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BRISTOL PROPERTY AGENTS ASSOCIATION

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NEWSLETTER

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Growing pains

Is enough land being allocated for Bristol's expected expansion?

Counter moves

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Homes edge up

2009 saw home prices edge back up - but what will 2010 bring?

Bristol Property Agents ASSOCIATION

Developing our future

2009 posed its fair share of challenges within the property sector. 2010, argues Chris Haworth, the BPAA's outgoing President, is the year when a more enlightened attitude towards development will be needed if Bristol is to avoid stagnation in the decades to come.

PROPERTY AGENTS, not always unfairly, have something of a reputation for talking up the positives. So without being over optimistic, perhaps the best way to characterise the Bristol property market in 2009 was that it was certainly not as bad as the second half of 2008… and nowhere near as bad as many of us feared.

The year saw a level of confidence return to certain parts of the market, and deals continuing to be transacted - in offices, retail, industrial, and now even the investment market! The residential sector stabilised and, throughout the summer and early autumn, performed far better than many had expected, bringing the welcome return of volume house builders to the land market. Overall, activity levels either stabilised or returned during the year, although at nowhere near the levels of 2006 and 2007.

Regrettably a lot of development plans have been shelved, waiting for occupiers, whilst development finance has completely evaporated - for anything other than pre-let or pre-sold schemes to good covenants. However, on the positive side, investment yields are firming up again with prime property once again attracting strong buying interest from both institutional and well-funded private investors.

We are also fortunate to find ourselves without the overhang of 'oversupply' and significant levels of new unoccupied property, that dragged out the last recession, and which may pose problems for a number of other regional cities.

Barometer

But the word that keeps cropping up in all the sector analyses of the Bristol market is 'challenging'; 2009 was a year when many parts of the economy kept their heads down and hoped for the UK to follow other countries out of recession. Inevitably the property market acted as a barometer for this sentiment. It would be folly to regard 2010 as anything but another year where we can only hope that the national economy edges forward rather than slips back, with many uncertainties ahead.

While Bristol has a reputation for outperforming its regional city peers, nobody should not be complacent, a trap Bristol has been accused of falling into before. 2010 is also a General Election year, and there is always the danger that the market will sit on its hands and wait to see what difference that will make.

Whilst we are unable to control many of the factors that will influence the national and international economic environment, there are some important issues with which the BPAA has been closely involved over the last year, and which could make an important difference to the way the Bristol economy moves forward in the future.

We have been actively engaged in the discussions on the projected growth strategy for the City which will take us up to 2026. Figures have been put forward that would see houses built and employment land made available to meet projected demand. But 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.

Sustainable

The key to sustaining our economic wellbeing in Bristol is not to become complacent, as certain parts of our community arguably became in the past; we must be proactive, positive and 'fast on our feet' to meet the needs of developing sectors of the economy. A crucial component is diversity: we have to be flexible to take advantage of new employment opportunities, making sure we are providing a wide choice of readily available and suitable land - and the planning regime is pivotal to that.

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Industrial: "activity down but deals being done"

Bristol's industrial agents report on an encouraging 2009 where activity levels were down, but where deals – some of them substantial- were being done.

GKN AIRBUS acquiring two warehouses, of 211,600 sq ft and 120,720 sq ft, at Gazeley's G Park development at Western Approach, was not only a further boost for Severnside, but also for the region's aerospace sector – and its industrial base. GKN have taken on the space for the manufacture of wing components towards their contract with Airbus. There are hopes that further aerospace requirements will now come forward locally.

Close by, Tesco are building a 500,000 sq ft distribution centre, replacing its Chepstow facility on land they have purchased; this will leave up to 47 acres available for other uses in the future. Another major supermarket operation, the Co-op, are reported to be back in the market for a 400,000 sq ft distribution unit, with Bristol and Bridgwater appearing to be the most favoured options at present.

ProLogis' 500,000 sq ft speculative development on Severnside remains unoccupied, an indicator of the general weakness in demand, and encouraging occupiers to wait for bespoke requirements to be met rather than electing to modify an existing building.

The bulk of this year's activity has been below 10,000 sq ft, where there are relatively limited options at present – with some locations having actually seen rental growth in the last 12 months in response to a lack of good quality space in the right locations. In contrast, the multi-let estates in standard space sizes in Avonmouth/South Bristol are providing plenty of competing opportunities for occupiers, leading to rents softening and more flexible lease terms being offered.

