

# Canterbury Future Development

**Executive Summary prepared for  
Canterbury City Council**

27 April 2012

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# Summary of findings and implications

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This report presents findings from an Ipsos MORI survey for Canterbury City Council which involved interviews with 902 residents aged 16+ living within the district area. Fieldwork was carried out face-to-face in-home using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) in 52 sampling points between 12 December 2011 and 15 February 2012. Ipsos MORI interviewers were set quotas unique to each sampling point, reflecting the known population profile of each point.

At the analysis stage data was weighted by age and gender based on mid-year estimate figures, working status based on data from the 2001 census, district based on population figures and tenure based on the latest regional English Housing Survey data as well as information collected by Kent County Council.

The survey was designed to explore opinion on future development and home building in the district of Canterbury. Specifically, the objectives of the survey were to inform the evidence-base informing future development strategies, to identify the priorities and aspirations of a representative sample of residents and to capture considered, informed opinions on the key issues and a number of possible scenarios for development. It was preceded by a project delivered for CCC by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP) and the perceptual data it collected ought to be seen in the context of other evidence and considerations.

## Majority support building in principle but most prefer same/slower pace

The survey found majority support among the district's residents for the building of new homes in the district *in principle*. Just under six in ten, 58%, either strongly or tend to support this while there is 22% opposition. When asked about the local area, there is a shift towards opposition but, still, more support than oppose building; 46% against 35%. At both geographies, however, support is not especially strong: 44% *tend* to support this across the district and 34% in their local area. Similar proportions, 13-15%, *strongly* oppose and *strongly* support district building.

While a majority of residents back building in the district in principle, a smaller proportion, 26%, having been exposed to some of the key issues and shown the current rate of building, back more building than in the past (556 homes per year since 1990). At the next question though, and in receipt of further information about the potential impact of building on jobs and population growth, 39% say the Council should choose Option C or Option D which both

involve building significantly more than 550 homes (the ten scenarios developed by NLP were reduced to four main options for the purposes of the survey, described in section 2.8). Responses to Q12 are as follows and the full text of the question and 'Info showcard 2' can be found in the appendices:

**Table 1: Responses to Q12**

	% <sup>1</sup>
Option A (150 homes per year)	16
Option B (550 homes per year)	32
Option C (760 homes per year)	31
Option D (1,140 homes per year)	8
None of these options	9
Don't know	2
<i>Base: all</i>	902
Source: Ipsos MORI for CCC	

It can be seen that all but 11% back one of the four options presented. Seven in ten, 73%, back an option which involves building at the same level as the South East Plan or more (options B, C or D) while just under half, 49%, back the same or less (options A or B).

Analysis of the survey findings shows that there are some changes, in opinion; for example, 60% of those favouring options C and D, which would both involve a faster pace of development than currently, had previously said that they would favour 'the same' amount of development. Still, most residents, although not a majority, prefer the same, or a slower, pace of home building.

**Table 1: Summary of resident opinion**

	%
Support building new homes in principle in area	46
Oppose building new homes in principle in area	35
Support building new homes in principle in district	58
Oppose building new homes in principle in district	22
Think Council should encourage lot/little more building than in the past (with the current rate of building as context)	26
Think Council should encourage lot/little less building	27
Think Council should encourage the same amount of building	39
Choose an option involving more building than in the past (Options C and D)	39
Choose an option involving the same/less building (Options A and B)	48
<i>Base: all</i>	902
Source: Ipsos MORI for CCC	

<sup>1</sup> Please note: %s do not sum to 100 due to computer rounding of figures.

## There is a strongly conditional nature to public opinion

The findings described above accord with past research by Ipsos MORI and others which have highlighted the conditional nature of public attitudes towards development and the importance of the information presented in testing opinion, and these patterns are also prevalent in the Canterbury survey results. For example, as shown in Table 2 below, there is strong in principle support for building if it means affordable homes for local residents, if it allows young people to stay and if it helps create jobs. In fact, 45% of those who opposed building in the district in principle go on to back it if it meant young people could stay.

