



Silfiac Eco-village

It is a sustainable development consisting of a number of individual residences.

The primary aim of the development was to enliven the village by encouraging in new residents. A secondary aim was to ensure a social mix. This encouraged 3 providers of rental accommodation to build new houses close to the eco-estate but unfortunately their grasp on eco-logic has been regrettably limited.

The architect Bernard Menguey, was very interested in these new approaches and became the architect for the realisation of the development of 15 lots plus communal areas and family gardens.

Some areas have remained communal property so activities can extend beyond the family's space. It was intended that some of these public areas would be devoted to activities such as BBQ, picnic, play areas but these have not yet been realised. The equipment and public spaces of the development have been designed to be ecologically sound. Semi-porous roads and pathways and an advanced absorption system for storm water. Sewage water outlets are connected to lagoons for safe biological treatment.

The parcels of land were free to anyone wishing to construct a house. The owners could choose the prime contractor they wanted or indeed self-build. There were few hard rules, rather indicators and ecological principles to be followed. Cooperation rather than coercion was the aim.

Some materials were banned when healthier alternatives existed at equivalent cost. Thus, for example, the concrete block since there is a brick solution at the same cost. Coatings are based on lime, hemp and other natural materials. The windows are wood (not tropical) and not PVC. Heating is wood, solar or geothermal.

The first batch of sales took place and construction began in the autumn of 2006. Well how has it done? I cycled there the other day to have a look. It does not look like a conventional housing estate. Some of it is very handsome and some of it is clearly work-in-progress. Some of the garden areas are well tended and some less so. Clearly some of the founding principles have struggled be it through man's relationship with his fellow man, shortage of money, bodged DIY, in fact all the human elements that affect communities the world over.

Nevertheless I think it has been a worthwhile project and has achieved some significant successes. Much can be learned about the way to approach ecological projects and many of the untried innovative aspects have been proven to work in the longer term.

Sustainable development is the key and this venture continues to test the 4 interconnected aspects of ecology, economics, politics and culture.