Due to the lack of speculative development over the last five years there is an emerging shortage of modern, well specified space. Severnside and Avonmouth continue to offer development opportunities, but there are concerns about the lack of employment land coming forward in other locations, with only a few parcels of land currently earmarked; this will lead to serious problems for occupiers/employers as and when demand returns.

Developing our future - continued from page 1

Sustainable growth is the central message of Bristol's core strategy and certainly no one wants to see green belt concreted over; after all, the quality of life here in Bristol is one of the prime reasons that we have experienced growth above the national average.

But a measure of realism is required. Almost everybody has benefited from the growth we have seen over the last 30 years. Bristol's Green Belt is now over 40 years old and it was not supposed to create a 'noose' around the city. Something more imaginative from local authorities will be necessary if we are to avoid potential stagnation and 'planning by appeal' becoming the norm in the next 15 years. Sensitive boundary reviews to enable economic growth, coupled with the establishment of new boundaries to prevent unbridled development sprawl for the next 40 years, is a sensible, pragmatic approach.

The proposed housing provision relies heavily on very high densities of development, requiring too high a proportion to be of an apartment or flatted nature: unpopular and unsuitable for families... and ultimately unsustainable.

Furthermore, if Bristol is serious about attracting new employers into the city, we will have to do better than point them towards a few pockets of development land in South Bristol. The proposed provision of employment land is woefully short of even the City Council's own estimate of what is required. We look forward to continuing the very fruitful engagement we have with Bristol City Council to keep making our voice heard as the strategy reaches its final stages of development and implementation.

A cohesive approach

2009 has also been a notable year in another respect: the new influx of many residential agents joining the BPAA. This has been a very welcome development, sparked in part by their need to act more cohesively in response to changing trends and pressures – particularly in the way they market properties.

The strength of the BPAA – indeed the unique strength of the BPAA in national terms – is that professionals in the same industry are willing to work together to not only raise their own game (without losing their competitive edge!) but to help create a property environment that is better for everybody.

Having more representatives from the residential sector will give us a stronger collective voice on issues that affect the long-term future of our city. As a reflection of the important contribution of the residential agency sector, I am delighted that Doug Wood, of Woods Estate Agents, has been elected Junior Vice President of the Association and will be in office in 2012.

As we move into a new decade, the BPAA's role in shaping our city's fortunes has never been more important.

Offices look south

While 2009 as a whole saw office transactions at 50% of the 10-year annual average, a strong end to the year was enough to give agents encouragement going into 2010. And the year's biggest deal came from a very unexpected quarter.

THE BRISTOL MARKET was certainly a lot stronger at the end of 2009 than at the corresponding period of 2008, with more deals being struck as well as more enquiries being made – albeit many of the transactions were 10,000 sq ft or less – as well as a number of deals in solicitors' hands for completion early in 2010.

The year was marked by the city centre putting in a much stronger performance than out of town, possibly reflecting the latter's dependence on sectors suffering more from the downturn, while the biggest deal of the year came from a totally unexpected part of the city: South Bristol.

The bad news that Somerfield was to close its headquarters, following its takeover by the Co-op, was succeeded by the rather better news that the City Council was to step in and confirm its commitment to South Bristol's regeneration by taking 60,000 sq ft. There have been enquiries for the remainder of the space as well as other active enquiries in South Bristol.

Some 1.5 million sq ft of offices are now looking for occupiers in the city centre, of which 350,000 sq ft is brand new, grade A space, with 100,000 sq ft of this under offer. To put this into context, an exceptional 2007 saw 900,000 sq ft let or sold, and the five-year average take up is over 700,000 sq ft.

The advantage that Bristol now has is that so few new buildings are empty, just one new office is under construction and developers have put other schemes on hold. This is in marked contrast with the early '90s recession when the city was left with an overhang which took many years to clear and which suppressed new office building. It also helps to explain why rents for prime space during 2009 slipped just 50p/sq ft from their 2008 high water mark, although incentives were more generous. In this context, while developers with schemes on the stocks may still not feel inclined to build speculatively, especially in the light of lenders' current reluctance to fund new commercial buildings, they will be able to respond quickly to demand as and when it returns - and be confident of viable rental levels.

While the second hand market has required rather more in the way of incentives and flexible packages, business is being done. In the words of one agent: "For a while in 2008 you felt as though there simply wasn't a deal to be done – no matter what you offered".