**Table 2: Percentage point increase in % support for building new homes if...**

	All residents	In principle opponents
...it meant that enough affordable homes were provided for local residents	+15	+36
...it increases the demands on public services	-14	+12
...it meant that young people and families could stay	+19	+45
...it meant building on 'greenfield'	-40	+2
...it helped to create jobs by attracting people and businesses to the area	+10	+34
...it meant an increase in traffic and congestion	-36	+2
<i>Base: all</i>	902	202
Source: Ipsos MORI for CCC	(100%)	(24%)

By contrast there are a number of external factors which will also be crucial in shaping opinion. There is a swing away from in principle support if it involves building on greenfield; 70% of all residents say they would oppose building in these circumstances as do 65% if it leads to an increase in traffic and congestion (as shown in Table 3).

**Table 3: Percentage point increase in % opposition for building new homes if...**

	All residents	In principle supporters
...it meant that enough affordable homes were provided for local residents	-7	+5
...it increases the demands on public services	-2	+20
...it meant that young people and families could stay	-12	+2
...it meant building on 'greenfield'	+48	+58
...it helped to create jobs by attracting people and businesses to the area	-3	+8
...it meant an increase in traffic and congestion	+43	+51
<i>Base: all</i>	902	524
Source: Ipsos MORI for CCC	(100%)	(59%)

When asked why they chose the option they did, those choosing Option A or B are more likely to provide negative reasons – particularly a concern about greenfield and the volume of housing – while those backing Option C or D explain their choice in positive terms and in respect of jobs and growth. Regardless of the option chosen, concerns focus on greenfield.

Similarly, when asked which of four reasons was most important in shaping why they backed Option C or Option D, jobs and population growth feature most prominently, while those favouring more conservative options A and B identify the amount of housing and building on greenfield as their key reasons.

As with any survey, ours is a snapshot reflecting the backdrop. Residents are strongly satisfied with their local area as a place to live; 53% are very satisfied. This comes at a time when national polls show heightened concern about the economy. In the district of Canterbury 69% of residents dispute the idea that there are 'plenty of employment opportunities in this area' with even more, 85%, expressing the view that 'we should do more to help businesses set up here'.

At the same time, though, while 46% agree that new housing developments would help to improve the local economy, 32% do not. Doubts are more pronounced that new development will bring more and better facilities and amenities to the local area. Just under nine in ten, 89%, are of the view that homes should not be built until new infrastructure is in place.

### **Attitudes are linked to area and demography**

So far we have presented findings at the aggregate level but there are some important differences among different types of resident. Although differences between specific demographics are discussed in this section, it should be remembered that demographic groups are often interlinked. The impact of this is discussed in further detail in Chapter 3 of the main report.

Younger residents (aged 16-24), a high proportion of whom are students<sup>2</sup>, those who live in social or privately rented accommodation, those of lower social grade and those who live in Canterbury City are in general more likely to be pro-development and are more likely to select option C. The primary driver for this group is the desire to see more jobs and more employment opportunities in the area, and they believe that future development can help to provide this. Older, more affluent residents, specifically owner occupiers express more

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<sup>2</sup> Off campus students interviewed as part of the main survey include anyone who is still in full-time education at school, college or university.

concern about building on greenfield land, with those in Whitstable particularly concerned about whether the level of infrastructure would be able to support future development. There is also a greater scepticism among this group that building more homes will indeed lead to more employment opportunities in the district.

Ipsos MORI conducted an additional 100 interviews with students resident in campus accommodation at the district's two largest universities, boosting the total number of interviews with students to 179. Students are incredibly positive about Canterbury district as a place to live, however jobs and housing are key issues identified by them as things that need tackling in the area. The importance of these issues to students is highlighted by the gap between those who would like to remain in the area after they graduate, and the markedly lower proportion who see staying as being a possibility.

