

BPAA PRESS RELEASE

“Land shortage could see Bristol stagnating in years to come”

“A more enlightened attitude towards development from the city’s planners will be needed if Bristol is avoid stagnation in the decades to come.” That’s the view of Chris Haworth, the outgoing President of the Bristol Property Agents Association, delivered as he hands over the chains of office to his successor, Andrew Batchelor.

Mr Haworth, a development specialist at Alder King, describes 2009 as: “A challenging year, but one in which we saw a level of confidence return in all the key markets – retail, residential, office and industrial as well as investment. Sensible levels of development in recent years mean that we have not been left with the large amount of empty property that held back growth following the last recession, and which many regional cities are now seeing.

“That is an excellent position to be in as the national economy edges slowly out of recession, and will encourage developers and investors to put their money into the city, creating new employment opportunities.

“But our main concern as a professional body is that we can see problems on the horizon. The development strategies now being discussed for the City simply don’t make enough land available for the population growth that everyone expects between now and 2026.”

The official figures are for the population of the city to grow from 421,300 in 2006 to 520,000 in 2026.

“But,” maintains Mr Haworth, “current local authority policies – not only in Bristol but also in the adjoining unitary authority areas – will not release the amount of land that we and our clients think is needed, or in the right places, to meet the ambitious growth projections that are the natural consequences of our success as a city and vital to Bristol’s future prosperity.”

Going forward, the Council envisage 1,500 homes being built each year – but 2,500 were built last year, during the recession. “No one wants to see green spaces concreted over,” Mr Howarth maintains, “but some compromises will have to be made if Bristolians are to have the homes and jobs they will need going forward.

“Not everyone wants to live in a city-style apartment – but the densities of housing being specified on brownfield land points to that being promoted as the solution to growth in demand.”

Other features of 2009 include:

- Office rents holding up strongly – dipping just 50p/sq ft from the record levels of 2008. Deals done were 50% down on the 10-year average, but the year ended very strongly.
- An influx of investment from overseas, including two office purchases that totalled £50 million between them.
- A steady year for the industrial market, with prime units holding their values well.
- A good recovery for the residential market, with prices moving into “positive territory” for the year – with one area, Southville, actually returning to 2007 values.
- The first full year of trading at Cabot Circus has helped some parts of Broadmead, but has not adversely affected The Mall, which traded well and still has no landlord voids.

“We all entered 2009 with some trepidation,” says Chris Haworth, “and it has not been an easy year by any measure, but I think all of us have been encouraged by how confidence has really come back into the market in the last

six months. Bristol remains a city where people want to live, work and invest – largely as a result of the quality of life here.

“It is critical that we have development strategies in place that enable us to maintain that quality of life – and accommodate the growth that will allow everyone to share in the city’s increased prosperity.”

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