Out of town enters 2010 with 500,000 sq ft available. But while this market may have disappointed agents in 2009, again this does not statistically represent a long supply line: the five-year average annual take up is 324,000 sq ft.

Temple Quay Central, promoted for the last few years as the city's premier office quarter, suffered a setback early in 2009 as the developer Castlemore Securities went into administration. This, however, has far from derailed the project. 2010 will see the completion of its flagship office, a 215,000 sq ft waterfront unit – 175,000 sq ft of which will be occupied by Bristol law firm Burges Salmon.

A number of public realm projects will be completed early in the new year and a second connecting bridge will also be opened.

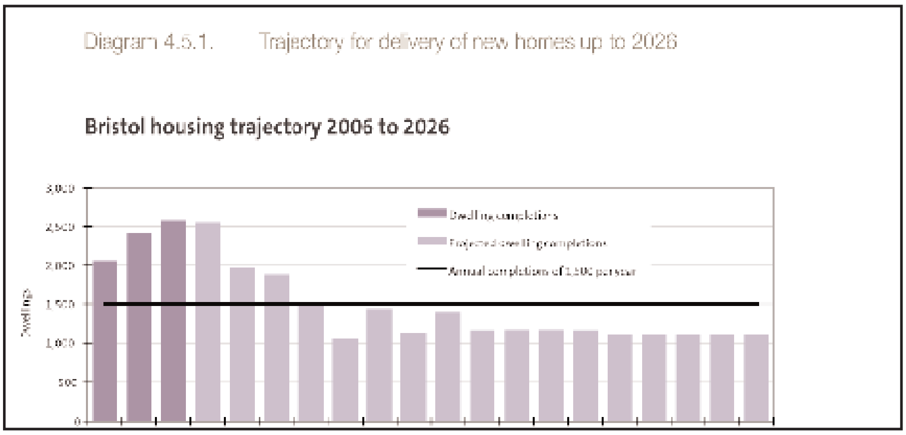
Office options

The top six new build offices immediately available in the city centre - although several have deals in solicitors' hands

Templeback - 100,000 sq ft
Temple Circus - 83,000 sq ft
The Paragon - 52,000 sq ft
1 Linear Park -52,000 sq ft
Tower Wharf - 37,000 sq ft
St Catherines Court - 21,000 sq ft

Coping with expansion

Bristol has been set ambitious targets to cope with anticipated population growth in the next 16 years. But city planners and some parts of the property sector have diverging views on how these will be achieved.



BRISTOL IS GROWING. And not just in line with the anticipated population growth throughout the whole of the UK, as the birth rate continues to climb and the country experiences net inward migration. From a figure of 421,300 in 2006, Bristol's population is expected to grow to almost 520,000 in 2026 – a massive 26% in 20 years.

The reasons are positive ones: the South West in general is growing faster than other regions; and as its economic engine house, Bristol is driving that growth. People want to live and work here and we regularly top polls as 'most attractive city'. We have the highest student retention rate for any city - and there are plenty more in the pipeline: 52,400 currently study here.

The challenge facing the city, and 'all who sail in her', is how to accommodate that growth without compromising the quality of life that makes us want to be here in the first place. Homes have to be built, infrastructure developed, jobs found and services expanded - and all within a relatively small geographical area.

Government projections for new homes required in the sub-region (and all previous government projections have proven to be been underestimates) top 92,000: that's a city equivalent to one substantially bigger than Bath, and all within the old 'Avon' boundaries.

So how will these targets be met? This is where a series of interweaving strategy documents come into play.

Regional context

Over the past few years, two key types of new planning strategy documents have been evolving: the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), which sets the context for the whole of the South West; and, in the former Avon, Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) – each of which sets out the local development context, explaining how each authority will play its part in meeting the growth projections.

Bristol's local development framework (BDF) has been drawn together by Bristol City Council and is a series of documents which effectively set out how the city will develop over the next 15 to 20 years. These documents, in turn, form part of the statutory Development Plan for the city along with the RSS.

For the outsider, all this can sound somewhat confusing, but these documents' importance, to the property sector and to the local economy, cannot be overstated as they will ultimately determine property development and 'planning decisions' in the future. While nothing is written on tablets of stone, the Development Plan now being finalised by Bristol will be as close as it comes to prescribing where houses, offices, warehouses, leisure and retail outlets will be built in the years to come.

