

PART II.—HOUSING ACT.

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF HOUSING CONSTRUCTION.

“I have pleasure in submitting the following report on the activities and operations of the Department of Housing Construction under my control for the year ended 31st March, 1940 :—

“*Purchase of Land.*—Land for housing purposes has now been purchased in 127 towns. Owing to the growing scarcity of serviced sections the Department has had to acquire a considerable area of undeveloped land, the preparation of which areas for housing purposes involves a tremendous amount of preliminary work in the way of construction of roads, footpaths, water-supplies, storm-water, and sanitary sewers. In view of this necessary preliminary work the Department is required to purchase land well in advance of the actual construction of houses. To date, the Department has purchased approximately 18,000 building-sites.

“*Delays consequent on the War.*—As a result of the outbreak of war, some of the Department's schemes of land preparation and development have been considerably retarded, as owing to the Dominion's war effort it was necessary that a number of the Public Works Department's staff, with its plant and machinery, had to be withdrawn from housing work to immediately concentrate on the preparation and equipment of military camps and aerodromes.

“Likewise for some months following the outbreak of hostilities the Department's contractors released a large number of artisans to undertake the building of the various military encampments, consequently for some time housing activities were slowed up in deference to the prior claims of the war emergency. As the work at these military camps became completed, the artisans and other staff were retransferred to housing work.

“In furtherance of the Dominion's war effort this Department undertook at short notice the erection of twenty-one houses for the Defence Department at Trentham for the use of officers and men of the training staff of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and it is pleasing to record that with the splendid co-operation of the Department's officers and the contractor's staff, and, indeed, of all concerned, these houses were erected in record time.

“For the Royal New Zealand Air Force the Department is also erecting thirty-five houses at Whenuapai, ten at Hobsonville, and eighteen at Blenheim.

“*Construction and Design.*—No important changes have been made in the various types of construction originally adopted.

“The difficulties of obtaining flat iron and wire netting has necessitated changes in the standard details and the reduction in the number of lath-and-plaster houses being erected.

“Standard designs are continually being revised, altered, and in many cases cancelled with new designs replacing them. Economy of construction and floor plan with correct orientation, and simple circulation are the factors that govern all revisions and new designs. Close studies are still being made with the object of further standardization of the individual unit and fittings without sacrificing to any appreciable extent the variety of design which has so far been such an outstanding characteristic of the schemes carried out by the Department of Housing Construction during the past three years.

“The design of houses suitable for hillside sections is receiving careful attention. New designs that avoid long flights of steps and excessive basements are being prepared for these conditions.

“*Flats.*—The Department is continuing to erect small numbers of pensioners' flats in the larger towns throughout the country. The block of fifty units being erected at Berhampore, Wellington, is nearing completion. Tenders have been let for eight flats over and adjacent to seven shops in Waterloo, Lower Hutt. These flats are from two to three rooms with all conveniences.