Housing Futures

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Informed public opinion

Stephen Platt, William Fawcett and Robin de Carteret

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Contents

Acknowledgements vi

1 Summary 1
Findings 1
Background 2
Method 2
Results 3
Policy implications 5

2 Background 8
Aims 8
The problem 8
Antecedents 8
Development options 9
Policy relevance 10

3 Process 11
Approach 11
Options 13
Statements 16
House type and density 17
Public opinion survey 20

4 Expert opinion 29
Current planning issues 29
Staff recruitment and retention 30
Solutions to the housing problems of the South East 34

5 Results 37
Respondents 37
Options 37
Statements 39
House type and density 39
Written comments 40

6 Next steps 42
Feedback and dissemination 42
Developing the methodology 42
Expanding the coverage 42
Going into detail 43
Public consultation 43

References 44

Appendix 1: Survey data 45

Appendix 2: Survey form 70

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1 Summary

The main motivation for this study was a concern that people on modest incomes can't afford a home in South East England. There is a severe lack of affordable housing and this is impacting on business and essential public services. Central and local government want to build many more homes; at the local level, the debate is about where these new homes should be built and what type of homes are needed. Public opinion has an impact on this debate because it influences planning policies and individual planning decisions. The purpose of this survey is to find out 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 stake holders together with a survey of public opinion reporting the views of over 1,400 people in three towns in South East England. As well as reporting our methodology and results, we also draw inferences for policy makers, planners and housing providers.

Findings

- 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 per cent). Even higher-density flats were acceptable to a minority (21 per cent).
- Most first-time buyers (68 per cent) liked detached and semi-detached homes, but a significant proportion would be prepared to live in terraces (49 per cent) and high-density flats (30 per cent).
- Only a third of people agreed that their town and surroundings should be kept the same and 40 per cent 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.
- We 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.

Background

There is a strong case for more house building in South East England. The key question is where should these new homes go and what type and density of homes should we build?

Aims

The aim of the research was to find out the reaction of the general public to development options for new housing in the South East. In particular, we wanted to answer the following questions.

- If the likely consequences are explained clearly, what is the reaction of the general public to these options?
- Do people living in different areas favour different options?
- What preferences do people have for different housing types and densities?

Method

The consultation was in two parts – expert interviews and workshops – to ensure that the options presented to the public were reasonable, followed by the public opinion survey in three towns: Aylesbury, Maidenhead and Medway.

Experts

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

Public opinion survey

The main feature of the public opinion survey was to give the public a strategic understanding of the likely consequences of the various options to help them express an informed opinion. The questionnaire had three parts: options, statements and house type and density.

People were asked to say how much they liked or disliked six options.

- *Minimum growth*: preserves the status quo with the minimum of change.
- *Densification*: puts new homes within the existing urban area by infilling open land and large gardens plus replacing redundant buildings.
- *Urban extension*: allows expansion into selected areas of open land around the town.
- *Village growth*: growth concentrated in existing villages through infill and modest expansion.
- *New settlement*: concentrates development in new settlements of 2,000 to 4,000 homes.
- *New town*: concentrates development in a new town of at least 20,000 homes.

The likely consequences of each option were described in terms of their impact on five key issues: housing supply, jobs, traffic, loss of open space and service provision.

People were asked to say how much they agreed or disagreed with ten statements about the future of the South East.

Finally, the survey also offered a description of the pros and cons of three density options:

- *Type 1*: detached or semi-detached houses 20/ha
- *Type 2*: two or three storey terraced or town houses 45/ha
- *Type 3*: flats of four or more storeys 83/ha.

The implications of each housing type were described in terms of the size of private garden, the amount of land used and proximity to services. The public were asked two questions.

- How much would they like or dislike each type to *be built in their area*?
- How much would they like them for *themselves or their family*?

Qualitative and quantitative data

There were both qualitative and quantitative aspects to the data collection.

As well as the expert workshops, a series of interviews were conducted with informants in each of the survey locations and with 'national experts' who we thought were likely to provide useful insight.

During the main public consultation exercise, we talked to as many as one in five people who completed the survey. Some of these conversations were fairly lengthy and, although we were unable to record them, they leave vivid impressions about people's attitudes and ideas, which help inform the findings.

Response

Computer-based and paper versions of the survey were available at exhibitions in four shopping centres in Aylesbury, Maidenhead, Chatham and Gillingham. Paper versions were available at public libraries, hospital waiting rooms and building societies, and the survey was accessible on the web.

A total of 1,428 people completed the survey. The pattern of age, employment and home tenure is similar in composition to the 2001 Census in each of the three towns. Although the main survey took place in the town centres, not all respondents were urbanites – 37 per cent reported their home area was urban, 33 per cent suburban and 25 per cent village.

The expert workshops were held in spring and early summer of 2003, and the public opinion survey took place in July of the same year.