Much of the thinking, planning and consultation is now complete; and, just as this newsletter goes to print, the deadline for final representations on the 'Bristol Development Framework Core Strategy', published at the end of November 2009, concludes. Any comments considered sufficiently relevant will be added in as notes, and the Secretary of State will make his or her findings known this summer.

So do the planners and property sector agree on the shape of the future? Well... not exactly.

Simon Fitton is Technical Director of RPS Planning, a company that advises a number of major developers. In his opinion: "The Bristol Core Strategy is restrictive in terms of both new houses and economic growth. The urban extension sites are not being properly considered, while the only new industrial land identified to date is at Nover's Hill.

"Up to date figures put forward talk of 36,500 homes in the Bristol City Council area by 2026, which we think is about right. But the City Council is only allowing for 30,000. That is equivalent to 1,500 new builds a year - and we know that the affordable housing requirement alone is over 1,500. Last year there were over 2,500 new builds - and that was in today's market. More land will have to be released if we are to meet the needs of Bristol's population."

Delayed decisions

Various critics point to the fact that the problem is wider than just Bristol City Council's administrative boundary, and therefore there is a 'compounding' effect, because Bristol as an urban area extends into BANES, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire – all of whom are keen to limit development.

Kevin Willcox is Strategic Land Director of Crest Nicholson, one of the region's biggest housing developers in recent years, and one of his criticisms is that the type of housing being promoted by Bristol City Council simply isn't what the market wants. "It's mostly high density on brownfield sites," he says, "but we don't need more apartments. We want more family homes."

One of the biggest recent issues is the failure of the RSS, for various technical reasons, to progress to adoption coupled with the announcement by the Conservative Party that, should they be elected to Government, they will scrap the RSS and 'return planning to local people'. That has provided a context for some councils to delay decisions.

Kevin Wilcox again: "The most difficult aspect of all this is the uncertainty: South Gloucestershire, for instance, appeared to have stopped releasing land – and were waiting for a change in Government. But having lost a planning appeal, they have now 'turned turtle' and are allowing development again.

"Housebuilders need certainty to do their financial and resource allocation planning years ahead. The companies are mostly nationally based and, if they judge the market is uncertain here, they will turn their activities to other parts of the country where local authorities are far more positive."

Bristol City Council, however, argue that they are in tune with what the market needs and, after several years of intensive new house building, are well on target. "We have adopted the figure of 30,000 because we feel it is deliverable and sustainable," says David Bishop, the City's Strategic Director, Development.

"We don't agree with the projected urban extensions to Hicks Gate or to the South West in Ashton Vale – not least because they will compromise other aspects of land use, such as playing fields and landscape."

"And we would argue strongly that higher density housing does not have to exclude family homes," adds Sarah O'Driscoll, Service Manager, Strategic Planning. "Some of the highest density areas in Bristol are in places like Bishopston, Horfield and Totterdown – and these are essentially family homes. A great deal can be achieved with good quality design.

