

# To gate or not to gate?

By [John Roberts](#)

6 Sep 2013

Gated communities have become the accepted, and often desired form, of home ownership in the 21st century with buyers increasingly prepared to pay the premiums associated with living behind guarded security or access-controlled gates.

Consequently, gated residential communities and garden apartments are the types of developments most likely to be the new ones coming onto the market. While composite South African figures are not as easily at hand, US statistics show these types of properties have grown from 2000 in the 1970s to more than 50,000 in the new millennium.

That equated to around 6% of that country's households living behind walls or fences, with about half of them in communities where access was controlled by gates, entry codes, key cards or security guards.

In essence, gated communities have several common elements. Gates and fences provide the perception of security, safety and privacy - and in affluent neighbourhoods, privacy means exclusivity and, thus, higher property values. Adding weight to the argument is that an automatic gate system or private security access boosts the property value regardless of whether or not it actually impacts on crime in that area.

## Prestige akin to a private club

Facing facts, everyone wants to feel proud of their environment and including the element of a gated community to the home address can offer prestige akin to a private club where access privileges are required and the real benefits of crime prevention are a bonus.

To a lesser extent, gated communities may also offer buyers the opportunity to purchase a more modern home than those found in established areas, simply because the homes found in those communities are newer than the free-standing ones in the neighbourhood.

There is also the opportunity for sharing the costs associated with expensive facilities: tennis courts, swimming pools, convenience centres, and stables and equine facilities are ones that come to mind. These are items many property owners would be unable to afford individually, but in pooling resources and opting for communal living, can become accessible.

Not often considered is that gated communities also aid safety measures for the neighbourhood. The body corporate can erect speed bumps and enforce lower-than-typical speeds on the roads as measures for residents' safety, particularly children.

## A sense of togetherness

They also foster a sense of togetherness, a feeling of unity and the unspoken understanding that neighbours will look out for their peers, standing aside one another in times of needs or fighting together for common causes.

Those luxuries come at a price with levies - generally covering communal water, rates and taxes, security, common property maintenance expenses and community employees should that be applicable - working out higher than the individual costs associated with a free-standing home.

The municipality may also deem the road infrastructure within the gated community as private property, meaning the onus for repairing potholes and maintaining the network falls to the residents as a cost above the taxes already collected for the upkeep of the country's streets.

Homeowners in both free-standing properties and gated communities or flats are billed individually for their rates, lights and water use in line with recent changes to the Sectional Title Act and local municipalities' requirements.

The question arises as to just how much more homeowners are prepared to pay for living in gated communities against those opting for free-standing properties. While not backed by qualified, independent data, the figures emerging from estate agents show a property within a gated community can command a 10% to 15% premium on a similar free-standing home.

That equates to roughly R50,000 on a three-bedroomed house, yet for a buy-to-let investor, there is the possibility of recouping some of that higher capital outlay in higher rentals. On average, rental income is around 20% higher in gated communities with the tenants gaining a sense of value for money, security and the assured serenity made possible by the relevant rules applying to that community.

## Perceived security

However, the elephant in the room (or the gated community) is the perceived security. Reality has shown security in gated estates is not as efficient as projected or perceived with many of the crimes committed undertaken by the residents themselves. In high-end property developments, the issue of bored, drug-taking youths has become something many have had to tackle while hoping it does not rear its head too high as to be noticed.

Essentially, while in most cases it is possible to minimise and control crime in gated communities, it can never be wholly removed. Developers put into place every conceivable means to limit crime from external sources, but the inside responsibility becomes that of the owners and the body corporate.

That means there is still place for locking motor vehicles, not leaving valuable items exposed on car seats, locking the house doors and installing burglar alarm systems and burglar bars.

## ABOUT JOHN ROBERTS

- John Roberts is CEO of Just Property Group.
- How will e-tolling change the urban landscape? - 2 Dec 2013
  - Considering commercial - 7 Nov 2013
  - To gate or not to gate? - 6 Sep 2013
  - Wooing the market - 31 Jul 2013
  - Taking the market in hand - 10 Apr 2013

[View my profile and articles...](#)