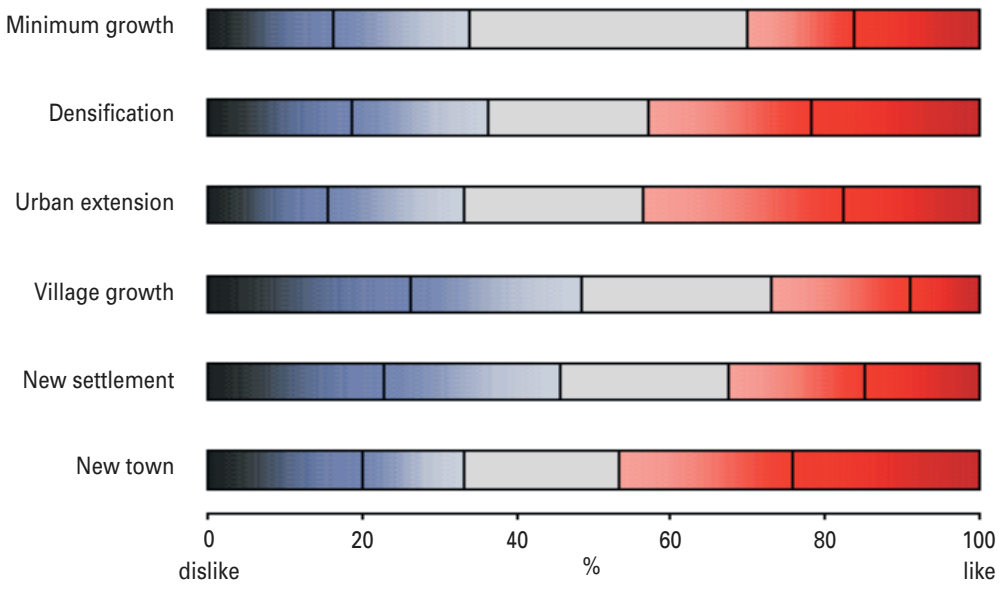
Results

Development options

Three development options are favoured (see Figure 1). Although some people express strong dislikes, more people like the densification, urban extension and new town options than dislike them.

Two options – village growth and new settlement – are disliked. Both are likely to increase traffic and congestion because neither provides the

Figure 1 Options



population to support the new services that will be needed like schools and shops.

People are evenly divided on whether or not they favour minimum growth. About a third of all respondents like minimum growth, a third dislike it and just under a third are in the middle.

The pattern of voting suggests that two issues – service provision and traffic congestion – are more important to people than land use. Since urban extension and new town are liked, it appears that there is no objection in principle to the use of open land. However, there is considerable disagreement about the release of greenfield land for development. This could suggest that people find the term 'open land' less emotive than 'greenfield land'.

Statements about the future of the South East

The majority of people agree with four of the ten statements (see Figure 2).

- 'Quality of life is more important than economic development.'
- 'More should be spent on public transport than roads.'
- 'Housing quality is more important than quantity.'
- 'The region must be allowed to grow.'

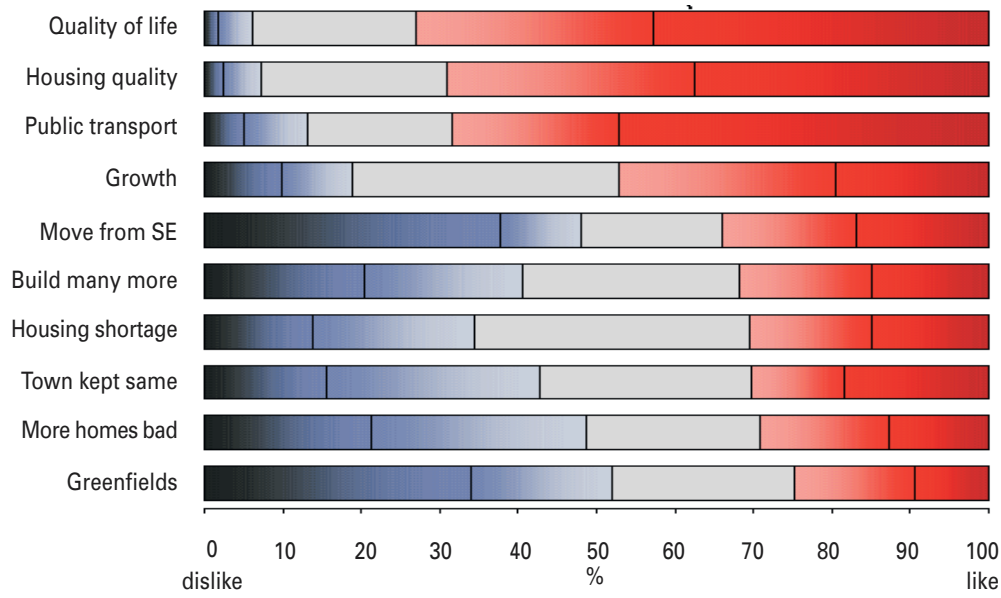
Clearly, people value both quality of life and quality of housing, yet want to balance this with the benefits of economic development.

There is an apparent paradox in people's voting. For example, while most people agree with the statement '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'.

But 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 would 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 agree on is that 'More should be spent on public transport than

Figure 2 Statements



roads'. Traffic congestion is one of people's biggest concerns and the dominant message is that public transport must take a leading role in the future development of the South East.

House type and density

Most people (79 per cent) reject high-density living (>80 dw/ha). They don't want to live in flats themselves and don't want to see flats built in their area (see Figures 3 and 4). Detached and semi-detached homes are the preferred type of home for the vast majority of respondents.

However, nearly half of all respondents (47 per cent) would like medium-density terraces of 45 dwellings per hectare to be built in their area and only a quarter (27 per cent) would dislike them. A substantial proportion of people looking for a starter home (45 per cent) would like to live in terraces. Flats of four or more storeys are acceptable to just over a quarter of respondents but only a small proportion (12 per cent) would like to live in a flat themselves.