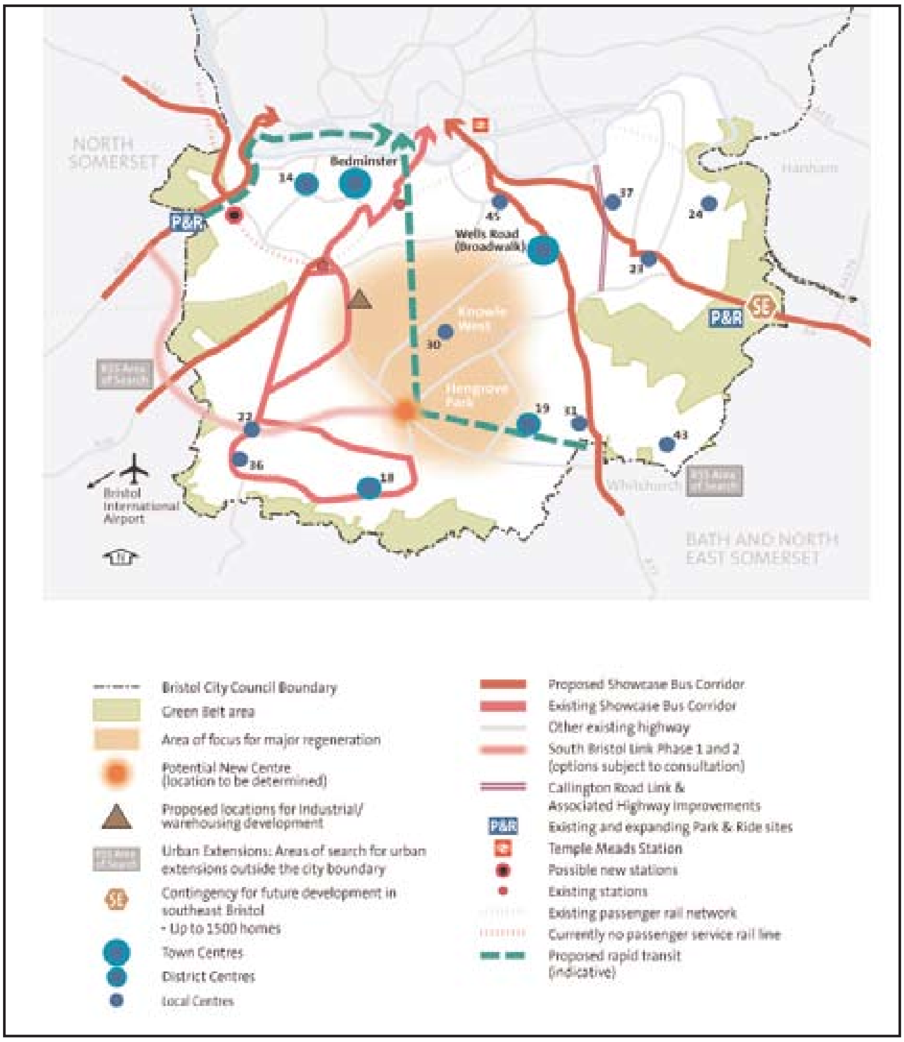
"We want to see sustainable development, with communities that have the right infrastructure and quality of life and access to services."

Constructive ideas

"Identifying employment land is a challenge," says Zoe Willcox, the City's Service Director, Planning, who recognises that many pieces of employment land have been absorbed by residential developers in recent years. "But we do know how much will be needed and we have asked for constructive ideas on how this additional employment land allocation can be delivered. There are sites out there – not just brownfield but low value green space too. We are happy to consider any of these, and that detail will form part of later documents."

"We want to work together with the property industry in meeting the targets," adds David Bishop, "and let them know that we recognise the difficulties that developers face in the current climate. The figures we are working on are for the next 16 years and there will obviously be dips and rises in activity levels during that time. Very few projects are currently coming forward because the market has been 'dulled down' by the economic situation, and we are reflecting those pressures by offering to repackage plans – looking again at Planning Gain S106 terms in particular."

In other words, Bristol does acknowledge that in the current market the sums don't necessarily add up for developers – but there are deals to be done if, in return, Bristol can get the type of development it wants. The City's officers also point to the huge expenditure proposed to be pumped into Bristol's transport infrastructure in the coming years – the light rail transit project for instance, which is harnessing government



funding to open up parts of the city that might currently be seen as less accessible: most notably, South Bristol.

Bristol's officers take their lead from the elected Council, and here the message is clear. In the words of Dr Jon Rogers, Executive Member for Transport & Sustainability: "We want to see Bristol's development continue – with more housing and increased employment space – but in line with the original Regional Spatial Strategy, which was carefully thought through to achieve this in a sustainable way. What we don't want is more urban sprawl, so development should be within the inner city and South Bristol, regenerating these areas and furthering our vision of a modern, high tech, media savvy city."

But will that prescriptive approach actually work in the open market? Some developers and their advisors are concerned that some of the areas where Bristol wants the houses to go are not necessarily where people want to live: the parts of the city earmarked for regeneration – such as South Bristol, the 'Northern Arc' and 'Inner East Bristol' - are where a lot of density intensification is proposed. They feel that shoehorning development into areas in this way will be swimming against the tide of market forces and, ultimately, will either prove undeliverable or only at much slower rates - with consequent obvious economic implications.

A large part of Bristol's housing allocation will be affordable – if some people want a home they will have to go where the available housing is. However, private purchasers have more choice in where they live. Key to persuading them to live in areas such as South Bristol – where 10,000 new units are planned – will be infrastructure, transport and service improvements, job opportunities and improved public resources such as schools. Developers won't go where they don't believe they can sell homes. The days when demand was chasing supply to the extent that 'pioneer' areas could be opened up are long gone.

