

Poised to prosper

RIVING around Hamilton Hill, a sprawling suburb with 8500 people and 4000 homes, it is easy to feel the place is only half formed.

In years to come, it is highly likely developers will swoop on significant tracts of grassland and big blocks that lie tantalisingly vacant.

There's evidence this is already happening, with many townhouse developments up for sale in wide, open streets in the east of the suburb, flanked by fibro-and-brick veneer bungalows from the 1960s and '70s.

The same appears to be happening in Hamilton Hill's more expensive west.

Turn off Hampton Rd into Rockingham Rd as you leave Fremantle and on your left stands a row of smart three-bedroom, two-bathroom townhouses on the market for \$529,000 each.

Hamilton Hill is in the City of Cockburn, a council overseeing the rapid expansion of Perth's southwest corridor in conjunction with the State Government.

Collett Realty principal Russell Collett says it is only a matter of time before the suburb blossoms.

"My wife Kathy and I actually moved from Fremantle to Hamilton Hill because we believe this is where the growth is going to happen," Mr Collett said. "We're surrounded by one of the biggest infrastructure and private developments in Australia."

He's talking about the development of

Cockburn Central, where there are plans to create a regional shopping and residential centre, which will ultimately serve a population of more than 200,000.

"We're on the border of North Coogee, formerly industrial wasteland where the Robb Jetty was located, which is set to become a burgeoning new suburb where \$800,000 will buy you very little," he said.

"Then there's the South Beach development and the Coogee Marina Estate where \$3.5 million buys you vacant land on the water — and that's before you lay a brick.

"You've got Fremantle, where \$1 million will buy a two-bedroom apartment, probably with not a lot of views, and you've got Hamilton Hill where \$800,000 will virtually buy you anything.

"The City of Cockburn is doing it well — they're retaining good recreation areas for future ratepayers. It's not happening too quickly, but it is happening with good planning and good vision."

There are plans to create a greenbelt including Manning Park and the bushland area in the western part of the suburb.

This will stretch almost to Woodman Point Reserve, creating a new regional park.

That plan is not expected to affect any of Hamilton Hill's many recreation grounds — Davilak Oval, Dixon Reserve, Enright Reserve, Cockburn Bowling Club, Cockburn Soccer Club and a number of smaller parks.

Mr Collett said sporting clubs in the area had strengthened the community and helped perpetuate an image that Hamilton Hill was a "tough suburb".

"That reputation comes from our footy clubs, who do play it tough — no questions begged. I think a lot of areas that have this reputation, including Fremantle, get it from their sporting traits," he said.

"But I'd say the sporting aspect is the biggest thing in terms of strengthening community ties in this suburb. It's pivotal — all of our sports clubs have their own clubhouses, which are very well patronised."

Mr Collett is quick to dismiss the idea that Hamilton Hill is not a safe place.

"If I had the choice of walking in the streets of Fremantle or Hamilton Hill, I'd choose the latter. Certainly, I'd walk in our streets at night before I'd walk the streets of Northbridge," he said.

Mr Collett said that for much of the past century Hamilton Hill was home to market gardens, Fremantle port workers and horse stables, one of which belonged to his great uncle, Cliff.

He remembers tales of Cliff taking his horses down Clontarf Rd, then nothing more than a dirt track, to work them on the beach.

JAMES DALLMEYER