Policy implications

Information about people's preferences and attitudes will help improve understanding and raise standards in planning and housing provision, so that the location of new homes is acceptable to the general public and the new homes are what people want.

Figure 3 Built in your area

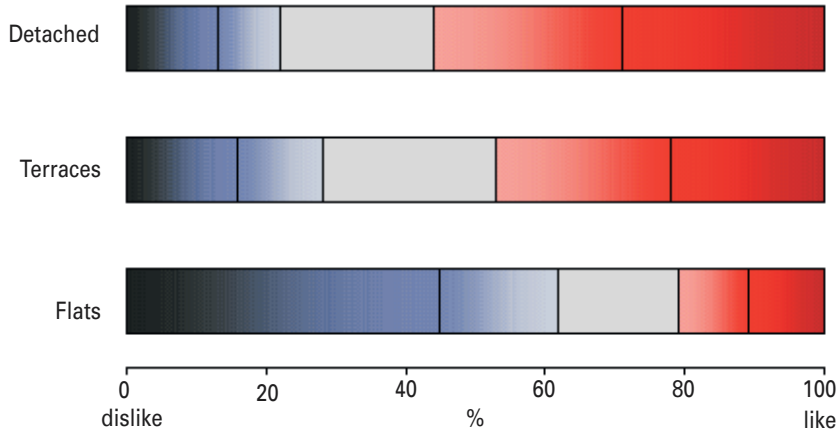
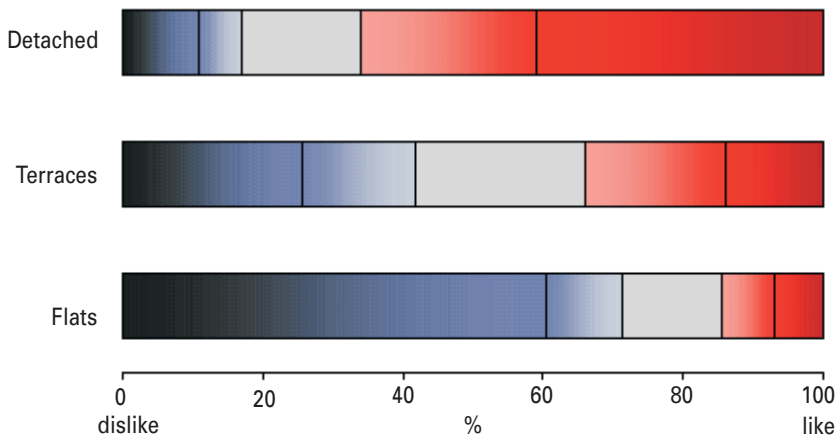


Figure 4 For you or your family



Acceptable growth
People in Aylesbury, Maidenhead and Medway accept that new homes are needed, but think they must be affordable, in the right places and come with open space, services and infrastructure.

The general public are not convinced that growth will deliver affordable homes or sustainable communities. In part, this is a challenge for professionals involved in housing provision to demonstrate that well-planned development can deliver high quality. But it could also be argued that Government will also have to find ways of providing the necessary investment for services and transport that need to accompany new housing development.

Housing shortage
A strong message coming across in the media is that there is a housing shortage and that affordability is a major problem. But the media also run anti-development stories and warn about house prices falling. The Government has given clear guidance to local authorities about the provision of affordable housing but it could be argued that the case for more affordable homes needs to be made more convincingly.

Higher density
Dramatically increased density is not favoured as the answer to the perceived housing shortage. The clear message from the Housing Futures survey is that the majority of people prefer detached or semi-detached homes with gardens, both to live in themselves and to be built in their area. However, an increase in density with terraced housing is acceptable in certain locations.

Terraced housing is also acceptable to those starting out on the housing ladder. High density needs to be matched to specific situations where there is clear demand.

From talking to many people during the course of the survey it is clear that, to meet with public approval, any increase in density in existing built-up areas needs to respect and enhance local character. In situations where open land is being developed, major housing development will be more acceptable if it is accompanied by the mix of amenities, services and infrastructure needed for communities to function.

Although the appropriate mix of densities depends on the specific site, this survey suggests that a mix of homes of different densities would be acceptable to a majority of people. Normalising the votes in favour of the three types and density of housing suggests that, overall in the South East, building 45–50 per cent low-density detached and semi-detached, 35–40 per cent medium-density terraces and about 15–20 per cent higher-density flats would be acceptable. This would achieve the Government's target density of 30 dwellings per hectare.

Settlement patterns
Like density, the appropriate pattern of settlement will depend on the specific locality. In green-belt authorities, for example, densification may be the only option. But we can use the results to make suggestions about where new homes might be built to meet with maximum public support.
Normalising the votes in favour of the five development options gives the following figures: densification 22 per cent; urban extension 23 per cent; village growth 14 per cent; new settlement 17 per cent; new town 24 per cent.

Simplifying these figures suggests the following overall pattern of settlement for new housing in the South East: about 25 per cent of all new homes in each of the three most liked options and the remaining 25 per cent in existing villages and new settlements.

Land use
Three development options were considered more acceptable than minimum growth. Two of these, urban extension and new town, would use open land. The third, densification, which in general uses

brownfield land, is no more popular than the other two. The inference from this is that people don't have a blanket objection to land being used for development, nor is there a preference for the use of brownfield over open land.

