

Orakei: Model Garden Suburb.

By G. M. FOWLDS, Junr.

By its acquisition of approximately 500 acres of the native settlement and reservation at Orakei, the Government has a unique opportunity of providing an object lesson in garden city planning.

The commanding situation of the site and its proximity within three miles of Auckland, its eventual and alternative transportation connections of boat, road, rail and tram, admit of wonderful possibilities.

There is no reason why this suburb should not be a "Mecca" for officials and citizens interested in the more perfect designing of our cities.

Though the years are now passing since the Government completed the purchase of the block, the intentions of the authorities have not yet been published. By now steps should have been taken for the inauguration of a Town Planning Dept., and the engagement of recognised city designers whose services would also be available to local corporations.

A magnificent property with a splendid scope should not be left to the tender mercies of the officials of the Public Works Dept. If qualified men have not yet been arranged for, then an open competition should be set in motion.

It has been reported that the Government has declined to make any contributions towards the cost of a road to be made in conjunction with the proposed railway deviation which passes the estate. This is a most short-sighted stand, because a direct road would tremendously enhance the value of the suburb and would be reflected in the increased land values. An esplanade, with its objective at St. Heliers Bay, would be a valuable asset for Greater Auckland, and particularly for the complete development of the Orakei suburb.

Presumably the Government will not dispose indiscriminately of the sections, and will retain the title by operating under some form of Glasgow lease, otherwise speculators will come in and largely defeat the main purpose to be achieved.

In England considerable value has been derived from the provision of a number of garden cities which were the result of definite planning by companies or interested bodies, and the names of some of these as Bournville, Port Sunlight and Letchworth would be familiar to many. In these settlements the originating trust has retained the freehold and therefore reserved to itself for meeting the cost of extension the rise in land values consequent upon its enterprise and expenditure of capital.

By their retention of the unearned increment which, under ordinary conditions would be absorbed by a few individuals, the promoters have

been enabled to provide more extensive community services.

Naturally the best results will be achieved, and the progress of the suburb secured by avoiding all rates on improvements which would be involved under the system of rating on the capital or annual value.

No rates should be imposed on buildings or improvements in order to encourage the erection and maintenance of attractive houses etc., and the general embellishments of surroundings. This is a very vital point. We should be guided by the example of large cities like Sydney and Vancouver, which have appreciated the force of the claim. A study of New Zealand figures reveals the fact that in those areas which exempt improvements, there is a higher percentage of improvements, viz: more and better houses and shops. Further, this system is just and equitable to all classes of ratepayers.

Following up this idea there is another feature which contains interesting possibilities. There is no doubt that direct road access would be a desirable advantage, and if a tramway was provided for at the same time, the construction of these would immediately add thousands of pounds to the unimproved value of the land, which would be benefited proportionately to its proximity to the tram and main road. Obviously the occupiers who are not putting up the expenditure for these projects have no moral right to this increase in values, and the State, therefore, as actual owner, might collect this fund which has accrued, to meet the cost of the road and the running expenses of the trams. The trams could therefore be run free because they are only horizontal elevators. Vertical elevators are free to all who care to use them, and the cost is met by a charge spread over the adjoining tenants.

There are a number of other features which deserve early consideration in the development of Orakei. In the general layout an endeavour should be made to leave a belt of unused land between Orakei and the adjoining districts. This might be planted with various trees, and the whole block, in view of its present bareness, will require an immediate afforestation programme. Obviously the scheme of subdivision will avoid the stereotype rectangular or gridironing, and have regard to the contour of the area.

The streets should be classified into arterial ways, main roads and secondary streets. In the minor streets, where the metalling will be the minimum, wide strips of grass should be left to be planted with trees at intervals. As by its physical