One thing is certain: this debate will continue. The BPAA is in regular talks with the City Council, working hard to impress officers and councillors with what they judge to be deliverable, while those officers and councillors are working to share their vision of what the city needs. A degree of flexibility and compromise may well be essential if Bristol is to get the homes and jobs it wants in the years ahead.

Resi: confidence slowly returns

The turmoil and torment of the residential market have been well documented in the national media over the last couple of years, but how did the Bristol market stand up in 2009?

While the year presented agents with plenty of challenges, especially with ongoing uncertainties about the economy, it transpired there were significantly more sales than in the previous year; and, in common with many parts of the country, prices actually recovered somewhat - not least because of a lack of supply. As the year ended, even though the prevailing sentiment is that most vendors are entering the market only through necessity, agents were reporting a noticeable upturn in enquiries and valuations.

A number of prospective vendors, unable to sell but needing to move, have found themselves becoming 'accidental landlords' and, for many, this has not been a negative experience: letting voids are slightly up on 2008 but there is still strong tenant demand, and this is set to continue as employers such as the MoD bring more staff into the sub-region and prospective first-time buyers find themselves unable to raise the significant deposits now required.

The restrictions placed on borrowers are (albeit slowly) gradually easing, and this is encouraging more activity, but lenders are still being relatively circumspect in relation to new build apartments. Prices of city centre developments, around the country, have seen a significant fall. However, unlike many UK cities, Bristol has not experienced the same level of over supply and there is still a reasonably good demand for correctly priced apartments within the city. This is illustrated by the statistics:

Take up in Bristol for Q3 2009, for new build apartments, showed a three-fold increase on Q3 2008, with levels of stock dramatically reduced from 332 available units in Q3 2008 to less than 70 in Q4 2009. Prices in prime new build Bristol property rose by 4.9% in the third quarter and 3.5% in the fourth quarter, bringing an overall adjustment, for 2009, of 1.8% according to data from Land Registry, and 1.7% using data from Rightmove house price index.

There has also been a return of the cash buyer. Income from buy-to-let has become more attractive than other investments, coupled with a significant number of 'assisted purchases'- with - well-heeled parents helping children to get on to the property ladder.

With the stock of new build apartments now significantly reduced, a number of developers are dusting off plans of previously stalled sites. However, making such developments viable, with the reduced prices and take up rates of the prevailing market, will require significantly reduced Section 106 requirements: conditions previously being placed on developers - such as including 20% or even 30% affordable housing – would currently rule out most developments.

Not withstanding potential demand, due to the difficulties of funding apartment construction, there is likely to be a drop off in supply during 2010, with demand expected to outstrip supply. This is certain to put an upward pressure on prices, although the scales are delicately balanced and other factors (primarily the state of the economy, the willingness of lenders to provide mortgages and interest rates) will play their part in whether the fragile recovery seen in 2009 continues into 2010.

For other parts of the housing market, quality properties have inevitably held their values relative to others, but there have also been significant variations between how different parts of the city have performed – Clifton, Cotham and Southville have done particularly well, with Southville actually holding its 2007 values for spacious family homes conveniently close to the city centre.

Bristol Residential Development Survey 2009

- A total of 98.39% of all dwellings completed during the period April 2008 to April 2009 were constructed on previously developed land.
- The average density of housing completed on major sites since April 2000 is 78.49 dwellings per hectare (DPH) which is considerably higher than the government guide encouraging development of a minimum of 30 DPH.
- Of the 17,237 dwellings completed between 2001 and 2009, 78% were flats and duplexes and 22% were houses and bungalows. During the period April 2008 to April 2009, 83% of all dwelling completions were apartments and 17% houses.

Information: courtesy of Savills.

Resi agents eye move to self marketing

THE RESIDENTIAL sections of the City's two main newspapers have long been the primary route to market for Bristol's property agents – not only to promote their properties for sale or to let but also to put forward their names to prospective vendors.

However that may well change in 2010. Just as the residential market hit the buffers, and agents' activity levels and incomes fell, Bristol United Press, which owns both the Evening Post and Western Daily Press, announced plans to increase advertising rates. After hurried negotiations, these rises were postponed – but both papers are once more seeking to increase rates.

The result is that a group of agents, under the aegis of the BPAA, has been carrying out a feasibility study on producing their own residential property newspaper - co-operatively produced and funded - and distributing it through branches. This, together with the all important coverage on the Internet through sites such as Rightmove, could potentially offer a far more cost effective option - for agents and their clients.