No single development option was clearly favoured. The main difference between the three options that were favoured and the two that were not is in the predicted level of service provision and the likely amount of affordable housing. What people want is balanced development that delivers quality housing, accessible to schools and other services, at affordable prices.

Current planning policy

PPG3 and the designation of growth areas in the South East signalled a shift in government policy on new homes. The new planning guidance gives priority to the reuse of land and buildings and increased residential densities.

Although PPG3 claims that higher densities shouldn't mean lower standards or less attractive developments, the headline objectives of 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare and 60 per cent of development on brownfield sites are getting all the attention, and public resistance to development may have been aggravated by this focus on increasing housing density.

Master planning

There is clear approval from a substantial proportion of respondents for new town development. People were attracted by the benefits of comprehensive planned development and infrastructure investment that can come only with large-scale master planning.

Quality of design

The diversity of opinion shows that people respond to the specifics of what is on offer. It is clear from the voting that they value design quality. From talking to people after they completed the survey, we formed the impression that the treatment of communal space and the provision of amenities around homes may be as important as building design and construction in what people understand by quality.

Public consultation

This research has shown that carefully designed questions allowed the public to engage with the problem at a strategic level and produced thoughtful answers. The public found the survey interesting and easy to engage with, and the results provide a clear view of their opinions and preferences.

2 Background

This study arose from a concern that people on modest incomes can't afford a home in the South East. To overcome this problem, there seems to be a strong case for more house building. The key question is where should these new homes go and what type and density of homes should we build? The aim of this research is to find out what the general public think about new housing development, where they are likely to oppose development and where they would like new homes to be built. What types of houses and what densities would people accept in their local area? And what type and density do people looking for a new home want to see built?

Information about people's preferences and attitudes will help improve understanding and raise standards in planning practice and housing provision, so that the type and location of new houses are acceptable to the general public.

Aims

Our main aim was to find out the reaction of the general public to development options for new housing in South East England. We also wanted to find out to what extent this reaction differs from the attitudes of professionals engaged in planning, development and housing provision.

Research questions
In particular, the study seeks to answer the following questions.

- If the consequences were explained clearly, what would be the reaction of the general public to options that would increase the supply of new housing in South East England?
- Do people living in different areas favour different options?
- What preferences do people have for different types and densities of new housing?

The problem

South East England contains the greatest concentration of high-technology firms in Europe. Economic activity has expanded steadily over the last 50 years and there is intense and increasing pressure for further growth. But we want the economic prosperity that growth brings without having to sacrifice our quality of life.

One of the main brakes on growth is the high cost of housing and the impact this has on employment. Although there is a strong case for building more homes, there is also a strong perception that the public are opposed to development.

Antecedents

Housing Futures builds on the success of a previous project – Cambridge Futures.

In this project, a consortium of people in local government, the business community and the two universities produced seven alternatives for the development of the Cambridge region. Based on the proposition that economic growth in the region would continue, the physical, social, environmental and transport consequences of alternative development strategies were projected. The intention was not to make specific recommendations but rather to demonstrate the possibilities open to society and, in so doing, to generate informed debate and aid the formal planning process.

A central feature of the project was a survey that described simply and clearly the outcomes of different planning alternatives, and invited members of the general public to express their



The public consultation exercise was a most amazing piece of research, it proved to politicians that Joe Public is not as stupid as the tabloid press would have us believe.
(Professor Peter Carolin, Chairman of the Cambridge Futures Steering Group and former Head of the University of Cambridge Department of Architecture)

… it convinced people that if options were explained clearly then the general public were much less intransigent about change than might have been supposed … Although there are still matters of dispute, there is general agreement about the need for new land for housing and about development in the green belt.
(Peter Studdert, Director of Environment and Planning, Cambridge City Council)

opinions. The survey was conducted in 1999 and the findings are currently influencing planning policy in the region.

One of the main findings was that there was little support for the 'status quo' in the Cambridge region. The planning options that won the least support were closest to the present planning policies of 'minimum growth' for the City of Cambridge and 'necklace development' of villages outside the green belt.

Cambridge Futures suggested that a planning strategy that allows for growth of the city through densification together with growth outside the city on transport links would be most likely to meet the aspirations of people who live and work in the region.

The findings indicated that public opinion responds to balanced and clearly presented information about urban development, suggesting that similar techniques could be used to investigate public opinion about building new houses in the South East. Housing Futures, the survey reported here, is the result of applying a similar approach to three towns in South East England.

Development options

A number of development options are being championed. Richard Rogers and others champion an urban renaissance. They talk about rediscovering the joys of urban life and recolonising our city centres:

… our attitudes to urban living will need to change over the years ahead: for a sustainable future, with sufficient homes for every household, we need to rediscover the positive aspects of urban living.
(Urban Task Force, 1999)

There is support for suburban development from the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and many others:

In facing up to the necessity of new homes on greenfield sites, there is growing agreement that the most effective approach takes the form of urban extensions. Such developments plug into the public transport routes, the existing schools, shops and facilities, much reducing the likely congestion and pollution.
(Council for the Protection of Rural England, 2000)

In many places in South East England, developers are creating new settlements of two or three thousand homes on the edge of towns.

In contrast to these single development options, our findings from Housing Futures suggest that a combination of options, namely densification, urban extension and new town, offer the best solution to gaining public acceptance of new housing.

