

Community Exchange

**Project Marton's
report on relation to**

**Woodville, New
Zealand**

24 November 2010

First impressions

Woodville has three entrances –State Highway 3 runs through the town, and State Highway 2, which joins up to State Highway 3 in the Woodville township.

The Woodville township signs proclaim that Woodville is the wind farm capital of New Zealand. The wind turbines are certainly dominating features that provide a stunning backdrop as you enter (or exit the town). The event signs currently advertise the Christmas parade, and give the impression of a busy little town that supports and promotes local events. From previous visits, we know that the events signage changes regularly.

The town signs at the entrance ways are clear and eye catching, but perhaps could benefit from a bit of a spruce up. One sign was on a lean, and another was partially obscured by foliage, and the third had a sign attached that is due for renewal. The town signs are also at risk of being dominated by the racing club signs, which were first to appear in the landscape at each town entrance.

The rest area on State Highway 3, before entering Woodville was a pleasantly presented spot, but was somewhat marred by the full rubbish bins and the obvious drainage issues on the grassed area beneath the trees. The picnic table was easily accessible and looked (without closer inspection) graffiti free.

The sign advertising the State Highway 2 connection could potentially be moved closer to town, and this may avoid sending traffic around the bypass route.

There were some properties at the entranceways that did impact on the impression of the town, where some had cluttered yards, or, in the case of the old cheese factory, where the occupier clearly had a public statement to make, and readily displayed this opinion to travellers heading to Woodville.

The newest building in the CBD is the Yummy Mummy Cheesecake Shop, and clearly attracted many visitors. There were a number of empty buildings in one block, but the rest of the CBD seemed to host a variety of different stores that catered for the local community.

The Community Hall appeared to be a large facility, easily adaptable for many uses. The associated campground had 3-4 visitors, and clear instructions about use and charges. The park is large and easily accessible, and has good quality modern equipment that would suit a variety of ages. The rotunda was also an attractive feature. The heartlands building (that had housed Plunket and a number of other community services) appeared to be for lease, and it was not immediately apparent whether these services were now provided for elsewhere in town.

The Playcentre and the School were well maintained, and looked to be well supported by the community.

There is a wide variety of housing available in Woodville, with standards of upkeep varying in the different streets. There was a range of housing stock and bare land available for sale, but no more than would be expected in any other town.

There was a small amount of industrial activity close to the railway station, and the railway station looked to be no longer in use, but the rail area did take up a large area of land close to the township.

Reflection on Woodville - Tourist

Top five points:

1. Plenty of accommodation
2. Easy-to-find and well located information centre
3. Good selection of cafes, bakeries and pubs for lunch
4. Lack of wind farm related things to do in (and around) the town
5. Activities offered in town generally required prior organisation

There was a good selection of accommodation in Woodville. The camping ground is small, and you pay and pick up the key from the Caltex Service Station on the main Rd, which seems to be a convenient and accessible arrangement. The recycling centre stationed in the same area could make the camp ground less attractive, as this would create additional traffic in the area, but traffic that is not associated with the camping facilities. There looked to be a serviceable motel on the main rd, and a quieter one on Ormond St. There was also a backpacker's hostel and there was a farmstay further out of time. The range of accommodation would suit most tourists, except for those who are after high end accommodation, unless the farmstay catered for this clientele.

The information centre has a good selection of information brochures on activities and events around the District, including some activities that were available in Woodville. It would be helpful to have a separate sheet that identified activities and events that were specifically related to Woodville, and identify activities that were seasonal, and what was open or available to do during any regular weekday and/or weekend.

For a town of its size, Woodville had an impressive selection of bakeries, cafes and pubs that all appeared to be doing reasonable trade for a weekday. The large pub on the main rd did not serve pub lunches, which may have been a missed opportunity, particularly as some country pubs can do particularly well in that market.

The town entrance signs highlighted the strong association the town has with the windfarms that overlook the town. There was little to build on this association, with only one café using this theme, and the wind farm tours, when enquired about, are operated from Palmerston North.

There was a good selection of brochures and information about interesting things to do in Woodville, and it was easy to get the information from the info centre, and from strolling around the town. However, apart from the Art Gallery, none of the other attractions were open without prior arrangement. This would be difficult to do if you stopped in Woodville as a spur of the moment decision with limited time to dedicate to making arrangements with proprietors.

Reflection on Woodville - Business person

Top five points:

1. Great rail and road connections
2. Suitable land and commercial space available to establish new business
3. Local trades people e.g. electrician, plumber
4. Lack banking and other business support services
5. Difficulty in attracting local workforce

The rail and road connections available in Woodville are excellent for a business that is dependent on transporting the products to the various markets outside the town. Land prices, leases and rentals are cheaper than those found in bigger centres, and therefore may be attractive for businesses with limited capital or those needing low overheads/start up costs.

