

2. Market Opportunities: where will the demand come from?

The visioning day generated a lot of enthusiasm for a community made up of a wide range of people, and not just given over to one tenure, age or income group. A lot is already known not only about the housing market in Yeovil, but also about wider trends. For example the population is ageing and many more people are starting to think how to live without depending on a car, or a bus that never comes. Providing for the active elderly is therefore crucial to creating healthier communities and controlling expenditure on health and social services, and there are some important models to draw on of what can be done by encouraging people to move into more suitable accommodation while they are still able to look after themselves.¹⁸

Similarly we also know from research that increasing use is being made of public transport when it meets certain quality standards, and when car travel becomes a more expensive option.¹⁹ As the plan will be implemented over a period of around seven years, probably starting from 2013 to 2020, and the buildings should be designed to meet a range of foreseeable demands, while allowing for some substitution, for example maisonettes instead of family houses, in line with demand.



Retirement village in Painswick, Stroud

¹⁸ *Urban Housing for an Ageing Population*, Panel for Innovation report (HAPPI), JRF, 2010
¹⁹ *Active and Sustainable Transport*, Marcus Grant et al, UWE, Bristol



Top left and middle: Newhall in Harlow has offered somewhere different to live

Top right: Attractive apartments in Orchard Park, Cambridge

Bottom left and middle: Upton, Northants offers life time neighbourhoods

Bottom right: Vauban appeals to families

2.1 Young Families

Though in the minority overall, families with young children are always well represented in new developments, and are concerned to find homes close to schools and other facilities that children rely on. The housing market studies have shown how the area around the town centre contains families living in rented housing, many of whom aspire to owning their own homes. By acquiring a home close to the town centre and transport facilities that will be economic to run, these families will act as the pioneers in creating a real community. They will be helped by the proximity of great facilities like the children's playground and swimming pool in the Country Park, and the kinds of com-

munity support provided by The GateWay. The idea of living around a garden square, as in Street will provide some of the appeals of living in a traditional village. The village has been designed with outdoor space for young children to play in close to home, and without risk of being run-down by cars.

2.2 First Time Buyers

For some years first-time buyers have been dissuaded by the high cost of housing, and now by the very large deposits that are required. Yet without an influx of first time buyers, the housing market grinds to a halt. First time buyers will be attracted to the village by the proximity to a choice of jobs, many of which can be accessed without the cost of running a car. They will also appreciate somewhere that is considered smart and contemporary, and which will therefore offer a good resale value when it comes time to move. Many will be childless couples, as only a quarter of households in South Somerset have children living with them. The village can pioneer funding pack-

ages such as 'rent to buy' and schemes where the land is only conveyed when the home is resold, so that the land owner shares in the uplift in land values that results from developing the site comprehensively. Many will be attracted by smaller units such as maisonettes, and flats over commercial space that will offer good value for money.

2.3 Larger 'Eco' Houses

As prices of homes in villages become excessive, so those on higher incomes will start to consider the appeals of living in a town that is well-connected and that offers plenty of space. Typically they will want somewhere distinctive. Some may be attracted by the idea of living overlooking a lake, and so some of the plots there might be sold off to individuals prepared to follow the basic design codes. There will also be some who will be attracted by the innovative technical features that will be built into the development. This is a market that could be opened up once the Vauxhall Garage has been relocated, and the image of the site transformed as is already starting to happen as a result of Zero C's Foundry House development'.

2.4 Young Graduates

With more and more young people going to university, it is important for towns that depend on knowledge based businesses, such as Agusta Westland, to offer places that are easy to move into, through modern accommodation for rent. Young people such as nurses and students at Yeovil College will prefer to live near others like themselves. They could fit into apartments, which may be rented out first and later sold out as values rise. This market segment is likely to be attracted to homes that are easy to run, and contemporary in design. They may well play an active role in community activities such as the arts and sports, and so will benefit greatly from the village's location, often preferring to walk or cycle to get to their destination.

2.5 Senior Living

There is a very large potential market among the ageing population who now outnumber the young, but little has so far been built to meet the needs of the 'active elderly' as opposed to those who require care. As yet experience of building retirement homes in Yeovil has been disappointing, and their problems have been aggravated by the general slowdown in the housing market, making it difficult to raise the funds to move. Many of those living in under-occupied and expensive to run large homes, particularly leaky inter-war semis as in the North side of Yeovil, however will be attracted to move, and possibly downsize, if the right house is available, and moving is easy. A well-designed and spacious apartment with a balcony or patio and a good view, especially if there is a lift, and with low and predictable running costs would have a wide appeal to 'empty nesters'. The location next to a town centre gives the freedom to walk into town, and, access to all the town centre facilities. Many older people do not want to move to retirement communities and could be attracted to move to places that offers enough space especially as the cuts and heating bills start to bite. Though they may start with a car, many will decide to save money and trouble by renting a car when they need it, and using public transport as much as possible. This is therefore a market segment that could be tapped, once the village has started to get established.