Housing density

One obvious remedy to housing shortage and the lack of land is to increase the density of new housing. The Government is attempting to impose minimum density requirements on new development. Yet raising densities in the absence of innovative design and community involvement can meet with public resistance and result in failed developments. The perceived failure of 1960s' council flats has created a depth of opposition to high-density living that will be hard to combat.

Nor will higher density necessarily reduce house prices. High densities increase construction costs without necessarily reducing unit land price, since higher density may feed through into higher land prices or lead to higher profits for housing developers.

Aspirations and dreams

A home, since it is intimately bound up with marriage, relationships and family wealth, is the largest and most significant investment we make in our lives. Any new urban development will be a failure unless it matches people's aspirations and dreams.

This has two important consequences for this survey. The first is that people are likely to be interested in the subject and disposed to answer our questions. The second is that their attitudes and opinions are likely to be emotionally charged, and the survey will need to be carefully designed to avoid provoking a bigoted or entrenched response.

How do people choose where to live and in what type of house? Why do some people choose to live outside urban areas? What trade-offs are they making? What type and density of house will people tolerate being built in their area? What impacts do they take account of in assessing acceptability?

Economic growth of the nation should not be frustrated by a lack of homes, but economic growth has to be balanced against social and environmental considerations, particularly those of conserving and enhancing our quality of life.

Policy relevance

The main message coming across in the press, professional journals and government guidance is that, to maintain the economic health of UK plc, we need more homes in the South East.

Information about people's preferences and attitudes will help improve understanding in planning and housing provision, so that the location of new homes is acceptable to the general public and the new homes are what people want.

Finding a more positive attitude among the public to the supply of land for new housing greatly strengthens the case for a change in planning policies in favour of the release of more open land.

Detailed information about people's preferences will also assist professionals to understand more clearly the types of development that are most likely to be acceptable to the public. This will reduce the uncertainty faced by social landlords and developers, encouraging them to set more ambitious housebuilding programmes.

- The supply of land is critical to our ability to build more houses.
- Potential public opposition to planning permission for building on open land is seen as one of the main barriers to increasing land supply.
- The general public's attitudes to alternative development options and types of housing and densities will be useful information for policy makers and housing providers.

3 Process

To achieve the Government's objectives of balanced sustainable communities, we need to find ways of engaging with the general public at a strategic level. The approach used here is to provide an overview of the issues involved in providing more homes. We hope to show that this carefully designed questioning in which people are offered alternatives and have the outcomes of these options described in simple meaningful terms produces thoughtful answers and useful findings.

The consultation was in two parts: expert workshops, to develop the information presented in the survey, and the public opinion survey itself.

The consequences of different development options were developed and tested in a series of workshops with national and local experts including planners, councillors, developers, housing providers, academics and environmentalists. This technique of using experts to develop the survey content has proved very effective.

Computer-based and paper versions of the survey were available at exhibitions in shopping centres and libraries. Paper versions were available in hospital waiting rooms and building societies. The survey was also accessible on the web.

A total of 1,428 people completed the survey. The response in each of the three towns is similar to the distribution of people by age, employment and tenure in the 2001 Census. The sample seems representative of people living in the three towns.

Approach

The underlying rationale of this study is that, if the pros and cons of different development options are explained simply and unambiguously, including that of maintaining the status quo, members of the general public will be able to express clear preferences, which can inform planning policy. Tackling the issues at a strategic level as opposed to concrete proposals for a specific site reveals people's underlying opinions about how we should develop as a society rather than their personal selfish interests or prejudice.

Expert opinion was used to devise and test the content of the public opinion survey. Experts from the housing, planning and conservation world, at both the national and local level, were interviewed individually and then invited to a series of workshops. In simple terms the process works as follows:

- expert panels predict outcomes to options
- survey describes these outcomes
- public express their preferences.

This use of experts was one of the key changes we made to our original research proposal, which had envisaged modelling the various development options using standard land-use-transportation modelling techniques. This would have involved

Figure 5 Process

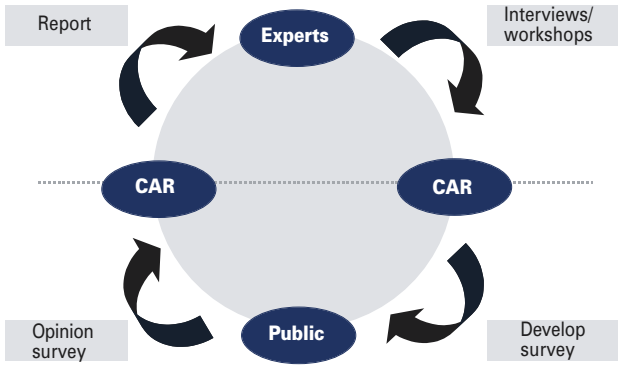


Figure 5 shows how the Cambridge Architectural Research (CAR) team used expert interviews and workshops to help develop the survey and to comment on the draft report.

collecting data on demographics, economic growth, transportation routes, land availability and housing stock, and modelling the outcomes for the three locations.

The planners in Aylesbury, Maidenhead and Medway were insistent that the survey be general rather than location specific. They were concerned that people might think that the modelling implied concrete plans for their area, and were anxious to avoid confusion with their own local plans and consultation exercises. There were also sensitivities about local elections.

Making the survey generic suggested that we use experts rather than modelling to devise the outcomes. We decided therefore to involve experts in a formal way in stating option outcomes and in devising the content of the survey. A total of 76 experts were consulted.

