

CONTINUING CARE RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

The centrepiece of the proposed enabling development for the Bedford River Valley Park is a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC). As the number and lifespan of retired and older people increases, so too do their expectations of what sort of retirement they will have.

Provision for this sector of the community is an area of growing concern for the whole of the UK and for Bedfordshire in particular as the availability of suitable facilities is very limited.

A significant step towards meeting this concern is the development of CCRCs – something in which America and Australia are already well ahead of the UK with, arguably, a different outlook on retirement; it is not about seeing out our days, but of packing them with as many activities as possible and enjoying a new richness and diversity of life.



Bedford River Valley Park – enabling active futures!



Retirement here we come!

A Continuing Care Retirement Community is essentially a 'one stop shop' that offers 55+ year olds a chance to enjoy a good life, in secure surroundings with all relevant amenities to hand including for many developments, a pub, restaurant, gymnasium, shop etc. CCRCs cater for this active and fulfilling approach to retirement and are taking a step towards meeting the urgent need for more retirement properties to buy.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

The best example is Denham Garden Village in Buckinghamshire, developed by The Anchor Trust, the largest not-for-profit provider of housing, support and care in England.

www.anchor.org.uk.

The development, mainly bungalows, is reminiscent of an attractive university campus built around a central glass atrium containing all the communal facilities such as food shop, doctor's surgery, health spa, café, bar and restaurant – everything on site that is needed for an active, safe and fulfilling retirement, **available also to the local community.**

Developments have been built in Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire plus Milton Keynes with the Lovat Fields Retirement Village at Willen Lake developed in partnership between The ExtraCare Charitable Trust, Milton Keynes Council, Milton Keynes Partnership and Midland Heart.

So, CCRCs could be something of a utopia for the members of the population heading for retirement.

However, in Bedford the facts and figures make difficult reading – in more than one sense!

THE FACTS AND FIGURES

Approximately 19% of the population of Bedfordshire is over the age of 60, that's some 77,400 people according to the Bedfordshire County Council's own Corporate Strategy for Older People 2007 - 2012.

Increased longevity also means more and more homes become less and less suitable for retired homeowners to remain living in them. It has also been recognized that in and around Bedford elderly owner-occupiers are very poorly catered for with far less access to retirement housing.

At present there are approximately 1,500 dwellings available in the Bedford Borough for a population of approximately 29,000 older people (60+) or 16,000 households headed by a pensioner.

The situation is worsened with only approximately 20% of the existing retirement properties available for purchase and the total population forecast to rise by approximately 10%. Despite this the vast bulk of the stock provided for rent is allocated only to applicants whose financial circumstances are seen to warrant the benefit of the public subsidy channelled into it. A significant void therefore exists in present local plans.

A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

The facts are that owner occupiers have very restricted access to available stock, especially so in areas of highest demand.

The sheltered and retirement housing provision in Bedford, including housing with care, sees just 18 developments of 739 properties available for sale; for housing with care only there is a single development for sale with just 41 properties.

This equates to approximately 7 properties available for sale for every 1000 older people seeking retirement properties.

The BRVP and the proposed enabling development for the rowing lake would be a significant step forward in helping ease this growing and pressing problem.

It would provide a golden opportunity for local authorities to work with private enterprise and produce a flagship model for similar future developments in the county and across the country.

The proposed development would include a state of the art facility for active and continuing care retirement, leisure, sports, education, housing and employment catering for every niche in the community from young to old – an opportunity not to be missed!

UNITARY AUTHORITY

As we go through the re-organization of the County and Borough Councils there is a further opportunity to help meet the challenge for the provision of retirement homes to buy whilst also implementing an exciting and extraordinary vision for Bedford's sporting and recreational future.

The County Council's own Corporate Strategy for Older People 2007 – 2012 outlines a clear vision for housing, care and support services for older people in the county with one disappointing omission – there is no clear picture of how the independent/private sector is expected to contribute to achieving this.

The Corporate Strategy quotes the view expressed by older people in Bedfordshire that there is 'insufficient sheltered housing for the private buyer' and acknowledges that previous studies/estimates 'tended to look at the need for social rented provision rather than the overall potential demand. The emergence of owner occupation as a significant factor in old age has shifted the balance between estimates of need to response to demand.' The strategy does commit 'to explore the extra care village



concept' although the private sector is not seen as a potential partner in delivering this. In common with many Authorities, the Council envisages delivery of this extra care provision through the public sector whereas this proposal represents an opportunity to involve the private sector and rapidly expand provision for the elderly in the community in the future.

The strategy does strongly support the development of extra care sheltered housing, both rented and to buy, to 'provide an effective alternative to residential care' and 'promote a more independent lifestyle' and that is where the BRVP, lake and enabling development can step in.

COUNCIL SUPPORT

Both the borough and county councils have been unanimous in providing financial and political support for the lake and park, both backed by Renaissance Bedford, the Government Local Delivery Vehicle.

The County Council subscribed £10,000 towards the fees to facilitate compiling the proposals for the enabling development in the BRVP and their subsequent submission to the Local Development Framework.

The Planning Consent for the 2300 metre lake is instrumental in allowing the enabling development and part of the lake has already been formed by numerous water areas (see front cover photograph).



Artists impression of the rowing lake.

Further work excavating the minerals in the western half of the lake/proposed enabling development area started in August 2008.

Mayor Frank Branston has hosted landowner meetings and his Deputy, Ian Clifton, has been a very positive influence for the project throughout and between them they have been instrumental in helping to bring the various landowners closer together to realise this opportunity for Bedford.

The independent/private sector is well placed to help and in Bedfordshire some provision is already made by the Kathleen and Michael Connolly Foundation and The Bedford Charity (The Harpur Trust).

The conclusion must be that the BRVP, rowing lake and proposed enabling development, would make a first step to meeting the needs of an expanding retired population seeking to buy suitable retirement homes.

Working hand in hand with charities and the private sector there is an opportunity for a well thought out strategy to be implemented that benefits the whole community and provides Bedford with top class community assets for the future.