There is a good selection of commercial premises on the main rd (Vogel St) of varying sizes - and most are well suited for renewal (i.e. a new coat of paint and some new signage) rather than redevelopment (i.e. demolish and rebuild). Some redevelopment of the main rd has occurred, with the Yummy Mummy Cheesecake shop being the most noticeable new development, and a destination store that is already acting to attract people to Woodville.

The town already has a good range of local trade's people available to do work on a new site. This is a substantial benefit, as using local people with local knowledge would help a new business establish connections and build relationships in the town quickly. There are a few industries already established in the town, and plenty of potential for more, particularly with the advantages of being relatively close and accessible to larger centres.

The town has a substantial amount of through traffic, and is likely to attract enough foot traffic to support a busy retail environment. However, small business operation and further development would probably need support from the Council or a small business support agency to get established, as there are few essential services available, with the lack of a bank in the town being the most noticeable factor. There are plenty of real estate companies that advertise within the town, but only one appears to have a physical base in Woodville. During the time of our visit, the Property Brokers office was not opened – the advertised hours of operation indicated that it would be open for at least 3 hours during our visit. While it is great to have the information (e.g. real estate) well displayed and accessible, the lack of local offices to ask follow up questions or make appointments to visit locally may be an opportunity lost of some potential buyers.

The biggest factor for the establishment of a new business is being able to attract a labour force with the appropriate skills. It was not immediately apparent that there was a readily available labour pool in town – and the work age demographic expected in a town of this size looked to be gainfully employed. The issue of attracting new people to the town may be difficult – while there is childcare and schools for younger children, there was no obvious signs of thriving sporting or social clubs that would interest those in the 25-40 year age group. If these groups do exist, they are not immediately apparent.

Reflection on Woodville - Retiree

Top five points:

1. Pensioner housing
2. Safe and quiet community
3. Community facilities
4. Lack of health services
5. Difficulty in accessing alternative transport options

Woodville has at least 2 blocks of pensioner flats, and a range of other housing that would be suitable for older people. With good quality footpath surfaces, and the further investment the Council is making in main st and footpath upgrades the town is easily accessible by foot or through use of a mobility scooter. The pensioner flats were not too far from the main retail area, and were also in close proximity to the park. The quality of housing varied, and there was plenty of housing options available for retirees looking to purchase (although it looked as if all of the pensioner units were occupied).

Locals we talked to commented that there were no gang problems in the town, mainly due to the presence of the lack of young people. This made local residents feel safe and secure, even if they were to walk around town at night, and they felt this was a real advantage. The retailers were friendly, and each engagement with residents in Woodville underpinned the feeling of a safe and caring community – where people looked out for one another and knew what was going on.

There are a range of community facilities available in the town for residents, and a variety of community groups and clubs to appeal to the older residents including the museums, a bowling club, an Old Folks club, a Women's Institute, Floral Art Club and a library and an outdoor swimming pool. The town also has two hotels and a TAB. While the retail offered is not extensive, it caters for basic needs. There is no hardware store or garden centre, which would be a good addition, but we were informed of an excellent plant nursery on the edge of town that was recommended as great value.

There is an ambulance service available for locals, but limited medical and pharmaceutical services. The medical centre was only open three days a week, with 2 doctors and nursing staff. There was no indication of what other services may be available (such as podiatrist, chiropractor etc), and the town may be difficult for some to manage high healthcare needs due to the lack of local services.

There did not appear to be regular public transport available - whether a shopping shuttle or other type of transport to the larger centres. If this is the case, then those elderly who need to access products and services located in other centres would need to rely on family members or neighbours if they were not sufficiently able to make their own arrangements.

Reflection on Woodville – Family

Top five points:

1. Early Childhood centres and Primary School
2. Friendly community and good facilities
3. Affordable housing
4. Lack of local retail and services
5. Limited social and sporting activities

One of the first things noticed in the drive around town was the colourful sign on the Playcentre building. The Police were also conducting seatbelt checks at the time of our visit - showing a well informed and safety conscious community. There was also a tidy primary school, and we were told of a kohanga reo located at the Marae by some friendly locals. This gave us confidence that early childhood education and primary school needs would be well catered for in town.