There are considerable advantages in this approach. Because of the complexity of the subject, we would have needed to interpret the detailed outputs of the computer model. Using the experts to generate the outcomes and then reaching consensus in an iterative process of debate, editing and testing meant that the final descriptions have wide support, are simple enough to be useful in the survey, yet respect the real complexity of the situation.

This approach means that the process is easier to apply to other places. The survey is relevant to current housing issues and credible to people answering the survey and people reading this report.

Finally, a great advantage of using experts in this transparent process is that the information provided to help people decide between options is much less prone to researcher bias than the black-box approach of urban modelling.

Expert interviews

A series of interviews were conducted with informants in each of the survey locations and with others who we thought were likely to provide useful insight. Fourteen people representing ten organisations were interviewed in each town.

These local informants included: local authority planning officers, local authority elected representatives, social housing providers, local business people, local house builders and estate agents, hospital administrators, police strategic support staff and education department recruitment officers.

Other informants included academics in relevant disciplines in universities in the study area, national social housing providers, national house builders, national property developers, representatives from the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) and the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), and civil servants in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). Eighteen people were interviewed at this national level.

Workshops

Six workshops (three local and three national) were organised to explore and develop the issues to be included in the public opinion survey. Twenty-four delegates attended the local workshops and ten experts attended the national workshops.

The planners in each town hosted the local workshops and invited people from local housing providers, developers, businesses, ecological pressure groups and civic societies. People responsible for planning policy, professionals involved in housing provision, special interest groups such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and academics were invited to the national workshops.

Three JRF advisory group meetings reviewed and commented on the research findings. A workshop was also organised after the survey to receive feedback from the three local planning teams, together with planners from Cambridge City, who had been involved with Cambridge Futures.



Expert workshops
Six expert workshops were used to develop and test the survey.

Options

The Cambridge Futures study proposed seven development options. We decided to adopt five of these seven options, which represented distinct patterns of settlement, and to exclude two options, transport links and virtual highway, which we thought were different in kind and non-comparable.

These five options were: minimum growth, densification, urban extension, village growth and new settlement. To find out the likely outcomes of these options, a questionnaire was sent out by post to selected experts. It was also filled in by participants at national and local workshops. The likely consequences of each option were assessed in terms of their impact on six key issues: affordability, employment, traffic, environment, service provision and community.



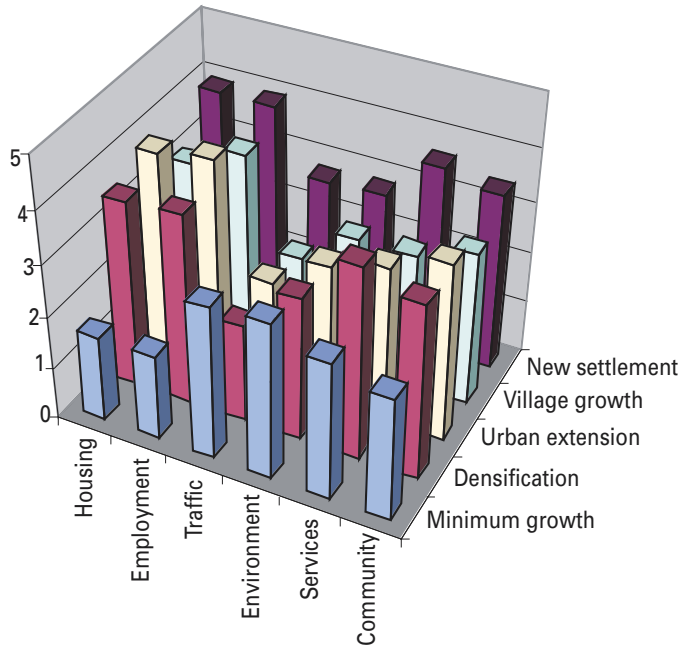
Expert assessment of option outcomes
The graphic shows part of the chart used to record expert assessments. Green dots show positive outcomes, red dots show negative outcomes and black dots are neutral.

The questionnaire allowed for both a quantitative and qualitative analysis. For example, in assessing the effect urban extension might have on employment, the respondents voted on a scale of one to five to indicate whether they thought it would have a positive or negative effect. We used these data to produce graphs that combined results from all of the respondents. In addition, the questionnaire asked for comment. These comments were also analysed.

Testing option outcomes
The outcomes were trialled in a workshop with our advisory group. The participants liked the descriptions but thought there was some unnecessary duplication. In discussion, an important issue arose concerning the scale of the proposed development in each option. The participants felt that scale could have a major impact on the outcomes since it would determine the level of service provision. The scale effect was thought to affect all the development options, but especially new settlement.

Figure 6 Outcomes for options

Expert assessment of the likely outcomes for five development options. The higher the stack the 'better' the likely outcomes. In terms of traffic and environment, all options do 'worse' than minimum growth. However, overall, new settlement and densification do best.



After much reflection, we decided that it would cause confusion to create sub-divisions of each option. However, we thought there was a strong case for creating a new option, 'new town'. 'New settlement' represents the scale of that which is commonly being built now; 'new town' represents a scale of development that would support a much wider range of facilities and services. We now had six options for testing.

We also decided to resolve some of the issues to do with scale in the densification and village growth options by being more specific about likely outcomes and by offering caveats so that the public could decide which they thought would be more likely to happen in their area.

