

# Integrated Townships - Weathering the COVID-19 Siege

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- *COVID-19 has underscored the advantages of self-managed mini-ecosystems with higher safety & security, open spaces, sanitation & control*
- *Top 7 cities have just 101 integrated township projects (launched since 2010 till date) with 3.16 lakh housing units; this is nearly 2% share of overall projects launched during the period*
- *Of this total, 57 projects are largely residential with basic facilities like a small retail shop, pharmacy etc.; remaining 44 are mixed-use developments with dedicated retail, entertainment, education, commercial, health & residential spaces*
- *NCR has maximum integrated townships - 42 projects with approx. 1.33 lakh units, followed by MMR with 17 projects having >63,500 housing units*

INVC NEWS

New Delhi,

During a pandemic like COVID-19, there is a strong rationale for living in integrated townships. These **self-sustaining, compact urban ecosystems** are now more than just lifestyle upgrades - they provide the kind of controlled environment that makes a big difference during such an outbreak. Gated communities offer security, but integrated townships let residents get through the prolonged siege-like situation of a pandemic with a much lower impact on quality of life.

**Anuj Puri, Chairman - ANAROCK Property Consultants** says, "Going forward, dispersed offices and flexible workplace policies around WFH will spur housing demand on city peripheries, beyond the city-centre hotspots. This will lead to higher demand for large township developments which, because of their massive size, have been developed on the peripheries. However, they account for a mere 2% of all housing supply since 2010, so their numbers are currently inadequate to meet the coming demand."

## Constrained Supply

Integrated townships began their Indian innings primarily as a lifestyle statement - the conveniences and address value come at an added cost which does not appeal to budget home seekers. The subtle luxury quotient, a function of the surrounding infrastructure rather than in individual properties, resulted in townships catering to a niche rather than to the masses. Also, very few developers have the expertise and resources to deploy integrated townships. As a result, the supply of integrated townships remained restricted even as other formats proliferated.

As on date, the top 7 cities have just over **101 township projects** (launched since 2010 till date), accounting for around **3.16 lakh housing units**. (Besides mixed-use developments, townships with more than 2,000 housing units are also considered).

This is only a **minuscule 2% share of overall housing projects** launched during this period. Clearly, this is a hugely under-served segment whose underpinning relevance and importance has been emphatically brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Out of the 101 projects, nearly 57 are large purely residential projects with some basic facilities like a retail shop, pharmacy, salon and some form of entertainment. The remaining 44 are full-fledged mixed-use developments with dedicated retail, entertainment, education, commercial, health and residential spaces. NCR and MMR have the highest saturation of townships.

"Beyond superior conveniences and security, townships offer a sense of community which is extremely important in times like the coronavirus pandemic," says Puri. "Living in such projects also helps work-from-home professionals to maintain optimum productivity while being assured of their and their families' health and safety. Many townships even offer a walk-to-work option."

Apart from the expertise to plan and execute such large projects, integrated townships also require gargantuan investments in capital, land and other resources. Resultantly, integrated townships will largely remain the purview of Grade A developers.

### **Integrated Township Supply (Completed & Ongoing)**

- **NCR** - **42** township projects with approx. 1.33 lakh residential units. 22 of these (with 55,000 units) are mixed-use developments; the remaining 20 projects are exclusively residential with over 78,000 units.
- **MMR** - **17** township projects, of which 8 are mixed-use and 9 exclusively residential. Together, they account for over 63,500 homes.
- **Bangalore** - **10** mega township projects with 35,230 units in all, of which 3 are mixed-use and the remaining 7 are large, well-equipped residential communities.
- **Hyderabad** - **9** township projects, of which only 1 is mixed-use and 8 are purely residential. Together, they have more than 21,600 units.

- **Pune** and **Kolkata** - **8** large township projects each, with approx. 19,700 and 27,150 homes respectively. Interestingly, Pune has more mixed-use developments (5) than purely residential townships (3) while Kolkata has 2 mixed-use developments and 6 purely residential townships.
- **Chennai** - **7** township projects with nearly 16,200 residential units, of which 3 are mixed-use developments and 4 are purely residential.

## The USPs

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the most important features of townships probably are their considerable distance from mid-city infection hot zones and their superior security and sanitation. It has also been confirmed that the virus is more easily transmitted in areas polluted by excessive traffic. The reduced and regulated traffic and large, air-cleansing green zones in integrated townships are therefore a compelling argument. In townships where they are available, schools, shopping and healthcare nearby are distinct advantages. Multi-level security arrangements can ensure very effective segregation from surrounding areas, as well as contact tracing, if the need arises.

However, the main value-adds in such projects predate the pandemic. Most townships are well-planned layouts where optimum space is utilized. Landscaped gardens, jogging tracks and dedicated play areas enhance the overall liveability quotient. Integrated townships also tend to have advanced waste management and rainwater harvesting.

## Opening up The Townships Landscape

Given the nature of the times, we may soon see more such projects being announced. Various government and nodal development agencies have already incorporated various townships-focused changes in their city planning, such as better road connectivity, utilities supply and sewage.

Some of the more promising areas for future development include Kalyan-Bhiwandi and Boisar in MMR, Sohna in Gurugram, North Bengaluru, Yamuna Expressway in Greater Noida, Gahunje in Pune, and West Hyderabad, among others.

These locations meet the most important criteria of being well-connected and having enough contiguous land parcels to accommodate integrated townships.

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