Investors see growth ahead

WHILE INVESTMENT activity in Bristol was predictably subdued in 2009, several major deals stand out – not simply because of their size, but because they involved German funds, who took advantage of the combination of a weak pound and the big drop in commercial property values.

The beginning of the year saw agents concerned about there being any activity at all: commercial property values had been one of the very first casualties as the financial markets hit the wall and 2008 had ended with the 'fire sale' in many UK centres of a number of investments as many funds pulled out of commercial property.

But with values down by as much as 50%, cash-rich funds called what they saw as the bottom of the market and March saw Gemany's SEB Asset Management acquiring the Osborne Clarke headquarters for £27.8 million (including transaction costs) from Invista Real Estate Investment Management Limited for a yield believed to be 7.4%.

In August, another of Temple Quay's largest office buildings - 3 Rivergate – was sold for £21.5 million by AXA CIS to Credit Suisse Asset Management, at a reported 7.2%.

It was not only overseas investors who recognised that the returns from properties with long leases and secure occupiers represented a significant opportunity, and UK retail funds also came back into the market with a vengeance – particularly in the latter part of the year. That rush of money back into the market helped generate a significant rise in values – with probably half of the early losses recouped by the end of 2009.

The other big deal of the year came in February when PRUPIM, on behalf of The Prudential Assurance Company Limited sold the freehold investment of the Sainsbury's unit in Emerson's Green, Bristol for £26.5 million showing a net initial yield of 8.2%. As an indication of how far the Bristol market recovered during 2009, the consensus is that, if that property had come to the market at the end of the year, the yield would probably have been closer to 6.5%.

However, while prime properties with long leases have fared well, secondary and tertiary properties have been slower to see a return of confidence, reflecting the fragility of the economy as well as sentiment in the economy's prospects in the year ahead.

The prevailing sentiment is that commercial property yields have now corrected themselves to fairly sensible levels from what was an overheated situation, reflecting the risks and returns involved, and certainly offering higher returns than many other asset classes. The prospects for 2010 remain difficult to gauge as investment decisions are so subject to market sentiment – and it may well be that demand will be subdued until after the General Election. If gilt yields move out as a result of the Government's quantitative easing strategy, this too could have a negative impact.

But Bristol, especially in comparison with other regional cities, certainly has many fundamentals right, not least a lack of unoccupied properties with little new stock in the pipeline, and is well placed should there be an upturn in the economy.

Retail: lease flexibility is the key

WHEN THE GOING gets tough, the tough go shopping, goes the phrase, and the retail sector is ever a bellwether of public perception of the economy. So a busy end to 2009 was a welcome fillip for the sector after a year when retailers have had to work hard to keep revenues up, and landlords have (of necessity) adopted a pragmatic and more supportive stance.

This spirit of co-operation, relatively unusual in this sector, has been a critical factor in helping many retailers get through a very difficult time and has limited the number of casualties nationally and in Bristol. At the end of 2008, the disappointing Christmas numbers from some retailers were seen as presages of doom: Christmas 2009 has been a very different affair.

It was the first full year of trading for Cabot Circus, which opened almost fully let but in the teeth of the recession. Several occupiers have since fallen by the wayside, but footfall has stood up well and the centre has remained a beacon of the city's retail offer, continuing to attract some good names in 2009 – including Abercrombie & Fitch's sister brand Hollister taking 9,200 sq ft. When Zavvi's demise left a gap, PC World was quick to take its place.

With gaps appearing in many locations in Broadmead, partly through re-locations, deals have been done to attract new occupiers and maintain footfalls as well as to avoid paying empty rates – including short leases, and monthly, top up and all-inclusive rents. This has opened the door to some discount retailers to take space in pitches that they would have struggled to get into a few years ago. Public realm improvements have also raised the morale in Broadmead, but some secondary areas have struggled.

But put into the context of the rest of the country – where void rates of up to 30% have been recorded in some centres – Broadmead has traded relatively well in challenging market conditions, with Primark playing a key role in plugging the gap left by the House of Fraser and helping to lift the surrounding pitch.

Rents in western Broadmead have fallen back, but there is little open market evidence to show the true tone, while eastern Broadmead has consolidated round a fairly healthy level of £140 Zone A, although the incentives on offer make it difficult to make an accurate assessment.