Top: Eco-housing overlooking a lake in Ecolonia, The Netherlands

Bottom left: Springhill Stroud has shown how eco features can add value to a development

Bottom right: Dickens Heath, Solihull offers a choice of somewhere different to live

2.6 Eco Enthusiasts

The final segment, who may play a key role in the early stages, will be people who are specifically attracted by the idea of somewhere different that puts new ideas into practice. Social pioneers can include people wanting to live more sustainably (for example by growing some of their own food in an allotment), or who want to get involved in shared communal space. The experience of one of the pioneering cohousing schemes at Springhill in Stroud shows that such developments also appeal to older single people who like the idea of companionship. By having a good mix, a sense of community and belonging can be created. Eco enthusiasts will play an active role in getting innovations such as car sharing and car clubs off the ground (though these will need to be sited so they can serve the town as a whole). They will also want space to store plenty of bicycles of different kinds! Hence a site for self-build might be made available within the masterplan to encourage local groups to come forward, as happens on a large scale in towns such as Freiburg.

2.7 Commercial Uses

Yeovil town centre has been performing quite well, but the Southern part of the High Street is relatively weak, and cut off from the leisure attractions at the Yeo Leisure Centre and Old Station Road. There are a number of opportunities that Summerhouse Village will open up:

2.7.1 Retail

By creating an active edge to Stars Lane some of the gaps in what the town currently offers could be filled. It is possible that a small food store may be attracted. In similar towns where efforts have been made to promote independent shops and sustainable life styles, such as Stroud in Gloucestershire or Ludlow in the Marches, there has been a resurgence in the town centre as a source of food, prompted by farmers' markets selling local produce, as well as specialist bakeries and delicatessens. As people live longer, so more time is likely to be spent using town centres providing there are pleasant places to go, with many people shopping for a day at a time, in line with future trends. Here Stars Lane could play an important role in providing a small convenience store and a bakery nearby Old Station Road, which is becoming a good place to eat out. Other uses could include businesses involved in parts of the 'green economy' such as double glazing, or business promotion, where visibility on a street where cars pass by and can stop will attract entrepreneurs who might otherwise be located in an inaccessible business park. Cafes on Stars Lane could have tables outside with fine views.

2.7.2 Small offices

Interest was expressed in the idea of some of the ground floor space being rented out as offices, and this could include voluntary



Top: A hillside hotel in mid Wales shows how steep sites can be turned into a popular destination



Bottom: New budget hotel in Orchard Park, Cambridge, whose bar and restaurant has provides a community meeting place

organisations and other small businesses that rely on easy access for customers. These would be units or around 500-1000 sq ft, and would provide a good use for what would otherwise be the ground floor of a house. Space might be let out on a temporary basis to new businesses, and later sold to a shop, as the area becomes established.

2.7.3 Health centre

With the prospects of older people living nearby, potential demand is likely to include a doctors' surgery or health centre. Many doctors and dentists are now moving out of large Victorian houses into shared modern premises. In turn this will generate demand

for a chemist, and would add to the attractions at the bottom of the High Street.

2.7.4 60 bed hotel

Evidence from Jones Lang LaSalle, as well as the personal experience of the team shows there is a real need and enough potential demand in Yeovil to support a major hotel opening up on the edge of town. This could provide not only accommodation for those working at, or visiting employers such as Agusta Westland, but would also provide valuable facilities for meetings and conferences that a market town such as Yeovil ought to be able to offer.

2.8 Community Uses

The TCPA Eco-towns Community worksheet points out that *'the formation of sustainable communities within an eco-town is as vital to its success as its physical infrastructure'*. The main community uses will be catered for by existing facilities, such as schools, some of which are within the desired 800 yards walking distance, and the popular GateWay community church. The new residents will also provide customers for the Country Park, including the swimming pool currently under threat of closure, and the facilities of the Yeo Leisure Park. However there is also potential for making much more of the Country Park, and facilities like the farm, and the Dodham Brook, as part of the 'green infrastructure' of the new village:

2.8.1 Food production

The 'eco' theme offers a number of opportunities that will make Suumerhouse Village more attractive as a place to live, as well as exemplary in terms of offering a healthy environment. Most important of all is growing food, which the BioRegional/CABE report considers is key to reducing our carbon footprint.²⁰ Allotments are not only increasingly popular, but also provide a means of cultivating and looking after green space that might otherwise go to waste. They may also offer an outlet for community enterprise, possibly working in conjunction with GateWay to involve those who would otherwise be alienated.

2.8.2 Active leisure

A Country Park is essentially a series of recreational opportunities, and this could include not making much more of the farm which currently grazes cattle on Summerhouse Hill, and thus keeps the grass down. There are plenty of examples of 'urban farms' that generate income from activities like horse-riding or sales of produce, and that could readily complement the hotel. With improved access, this could greatly add to the town's attractions, particularly for children.

2.8.3 Energy centre

Though run as a commercial concern, there would be considerable benefits of ensuring that visitors can learn about alternative forms of energy by seeing how waste is used as fuel. This could readily be linked with a 'recycling site' at the back of the hotel thus meeting a number of needs in one place through careful design, as the edge of town centres can offer the best locations for waste disposal.

2.8.4 Gardens

The space opened up by both the development of a hotel, and also the raising of the water level in the Dodham Brook opens up opportunities for creating a series of gardens that will turn the idea of a promenade into a reality. The challenge is how to make

the ongoing maintenance viable. One option is to link them to the hotel. Another is some form of community enterprise, as has been proposed by the GateWay centre in the past. This could help train young adults in country management skills, and in the process create somewhere beautiful on the outskirts of the town centre, which currently lacks any form of park or gardens.



Ruskin Mill near Stroud shows how community enterprise can turn neglected valleys into beautiful places

²⁰ *What makes an Eco-Town?* Bio-Regional Development Group and CABE, 2008