



In deciding whether to create your perfect lifestyle block from scratch or by taking on an existing property, be honest about your desires and resources, writes Chris Jones of Bayleys Canterbury.

Picture this. Lush green paddocks, set back from main roads, maybe nestled into some natural features, under a wide blue sky. Beautiful – and bare.

Some of my real estate clients will be thrilled by the challenge of shaping a site like this, and others will be daunted. My advice is simple – assess honestly why you want to live on a lifestyle block, and what time and money you can dedicate to the process.

BUYING BARE

If you buy bare land, it typically takes two years to establish it enough to move in. Maybe that’s harsh news, but I’d rather you’re realistic in your timeframes, so you can enjoy the journey without needless pressure.

Step One – plan the whole site, working with a landscape architect or similar professional with good experience. The site plan places all the utilities and services in workable locations that will service the buildings you aim to build – not just the house, but all outbuildings including sheds, garage, stables, barns, sleep-out and hot tub – good planning at the start will pay dividends down the track.

Also plan for how you want to use the land including stock paddocks, garden, vege garden, shelter breaks, a woodlot, fences, troughs, chicken coop, irrigation of paddocks and/or gardens.

Sadly I’ve seen many people have to re-route driveways, drill additional bores, face the fact that their lounge faces strong winds, the washing line is overshadowed or their vege patch is on difficult soil. These mistakes can be expensive and disappointing, so make a proper and complete plan from the start.

Step Two – before the house build can start, establish power, phone/fibre, a driveway (decide whether it’s shingle or sealed, and it may be easiest to use a contractor), water, on-site sewer disposal, and an outbuilding to secure building materials and tools. These utilities are the minimum for the builder to be able to work, even if the builder is you.

If your site has no town water supply, a professional drilling company can drill the bore, set up the pump shed with its pump and filters, and handle the resource consent, which is typically a smooth process.

Best to budget around \$100,000 to create all these utilities. No matter how you slice and dice it, it always hits around this amount.

Step Three – build your home, and plant trees. Then it’s time to reap the rewards...move in and start landscaping. You’re living the dream, in a property that’s perfectly designed for you. It really is amazing how quickly trees can grow and the satisfaction from setting up a property from scratch is significant.

BUYING ESTABLISHED

Buying an established and operational lifestyle property is usually cheaper overall and certainly easier than creating one from scratch. The pros: you can move in straight away, and make changes whenever suits you. Trees, gardens and shelter belts should already be established. The cons: it may not be perfectly as you would want it or as you would have built it yourself.

If you know you’ll make changes, doing the professional site plan is still important so your changes are workable with the environment and utilities available.

Established lifestyle blocks are also more readily available. I sell on average 2:1 established to bare land properties. Bare land can only become available when farmers or developers subdivide, so these timings are unpredictable. A good real estate salesperson will have their ear to the ground about what is coming up.

FOR ALL LIFESTYLERS

Do also be really honest about how much personal work and time you want to put into maintaining your property, gardens and wildlife.



Pick the tasks that you enjoy and can realistically commit enough time to, and build a support team for the rest.

For some people, this is their ultimate dream – they may be sick of city employment and itching to go “Good Life”. Or retired farmers hang onto a tractor and a few animals, and want to stay fit and connected to the land. Others may still be holding down full-time jobs, even though – thanks to lockdowns – this can be from home.

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I’m a lifestyler myself, finding it an incredibly rewarding way to live and raise my family while still having easy ability to work and to access the city. It’s wonderful. Whether you enter this lifestyle by buying or building, self-honesty and realistic planning should help you get the best out of your experience.

