

Chief Executive Job Experience

A day with Greg Rendall, TCDC Senior Building Control Officer

By Chief Executive David Hammond

On Friday 17 July I spent the day on job experience. My host was Greg Rendall, Thames-Coromandel District Council (TCDC) Senior Building Control Officer who took me on building inspections around Coromandel Town. It was an exceptional winter day with calm sea, warm sun and building sites overlooking Coromandel Harbour and the Islands. My thanks goes out to Greg who has a genuine love for his job. He didn't feel at all intimidated by his Chief Executive looking over his shoulder as he dealt with customers all day.

Greg shows great stamina. He didn't take a morning tea break as he went from one site to the next. As an office worker I'm no longer built of the same stuff. But luckily I brought a large coffee container with me for my travel up the Thames coast road and that got me through.

The Building Control job is technical and varied. Greg covered everything from pre-pour building foundations, gully traps, bush bashing to follow purple wastewater feeder lines, pouring over stormwater pipe diagrams, to inspecting toilet ducting. As a former builder himself, he can speak the language in a way today's chippies understand and Greg is a walking Wikipedia of building knowledge.

On-site I spent time with celebrated builder Steve Wilson who has won several national awards for his exceptional homes which he has built in Waiuna Bay, Coromandel, with assistance from his designer son. We inspected several today and they are stunning. Steve Wilson doesn't need to advertise. He tells me that he has several year's worth of work lined up and demand at

the moment is similar to the boom of a decade ago.



TCDC Senior Building Control Officer Greg Rendall on-site Waiuna Bay for an inspection.

Steve was very open to tell me several of the tips that have made him successful in business and sought after by clients including for how well he works with TCDC. They are:

- Being clear with clients of what products he will not work with which have leaky risk, and that he will not be a guinea pig of architect trials;
- Having owners approve Steve's sub-contractor list and not accepting out-of-town contractors that may be known to the owner;
- Having owners rate all the subcontractors used out of 100% and making future subcontractor choices based on a history of that feedback;
- Ensuring he only employs subcontractors who share his work ethic of quality, long hours and finishing the job;
- Ensuring that he gets producer statements and Work Records from all suppliers while they are there on-site to stop the endless chasing up later – once a supplier has finished on-site they don't want to later do the paperwork that an inspection needs;
- Ensuring that the relationship with TCDC Building Control Officers is positive and builds trust with council due to the quality measures he takes with the job and with sub-contractors.

Clearly Steve Wilson sees a trust relationship with Council Building Control Officers as good

for business. Greg also sees his job in the same way and told me that what he does is, "helping business get on with business."

As we were on the Waiuna Bay house site a couple stopped to talk with Steve. They had recently moved from the earthquake-hit Redcliffs suburb in Christchurch to Coromandel Town. Naturally we all talked about consenting of earthquake-hit homes and how much process is involved in today's building consents.

Greg and Steve reminisced about the old days and Council personalities such as a Building Control Officer known by local builders as, 'Drive-by John'. I had images of a cowboy with six-guns and Stetson, but apparently Drive-by John was a council inspector who had legendary ability to be able to undertake an inspection from the cab of his TCDC truck! If true, that's quite a feat. We agreed that those were the days before leaky buildings, earthquakes and lawyers got involved.

I said to the Christchurch couple that as a council we would dream of returning to the days of Drive-by John but only if the Government would change the Law to put all the risk back on the home-owner. They agreed that it should be.

But Greg disagrees with me on this and I respect his view. He says that responsible builders like Steve Wilson, and home owners, value Building Control Officers as providing an external quality assurance over the job. The Government's idea of self-certification of builders frightens them for how the home-owner will be left with so many messes to fix up. At the moment in Auckland the inspection pass rate is only 30-40% I am told.

I saw first-hand an example of that quality assurance role on the Waiuna Bay job. Greg was bothered by its stormwater system. The systems was designed by a professional engineer – no problem here. But the on-site was not built to that design. Changes had been made by the contractor that were not

noted down, nor were they communicated to either the owner of the house or the builder acting as Project Manager. What risk does this mean for the owner? No one knows. It did not pass inspection and the professional engineer who designed it will need to be called in to see what the contractor has done, and whether the variations will actually work or not.



Greg pouring over Producer Statements on-site Waiuna Bay

Part of the Building Control Officer job is giving the hard messages to builders and owners. In the afternoon I accompanied Greg to a pre-pour floor inspection of several new accommodation units being built at the Olive Motel. It is fantastic to see the confidence that business owners now have in the Coromandel's visitor industry which is busier even in winter in 2015. This was an easy inspection and passed.



Pre-floor inspection successfully passed by Greg.

However Greg noticed another block of three units being prepared for a concrete pour which had an inspection booked for next week. To be helpful Greg offered to get that inspection out of the way now at the same time. This is faster and cheaper for the customer.

Unfortunately that sub-floor failed as the depth was only 70mm not the required 100mm. There was no uncomfortable debate with the builders about this – they could read the tape measure for themselves. And there was no debating how important it was either because a thinner floor was not as strong and the owner has paid for a proper thickness floor of stated strength.

The builders were frustrated and disappointed. They didn't blame Greg but the Laser Level they were using which they thought was playing-up. Greg agreed with this and observed that the only fails of these sub-floors that he has done were down to the use of Laser Levels. Thankfully this problem was picked up now and not when the Concrete Mixer was due on-site next Tuesday. That would have led to concrete in the truck going off, and a large and costly delay for the owner.

Greg gave this additional inspection free of charge and left the builders to work out how they would fix the issues before the truck arrives next week.



Greg Rendall and Steve Wilson inspect a new deck

I want to thank Greg Rendall for his patience with me today, and for showing me that done right, TCDC can be a positive and enabling partner in getting business moving on the Coromandel. How we work is all about attitude and even a council in a regulation role can be an enabling partner.