

City Living

Mixed use developments in Leeds have been growing in scale and complexity. How well is the planning system coping, how robust is the market and how well are such developments contributing to urban sustainability?

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ABSTRACT

Medium to high density, mixed use property development on brownfield, central sites was encouraged by government policy from the late 1990s. The 'city living' apartments produced in response have proved popular with young professionals employed in the burgeoning financial and business services sector. These dwellings have helped to meet housing need for a segment of the market. They have reduced the need for some city centre employees to commute and have contributed to the greater vitality and viability of the city centre.

But in Leeds the planners were not prepared for the flood of applications, driven especially by the demand from buy-to-let investors. Although many tenants and buyers have come forward, only those with relatively high salaries can afford to occupy city centre flats. There is a higher rate of vacancy in the city centre than there is elsewhere in the city and there could be substantial oversupply if all proposed schemes are built, even if the local and city regional economy continues to thrive. The environmental performance of the buildings has been less than exemplary and the life style of inhabitants is not as low-impact as it could theoretically be.

What is the prognosis for this sub-market? What does research on supply and demand indicate about the robustness of the market? As city living tends to appeal mainly to young adults, what will happen as the early residents mature? Is there any sign that city living will become 'greener' – both in terms of the buildings themselves and the way of life of the inhabitants?

Key Words: city living, urban sustainability