Interestingly, in terms of the likely outcomes, members of the advisory group thought that it was unlikely that house price or employment opportunity would be influenced by building more houses. We were therefore most careful in our description of likely consequences to avoid saying either that homes might not be any cheaper or that there would be some or a lot of new affordable housing through Section 106 agreements.

These outcomes were incorporated in the revised version of the public opinion survey, which was tested at two further national workshops and two local workshops.

This process of using experts to first develop and then test the information in the survey has two main virtues. First, it reduces bias in the way the questions are framed and, second, it helps ensure that the information presented in the survey is, in the opinion of a wide group of experts, as accurate and as clear as possible.

Options

The following option descriptions were devised for the survey.



Minimum growth

Preserves the status quo with the minimum of change.

Likely consequences

- Does not add to the supply of housing.
- Does not help employers who are short of staff.
- Traffic congestion likely to increase with growing affluence and as more people commute in from other areas.
- Preserves countryside, urban open land and boundary of town.



Densification

Puts new houses within the existing urban area by infilling on open land and large gardens plus replacing redundant buildings.

Likely consequences

- Modest increase in supply but homes may not be any cheaper.
- New homes will be near to existing work.
- Traffic congestion is likely to increase but more potential for public transport, cycling and walking.
- Loss of urban open land but preserves countryside and boundary of town.
- Could overstretch some services if new facilities were not provided.



Urban extension

Allows expansion into selected areas of open land around the town.

Likely consequences

- Could provide significant amount of housing and some affordable housing.
- New homes fairly near existing work.
- Traffic into town is likely to increase.
- Town boundary extended with some loss of countryside.
- If new schools and other facilities were provided, access would be improved; if not, congestion would increase.



Village growth

Growth concentrated in existing villages through infill and modest extension.

Likely consequences

- Will provide only a small number of new homes, which may not be any cheaper.
- Could provide homes for locals but might mean an influx of commuters.
- Increased commuting and reliance on car use.
- Small loss of countryside but preserves boundary of town.
- Could make existing services more viable but could change the character of a village.



New settlement

Concentrates most new development in a new settlement of 2,000 to 4,000 homes.

Likely consequences

- Could provide significant amount of housing and some affordable housing.
- Could reduce recruitment difficulties.
- Likely to increase commuting and traffic congestion.
- Loss of countryside but preserves the existing town boundary.
- May not provide the population to support the desired range of new services like schools and shops.



New town

Concentrates development in a large new town of at least 20,000 homes.

Likely consequences

- Could provide a lot of new housing and potentially a lot of affordable housing.
- Could reduce recruitment difficulties.
- Commuting likely to increase unless businesses relocate.
- Loss of countryside but preserves open land in and around existing town.
- Comprehensive development would provide the population to support new services including public transport provision.

Statements

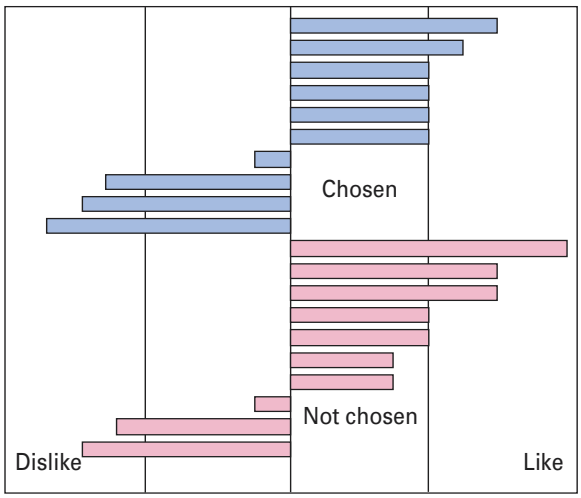
Controversial statements were used in the survey as a way of exploring people's opinions and underlying prejudices. From the interviews with national and local experts, we devised a set of 20 statements. Participants at workshops were asked to say how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement and were then asked to choose ten of the statements that they thought should be included in the public opinion survey. The results of this exercise are summarised in Figure 7. The length of the bar indicates the level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

There was considerable agreement among experts about which statements should be included in the survey, but, even among this small group, there was some controversy about whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement. Ten statements were chosen for trialling at a second national workshop.



Speakers' corner
Ten controversial statements were included in the survey to explore people's underlying prejudices about change and development.

Figure 7 Statements



Some green area should be released for development
The housing shortage is damaging the economy
With good planning many more homes can be built
The region must be allowed to grow
Building new houses won't reduce prices
More should be invested in public transport than roads
Quality of life is more important than economic development
I would move from the South East if I could get a job
The town and surroundings should be kept just as they are
More houses will mean much poorer quality of life
Everyone should have the opportunity of a decent home
Much countryside is less 'green' than most gardens
I would like a home in which it was easier to be 'green'
Cities are for people not cars
I'd like to be able to stop using my car as much
Commuters should pay to drive their cars into town
People will never give up their cars
Homes are more affordable today than in the past
The South East is full
Every home needs a garden

Statements for inclusion in survey

- Quality of life is more important than economic development.
- I would move from the South East if I could get a job.
- Quality of housing is more important than quantity.
- Some greenfield land should be released for development.
- Many more homes should be built.
- The housing shortage is damaging the economy.
- The town and its surroundings should be kept just as they are.
- More houses will mean much poorer quality of life.
- More should be spent on public transport than roads.
- The region must be allowed to grow.

