2009b. Medium-Density Mixed Housing in South Africa: the case of Sakhasonke, Pretoria: CSIR.