



Public views of development options in the South East

There is a severe lack of affordable housing in South East England and central and local government want to build many more homes. The Housing Futures project by Cambridge Architectural Research Ltd tested the reaction of the general public to development options that would increase the supply of housing. The findings are based on interviews and workshops with local and national stakeholders together with a survey of public opinion reporting the views of over 1,400 people in three towns in South East England. The project found:

-  In the survey results, no single development option was favoured. Three development options were marginally more liked than disliked – ‘densification’, ‘urban extension’ and ‘new town’. Two options – village growth and new settlement – were less liked.
-  There seemed to be no blanket opposition to land being used for development, nor was there a strong preference for the use of brownfield over open land.
-  The favoured options were those with a higher level of service provision. Approval for new town development may be motivated by ‘nimbyism’, but people may also value the infrastructure that comes with larger scale planned development.
-  Respondents were evenly divided about whether they liked or disliked a policy of minimum growth.
-  Although most people were opposed to high-density flats being built in their area, a substantial proportion found medium-density terraces acceptable (47%). Even higher-density flats were acceptable to a minority (21%).
-  Most first-time buyers (68%) liked detached and semi-detached homes, but a significant proportion would be prepared to live in terraces (49%) and high-density flats (30%).
-  Only a third of people agreed that their town and surroundings should be kept the same. 40% agreed that their region must be allowed to grow.
-  Qualitative data suggest that people believe the main problem is affordability, not housing shortage. They accept new homes are needed but believe quality and affordability are more important than quantity.
-  The researchers conclude that getting the public to engage with problems at a strategic level through proactive consultation can be highly effective. If presented with information about a range of options, people make reasoned choices and compromises.

Options

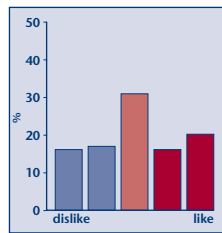
The survey offered six options for how towns could develop over the next 20 years. People were asked to vote on how much they liked or disliked each option. The figures in this section show the results, with comments from the researchers. Each option was explained in detail (see full report for more information). People voted on a five-point scale ranging from strongly dislike to strongly like. Respondents were asked to keep in mind:

- actual development will involve a mix of options;
- given the strength of market demand, new homes may not reduce prices;
- on schemes of 15 or more homes there is normally a requirement to provide 30% affordable housing;
- large developments will come with other facilities (schools etc).

None of the options received overwhelming support. However, more people liked the densification, urban extension and new town options than disliked them. Densification and urban extension were most liked by older people while the new town option was most liked by the young.

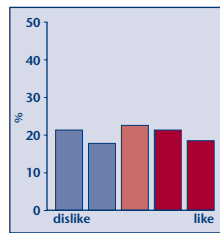
Two options – village growth and new settlement – were generally disliked. Both are likely to increase traffic and congestion because neither provides the population to support new services like schools and shops.

Since urban extension and new town were liked, it appears that there is no objection in principle to the use of open land. This suggests that service provision and traffic congestion are more influential issues than loss of open land.



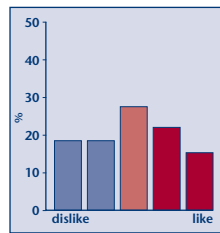
Minimum growth
36% liked and 33% disliked minimum growth.

Comment
Respondents were almost equally divided about change and growth.



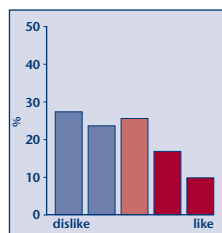
Densification
39% liked and 38% disliked densification.

Comment
This option puts new homes near existing services and preserves the countryside.



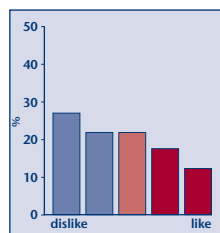
Urban extension
37% liked and 36% disliked urban extension.

Comment
This option uses existing services but also uses open land.



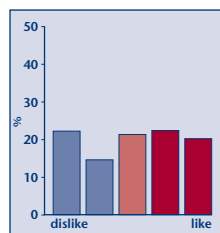
Village growth
25% liked and 50% disliked village growth.

Comment
This option cannot deliver the number of homes needed; results suggest people want to protect village life.



New settlement
29% liked and 48% disliked new settlement.

Comment
Results suggest respondents appreciated that new settlements are unlikely to support services and public transport.



New town
42% like and 37% disliked new town.

Comment
This option could provide a lot of new housing and could support services including public transport.

House type and density

The survey offered three types and density of housing. People preferred detached and semi-detached homes (20 dwellings/ha). But a substantial proportion (47%) found medium-density terraces (45 dwellings/ha) acceptable; 49% of first-time buyers would like to live in terraces.

Most people rejected very high-density living (>80 dwellings/ha). They didn't want to live in flats and didn't

want to see them built in their area. Nevertheless flats were acceptable to just over a quarter of respondents and a small proportion (12%) would like to live in one.