Students are largely in support of future development, and would be keener to see this taking part nearer to them rather than elsewhere in the district, and express a clear preference among the development options for option C (a small increase in the rate of development). This is primarily driven by the desire to see better employment opportunities in the district.

### Looking ahead: key findings and implications

It will be important to be sensitive to the differences across and within the district described above when deciding on the future development strategy and also when communicating any decision Councillors make. In addition, it will be important to take into account that a third of residents currently doubt the premise of building more homes if that premise were that more homes were needed. The amount and quality of housing is a second-order issue of concern, some distance behind a desire for improvement in respect of growth and infrastructure, especially roads, and these plus safety are, by some distance, residents top priorities for Council action. There is some evidence to suggest that this 'enough' sentiment is stronger than it is elsewhere – for example, according to the British Social Attitudes Survey one in five British adults maintain that no new housing is needed in their area. In principle opponents, and supporters of Options A and B, are more likely to doubt the need for housing in Canterbury than residents as a whole.

Related to this, the growth opportunities of development would seem to have more weight with residents. There is a clear perception that local economic growth and job opportunities need bolstering. The two issues which separate supporters and opponents most are that the former are much more likely to think new housing developments would help to improve the local economy and that this will secure better facilities and amenities. And opinion swings

towards the larger scale development options after exposure to growth issues. While only a quarter, 26%, backed a larger-scale of building than at present at Q11, 39% chose option C or D at Q12.

On the flip side, while 58% back building in principle, support cools when residents are presented with details and 48% back options which involve the same or fewer homes per year than at present, albeit with 73% still supporting the South East Plan or greater in terms of future development. Opinion swings against development in principle where building on greenfield is involved and this is a clear concern for both supporters and opponents of development and, particularly, those choosing Options A and B among the four options (as presented to respondents, each will involve some building on greenfield). The survey found very strong satisfaction with the local area and 40% of residents identify the countryside and the natural environment as something important in making somewhere a good place to live, third only to safety and health services among a list of thirteen.

It is also clear that residents need convincing about whether development will actually lead to 'planning gain', including jobs and enabling local families to stay. These have the potential to secure greater support for housing development; for example, although in principle opponents remain opposed to building whatever the potential benefits, a significant proportion – 45% – swing towards support when presented with the prospect of building meaning that young people and families could stay. Therefore being able to convince residents that this will actually happen is likely to be a stiff challenge. In addition, on the evidence of this survey, residents will need to be impressed by plans to remove development externalities, especially pressure on local infrastructure, if they are to support future development schemes.

While this highlights the value of looking at the issue of development holistically and assembling development strategies which do not focus exclusively on housing (and are able to maximise side-benefits and minimise external factors), it is also important to avoid losing sight of other issues including the *where?* and *what?* of development. The survey does point to strong interest in building family homes across the district, but these represent 'snapshots' of public opinion and further research and consultation will be valuable.

Residents' views appear to be fluid and conditional rather than fixed and settled. This is illustrated by some inconsistencies between responses at different stages of the interview and the changes of opinion (seen at the aggregate level and when the data is disaggregated) as our questionnaire moved from taking in principle views to more informed stances. Attitudes are also likely to be shaped by the very different, and changing, socio-economic

backdrop in Canterbury during the planning and implementation of the district's development and it will be important to be sensitive to this.

The detail of any development plan, the way schemes are presented, and clarity about what these mean in practice for individuals and communities, will all play a key role influencing opinion; the survey shows that there is strong in principle support for home-building but some conservatism about the extent of building. Also crucial will be effectively addressing the greenfield issue and the trade-offs between the natural and built environment. Exploring the link between homes and growth will be vital too, as will answering three key questions; is this at all proven, can it be communicated effectively to residents, business and other local groups, and will it be realised in the years ahead?