

## Hillside



PAT CAMPBELL

## Housing initiative builds pride

THE opening of a new block of units in the Melbourne suburb of Oakleigh was evidence of the many benefits that can be achieved through social housing projects, the Member for Chisholm (Vic) Anna Burke has told the House of Representatives.

Ms Burke said the Oxford Street project, funded through the federal government's Social Housing Initiative, has not only provided attractive housing for vulnerable groups in the local community but has also helped to create local jobs.

"This is not a ghetto environment," Ms Burke said, "this is somewhere you are quite proud to say is your home."

"Numerous residents at the opening invited us into their new homes and were not only proud that they now had somewhere to call home but also proud of the standard of the facility."

The units incorporate six-star energy ratings and environmentally sound features such as underground rainwater tanks and gas-boosted solar hot water units.

The local construction firm which built the development put on several apprentices to work on it.

"It was an amazing win-win all around," Ms Burke said.

More than 16,600 homes across the nation have been completed under the program so far, with \$5.6 billion in federal funding allocated to it. •



THINKSTOCK

BUILDING BLOCKS: Win-win from social housing

## Mobile phone maze belongs to another century

THE process for choosing a mobile phone plan in Australia has been criticised in federal parliament, with the Member for Fraser (ACT) Andrew Leigh describing the unnecessary complexity as Byzantine.

Dr Leigh said as well as having to choose from a plethora of handsets, it is not easy to figure out how much a call costs.

"With many carriers there is a flag-fall charge meaning that the first minute carries a different price from subsequent minutes. Sometimes it is cheaper to call people whose mobile phones are on the same network. Some carriers have lower off-peak charges," he said.

"Calls to landlines are often priced differently from calls made to other mobiles. For voicemail, some plans

charge for leaving messages, some for retrieving messages and some for neither.

"So, if you want to know how much your month's calls will cost, you need to be thinking about how often you call landlines, how often you call mobiles, which carriers your friends use, what time of day you make your calls and how many voicemail messages you expect to receive. Are you confused? I know I am."

Dr Leigh said the complexity of Australian mobile phone plans most harms people with low levels of financial literacy.

He called on mobile phone companies to recognise their responsibility to customers and start offering a simpler product. •