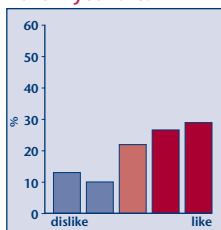
Not surprisingly people already living in urban areas found terraces more acceptable than those in suburbs and rural areas. And, in general, the older the respondent the less they liked higher density.

Type 1 Detached and semi-detached

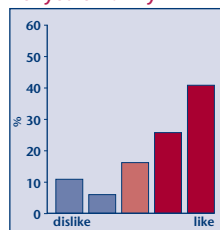
20 dwellings/ha
Most popular type. Acceptable to 55%. Desired as a home by 66% of whole sample and 68% of first-time buyers.

Comment
Clearly the preferred house type, but not by as large a proportion of people as might have been expected. The preferences of first-time buyers are similar.

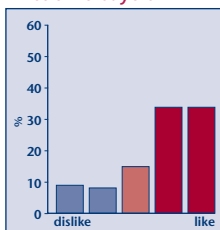
Built in your area



For you or family



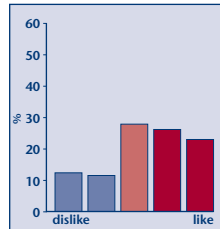
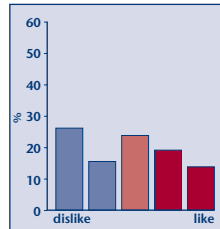
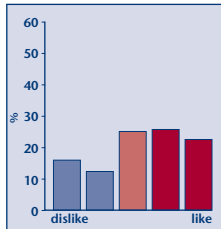
First-time buyers



Type 2 Two- or three-storey terraces

45 dwellings/ha
Acceptable to 47%. Desired as a home by 34% of whole sample and by 49% of first-time buyers.

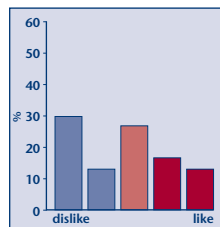
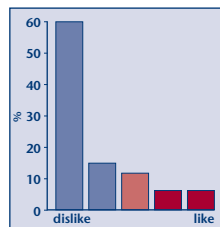
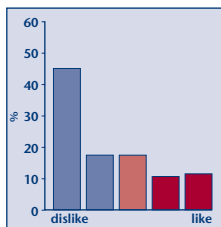
Comment
This type will deliver the Government's target density. It was acceptable to many, marginally more so to first-time buyers.



Type 3 Flats of four or more storeys

83 dwellings/ha
Least popular. Acceptable to 21%. Desired as a home by 12% of whole sample and 30% of first-time buyers.

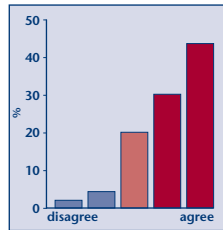
Comment
This suggests that people will need good evidence that flats can offer high quality living. However, flats were significantly more acceptable to first-time buyers.



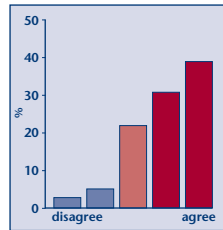
Statements

The survey offered ten statements about the future of the South East; people were asked whether they disagreed or agreed

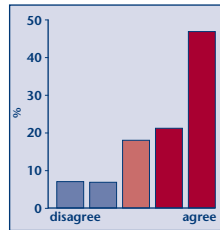
(ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree; the middle column shows those who were indifferent or undecided).



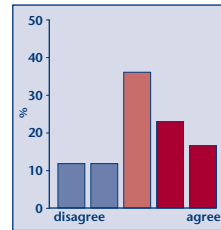
"Quality of life is more important than economic development."
74% agreed and 6% disagreed.



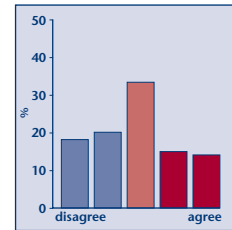
"Quality of housing is more important than quantity."
69% agreed and 9% disagreed.



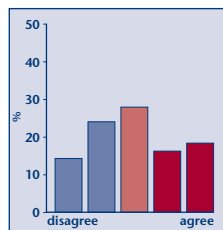
"More should be spent on public transport than roads."
68% agreed and 14% disagreed.



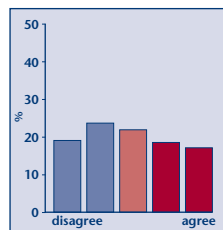
"The region must be allowed to grow."
40% agreed and 24% disagreed.



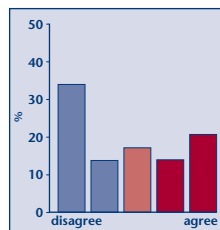
"The housing shortage is damaging the economy."
29% agreed and 37% disagreed.



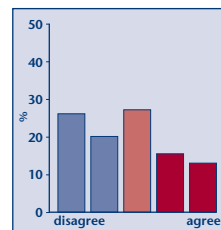
"The town and its surroundings should be kept just as they are."
34% agreed and 38% disagreed.



