

THOUSANDS of young, upwardly mobile Londoners working in the private sector – key to the capital's economy – are “trapped” in often expensive private rented property. They are in the wrong job to qualify for affordable housing, where public sector workers often take priority, yet with earnings of less than £60,000 they are unable to afford a mortgage on a highly priced property.

Pocket, a new private affordable housing provider set up by a former City financier, has devised a business model requiring no public subsidy that aims to deliver hundreds of new first-time buyer homes across London during the next five years.

The Pocket “brand” is aptly named: small homes on small sites at small prices (20 per cent below local market values). A debut development of 22 apartments in Camden sold out in weeks. Other schemes are in the pipeline in Ealing and close to Queen's Club tennis centre in Hammersmith, while reservations are being taken at a 32-home eco project being built at **Fermoy Road**, in the north-western corner of Westminster borough.

Mark Vlesing, director and founder of Pocket, believes his formula is a better solution than shared ownership or subsidised rented housing. “There is no stigma attached and people get to own their homes outright.”

How is it possible for Pocket to profit commercially and act like a charity?

First, it buys infill plots passed over by developers who have been scared off by the planning requirement to provide on-site social housing.

Second, its “do-gooder” brand finds favour with local councils, who allow higher-density schemes (more units) of entirely private flats.

Third, factory design and space-saving ideas mean smaller, functional flats can be built more cheaply.

Buyers are singles and couples on low-to-moderate incomes (£60,000 is the cut-off point). “When we started, we expected that most buyers would be in their twenties but the average age is 33,” says Vlesing. “Typically, buyers earn between £37,000 and £40,000 and have been renting for nine years.”

Natasha Waithe, a digital operations manager for Sony Music, is one of these buyers. In her mid-thirties, she has been living in London for 15 years, renting the whole time.

“I was priced out of the private market so five years ago I applied to Westminster's shared-ownership scheme. I looked at several developments but either key workers took priority or the amount to be paid per month in combined rent and mortgage for only a share of the



First-time buyers can Pocket the difference

Now young Londoners renting privately are getting a chance to buy, says **David Spittles**

property was too high. Pocket appealed to me because I could own 100 per cent of the property.”

She visited the **Weedington Road** development in Camden, where a permanent show flat is open for viewing. Natasha is buying a one-bedroom apartment for £197,000 off-plan, so has only put down a £500 reservation fee, but expects to pay a 10 per cent deposit. She has been told she will pay about £1,200 on the mortgage per month.

Flats at **Fermoy Road** are the same type and specification. All have one bedroom and a total 400sq ft of space, for £185,000 to £197,500.

To ensure on-going affordability, a restrictive covenant in the lease requires owners to pass on the 20 per cent discount when they sell. This is 20 per cent of the resale value, so owners can build up equity if house prices increase or the mortgage is reduced. Buy-to-let investors are kept out by the application process.

Westminster council is pre-screening applicants at Fermoy Road. Call 0845 437 9701.

At **Star Road**, Hammersmith, there will be 14 one-bedroom flats and four studios, available from the end of this month. To register, call Pocket on 020 7291 3682 or visitpocketliving.com.

READY
a flat (left) at the Weedington Road scheme in Camden, where a permanent show apartment is open for viewing

£185,000
one-bedroom flats at Fermoy Road (right), with balconies and communal roof terraces. Call 0845 437 9701



SMART CHOICE
comfortable and stylish one-bedroom flats and studios at Star Road, Hammersmith