All members were greeted on the street and in the suburbs by friendly locals - a great advertisement of a close knit and friendly community. The large park and playground in the town were well maintained and would provide for a variety of ages to play, and it had a really good toilet block attached. There was also a local swimming pool, which would be a great place to spend some of those hot summer days. There was also a large community hall (and attached campground), with the hall looking large enough to host a number of events. We didn't notice a Scout or Guide Hall, or evidence of Boys Brigade or Church youth groups within the town, indicating that perhaps there was not a lot of high-school age students, or that they generally did activities that took them out-of-town.

There was a good range of housing stock available for sale, and clearly a tidier "side of town" as seen by the general maintenance of homes and sections on some of the nicer streets, especially those further away from the railway station and railway lines generally. The town as a whole looked like a nice quiet and safe rural town to reside in. We didn't see any homes advertised for rent, but expect that rent would be moderate, and that there were clearly some rental properties.

The selection of retail available would mean that a young family would often have to travel out-of-town to get what they needed, for example, clothing or children's toys. While there are a couple of second hand stores, this is not to everyone's tastes. The CBD area would benefit from having more businesses established there, and selling a wider range of goods, however it is understandable that this is not easy in the current economic climate.

Outside of work, there may not be a whole lot of leisure time options available in the town. There looked to be one sporting club, but it is unclear how active this is. The tennis courts looked like they weren't used regularly (at least in the spring/summer). While there appeared to be a range of clubs suited to the interests of older people, there did not appear to be mother's coffee groups or other social forums for young families available.

Reflection on Woodville – Young worker

Top five points:

1. Close proximity to other centres
2. Specialised businesses and trades
3. Affordable housing and rentals
4. Lack of social activities
5. Low overall appeal

Woodville is ideally located as a rural town, with a short commute to larger town centres. Because of the location on two state highways, it provides easy access if you had to travel around the region and would provide a good base. With the feeling of safety (and apparent low crime), it would be a great place for someone employed as a sales rep, where they were often away from home, but wanted to make sure that they lived in a community where people would “keep an eye on the place” when they were away.

The town offered a couple of specialty trades e.g. the tannery, the cheesecake shop and is clearly an attractive place for a young person looking to start up due to the low overheads. It was unclear what the broadband access/reception was like in the town, and there is probably a good opportunity to set up an internet café.

Woodville would be a great place to take the first step on the property ladder, as there is a great range of affordable housing. While property prices have not risen rapidly in Woodville (when compared with other parts of the country), this means that they are also relatively well insulated from any rapid decline, as they are not over-valued. The opportunity to undertake property investment in the town would be strongly linked to any move of a large industry to establish in the town. For those wanting to rent a property in town, it looks that these would be affordable (just not sure on availability).

Like for the young family, there does not appear to be a whole lot in town offered for young people (18-40) and this is an issue. As people do not want to be in the situation of drink-driving, it is important that there is local entertainment that means that people can walk home after a good evening out, or use local taxi services or public transport. It is likely that the local pubs provide entertainment from time-to-time, there is no cinema or social clubs.

It is hard to avoid the fact that the town is likely to have low appeal to young workers, despite the affordable housing and driveability. Unless you had family ties in the town, you would probably be more inclined to locate to a centre that had more retail and more entertainment choice.

Opportunities and Ideas for Woodville

3 things that are great about Woodville:

- Proximity for viewing the wind turbines
- Yummy Mummy's Cheesecake shop
- Toilets you can easily park outside

Quick wins:

- The park and toilets are great facilities - these need to be promoted from the main rd/state highways
- Move the turn off to State Highway 2 sign - don't encourage them to leave already!
- Improve the attentiveness of customer service at the art gallery - every visitor is an opportunity to make a sale!
- Offer regular little tours between the different operators e.g. doll museum, pioneer museum etc - sell it as a package with the operators working together
- Make the binoculars useable/available. Maybe include an extra set in the plans for the main st upgrade.
- Post up on the community hall a list of local meetings and activities - let us visitors know that the hall actually gets used!
- Use the empty shops as window displays until they are filled by new tenants.
- Make sure the wind farm tour can stop to pick people up from Woodville. Would be nice if it "started" and "stopped" there, even if it did originate in Palmerston North.

Longer term ideas:

- An information centre on windfarms in conjunction with the energy companies operating the local wind turbines.
- Create a connection between the park, public toilets and the CBD.
- Encourage cafes to set up that offer a meal (for lunch/dinner) that is not a bakery or fish and chip shop. Create more competition than the 1 or 2 places that are operating now.
- Encourage ethnic food outlets and takeaway shops (e.g. Chinese takeaways, Indian)
- Develop a Woodville Walk - good footpaths and selected local history is bound to be interesting enough to provide little facts and funnies around town.