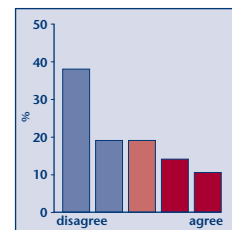
"More homes will mean much poorer quality of life."
35% agreed and 43% disagreed.



"I would move from the SE if I could find a job."
35% agreed and 48% disagreed.



"Many more homes should be built."
28% agreed and 46% disagreed.



"Some greenfield land should be released for development."
24% agreed and 57% disagreed.

Conclusion

Looking at the range of findings from both the survey and from the interviews, the researchers draw the following conclusions.

People were almost equally divided about whether they liked or disliked minimum growth. About a third liked minimum growth, a third disliked it and a third were undecided. From talking to people, it is apparent that they want the benefits of growth without the downsides of traffic congestion and pollution. Clearly people value both quality of life and quality of housing yet want to balance this with the benefits of economic development. They accept that new homes are needed, but think they must be affordable, in the right places and come with the open space, services and infrastructure communities need.

While most people agree that 'Quality of life is more important than economic growth', they also agree that 'The region must be allowed to grow'. They disagree that 'More houses will mean much poorer quality of life'; but also disagree that 'Many more homes should be built'.

These views are neither irrational nor hypocritical. They demonstrate how what we want for ourselves can be different or even the opposite of what we want for our town or for society as a whole. Clearly it will be much easier for policy-makers to get agreement to development if people's individual aspirations match their societal preferences.

One thing that most people agreed on was that 'More should be spent on public transport than roads'. From talking to people it was clear that traffic congestion was one of their main concerns. The dominant message is that public transport must take a leading role in all future development.

Dramatically increased density was not favoured as the answer to the perceived housing shortage. The clear message is that the majority of people aspire to live in detached or semi-detached homes with gardens. However, a modest increase in density with terraced housing is acceptable in certain situations. Terraced housing is also acceptable to first-time buyers. An appropriate mix of density would therefore meet Government policy and be acceptable to the general public.

Policy implications

Land use

The survey shows that people don't have a blanket objection to land being used for development. People favoured the options for balanced development that deliver quality housing, accessible to schools and other services, at affordable prices.

Settlement pattern

People's likes and dislikes about development options can be used to make suggestions about where new homes might be built. The findings suggest an even mix of new homes in existing urban areas, in urban extensions, in large new towns and in existing villages and new settlements.

Greenfield

The urban extension and new town options were liked as much as densification; there seems to be no clear preference for the use of brownfield over open land. However, there is considerable disagreement that greenfield land should be released for development. This suggests people find the term 'greenfield' much more emotive than 'open land'. They may even be confusing it with 'greenbelt'.

Housing density

An appropriate mix of density will both meet Government policy and be acceptable to the general public. The findings suggest, overall in the South East, a mix of 45% low density, 35% medium density and 20% higher density housing.

Quality

The diversity of opinion shows that people respond to the specifics of what is on offer, not simply from prejudice. This suggests that there is potential for reconfiguring proposals to reduce opposition to new development.

Master planning

There is moderate approval for new town development. From people's comments it seems that they like the benefits of comprehensive planned development and infrastructure investment that can only come with large-scale master planning.

Public consultation

This research shows that getting the public to engage with problems at a strategic level is both possible and highly effective. Proactive consultation works – people make reasoned choices and compromises if presented with information about a range of options.

About the project

The research was carried out by Cambridge Architectural Research Ltd in the spring and summer of 2003. The consultation was in three parts:

Expert panels: Expert opinion was used to devise and test the content of the public consultation survey. The consequences of different options were developed and tested in a series of focus groups with national and local experts including planners, councillors, developers, housing providers, academics and environmentalists.

Interviews: Over 50 interviews were conducted with local authority planning officers, elected members, social housing providers, house builders, developers, estate agents, building societies, hospital administrators, police officers and education department personnel, representatives of the TCPA and CPRE and civil servants in the ODPM.

Public opinion survey: The survey was made available at exhibitions in four shopping centres in Aylesbury, Maidenhead, Chatham and Gillingham. Paper versions were also available at public libraries, hospital waiting rooms and building societies. The survey was also accessible on the web. A total of 1,428 people completed the survey. The pattern of age, employment and tenure almost exactly matches the 2001 Census in each of the three areas surveyed.

The comments box at the end of the survey was used by 232 members of the public (16%). The interviewers also talked to about one in five people. Some of these conversations were fairly lengthy. Together, these written comments and conversations gave a vivid impression of people's attitudes and ideas which help inform the inferences made of the quantitative findings.

How to get further information

The full report, **Housing futures: Informed public opinion** by Stephen Platt, William Fawcett and Robin de Carteret, is published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (ISBN 1 85935 201 4, price £14.95). It is available from York Publishing Services Ltd, 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, York YO31 7ZQ, Tel: 01904 430033, Fax: 01904 430868 (please add £2.00 p&p per order). You can also download this report and a spreadsheet containing data from the survey free from www.jrf.org.uk (ISBN 1 85935 202 2).

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