The Mall at Cribbs Causeway has continued to trade well: its relatively wide hinterland helping it to withstand the challenge of Cabot Circus. Footfalls stand at around 13 million for the year. 'The Avenue' food area has been extensively refurbished, with new names such as Carluccio's, Yo Sushi, Patisserie Valerie and Caffe Gusto moving the dining offer upmarket and increasing restaurant dwell time.

New lets such as Apple and GIVe from George Davies (photographed below at Bristol Fashion Week) have provided excellent headlines, as has the opening of New Look's first shoes and accessories outlet in the UK, and there are currently no landlord voids – an unusually strong situation for any retail centre, although this has necessitated a softening in rents and terms.

Other notable performances locally include Yate, where some 'cracking deals' have been reported by agents. All around the sub-region, the major food retailers continue to stimulate a lot of activity, particularly with their convenience store formats – filling some of the voids in many out of town centres. Whether all these centres can continue without making over some units to other uses remains to be seen: there is a limit on how many pounds there are to go round.

The prospects for 2010 will depend on how much people feel they will have left over to take shopping after their weekly essentials: if anticipated tax rises are implemented, this – together with the restoration of VAT at 17.5% - might well make it another challenging year for the retailers.

Weather rises to occasion in 2009

GOLF

The Annual BPAA Golf Tournament took place at Mendip Spring Golf Club, on 24th September. The day was played in glorious late summer sunshine, and was brilliantly arranged by the Tournament organiser, Jason Herbert, who is to be complimented on the whole day's outcome. Some 48 players entered which, given the current property climate, was a particularly fine effort.

Justin Mcilhenney of Gregg Latchams produced a stirring display of golf which saw him crowned this year's champion with a Stableford score of 44 points. Well done to Justin, the runners up and to all the others who took part.

The BPAA is most grateful to Kevin Mashford of Utopia, not only for his company's kind sponsorship of the event, but also for his personal support on the day - in particular acting as our roving photographer! Thanks must also go to the staff and members of Mendip Spring for their hospitality and, finally, to the Members and Associates of the BPAA for continuing to support the event.

BOULES

As ever, the annual BPAA Boules Tournament proved a keenly contested event, with 30 teams battling it out in the beautiful setting of Goldney Hall's Orangery. Even the weather was on side as the competitors were whittled down! Bevan Brittan, Osborne Clarke, Meade King, Alder King and Clarke Willmott made it through to the quarter finals. But in the end a tense final was contested between a combined team from DTZ and EC Harris, who ultimately triumphed over Burston Cook to win the competition. The runners-up competition was won by CMS Developments.

The BPAA is again very grateful to the event sponsors Beach Baker Property Recruitment, and to all who contributed to raising £485 for Macmillan Cancer Support and NSPCC Childline.

TENNIS

The BPAA tennis tournament, last played in 2006, was resurrected in 2009 and nine firms took part on 10th September at the Coombe Dingle Sports Complex, on what transpired to be a perfect afternoon: clear blue skies, a light breeze and fierce competition... tempered by fine sportsmanship and camaraderie.

A round robin box competition produced two entertaining semi finals, culminating in a tense final between Matt Moody and Clive Lewis (a combined team from Lambert Smith Hampton and Lewis and Co.) and Will Meadows and Charlie Bending (Alder King and Beachcroft respectively). There was little to choose between the two teams, with the match going to a tie break: Will and Charlie triumphed and were presented with the champion's shield by BPAA president Chris Haworth.

The event, ably organised by Andrew Hardwick and Will Meadows, proved a great success and there are hopes to hold it again in 2010 and build upon last year's success.

QUIZ

The inaugural BPAA Quiz Night took place at The Mud Dock Cafe on 11th November 2009, where 20 teams battled it out for the title of 'Most Intelligent Property Professionals' in the South West. A closely-fought contest saw Bevan Britten win the coveted crown, with Williams Gunter Hardwick second, and Ashfield Land third.

The event was kindly sponsored by Cubex, who had their own round of questions incorporated into the quiz. It proved a very popular event, with a strong social element both before and after the quiz. There's a good chance of the event returning to the BPAA social calendar in November 2010 - this time with some silverware to win. Very many thanks and appreciation go to our sponsors and BPAA's own Edward Vanstone, who expertly organised and ran the event.

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2009/10

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Bristol Property Agents ASSOCIATION

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