House type and density

Background

The house builders and developers we interviewed told us that that people prefer lower-density detached housing. They argue that most people want more space in their homes, gardens and somewhere to park their car next to their house. On the other hand, the Government expects local authorities to avoid housing developments that make inefficient use of land. Offering the public examples of different types and density of housing and asking them how much they like or dislike them could provide useful information about what is acceptable.

Development and testing

We explored the question of what type of houses should be built where by getting experts to examine photographs of different types of housing and to locate them on a stylised map showing four possible locations: urban centre, suburb, village and new town.



The map on which experts were invited to locate the different types of housing.

The aim was to test how feasible it would be to use photographs of actual houses in the main survey.

Ten photographs of current housing were tested. The experts were able to draw inferences from these photos but were strongly influenced by architectural detail. Since we were interested in broad housing types, we decided it would be better to use stylised images in the survey rather than photographs.



The ten photographs of current housing that were tested.

The exercise also revealed that there are clear conventions about where each type of dwelling could be located. For example, people imagine low-density housing in villages and on edge of towns, and high-density in urban locations (see Table 1).

Table 1 Conventions about where each type of dwelling could be located

	Densification	Urban expansion	Village	New town
Cottages	– –	+	++	+
2-storey terraces	–	+	+	+
3-storey terraces	+	+	–	+
Flats	+	–	– –	+

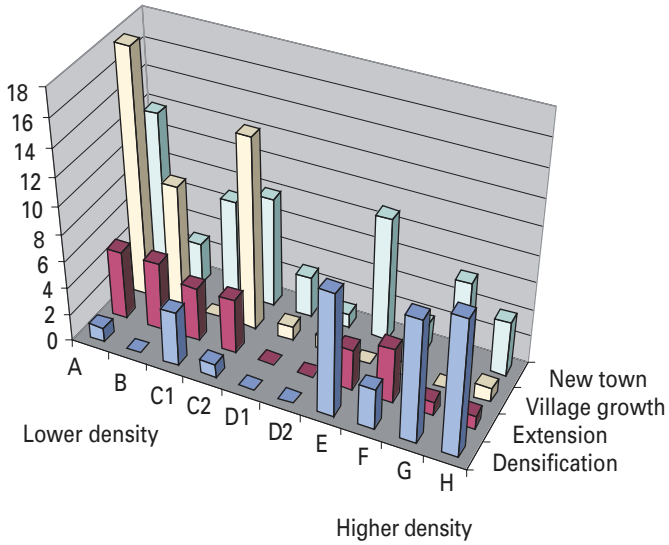
Although these conventions are interesting, the main comment from participants was that this section of the survey should be related more explicitly to housing density as a way of testing public reaction to the Government's agenda for increasing urban densities.

Figure 8 shows the results of testing the ten photographs with the expert panel. The height of the columns indicates how many experts located each house type in each of the four locations. It is clear that only the four low-density house types were popular in villages, while the four higher-density types were popular in urban densification. The experts were much more tolerant about which types could be located in the new town location.

The planners in the three towns provided us with information about recent housing schemes in their area. This shows that the actual density achieved depends principally on house type and size of site. On small sites of less than 15 houses, density is closely related to house type and form. As the size of development increases, a greater proportion of the site needs to be devoted to roads, schools, open space and other services.

This relationship between the size of site, type of house and resulting density is not linear. In other words, the higher the density, the more houses one can get on a given site and, consequently, the more services are needed. For example, on a 50-hectare site with an average density of 30–35 dw/ha, which is typical for many local authorities in the South East, about 40 per cent of the site can be used for housing. The rest typically has to be given over to a primary school, a local centre with shops/community facilities, open space/playing fields and distributor roads.

Figure 8 The results of testing the ten photographs with the expert panel
Developing the exercise for the public opinion survey



If the development was exclusively detached/semi-detached houses built at a lower density of 18–20 dw/ha, there might be insufficient population to support a school or local centre and the amount of open space/playing fields would be reduced. At this lower density, 60 per cent of the site could be used for housing and only 40 per cent would need to be retained for services and roads.

In contrast, if the development was of four-storey flats at a higher density of 90–100 dw/ha, a larger school would be needed plus more shops and more open space/playing fields. Only 25–30 per cent of the site would be available for housing and the rest would be needed for services. Table 2 summarises this relationship for a site of 50 hectares.

On the basis of this study, we designed two versions of this section of the survey, which were trialled at local workshops. In the first, the amount of land available for development is fixed and the number of homes that can get on the site varies with type of house. In the second, the number of houses proposed is fixed but the amount of land used varies.

Feedback

The participants at the workshop, together with the planners in both Aylesbury and Maidenhead, had a very clear preference for the version in which the number of homes proposed is fixed but the amount of land used varies.

The participants stressed the importance of making it clear to respondents that this was a hypothetical rather than an actual proposal. They thought that allowing a mix of house types would be more realistic and they also liked the inclusion of both questions.

- Would you like this type of house to be built in your area?
- Would you like to live in this type of house yourself?

From these comments, we devised the following version for testing at the Medway workshop.

Version for testing at the Medway workshop

Imagine that there is *a proposal to build 2,500 new homes on the edge of town*, together with a new school, shops, facilities and open space. The scheme could have a mix of three types of house:

- Type 1: detached or semi-detached houses
- Type 2: two or three storey terraced or town houses
- Type 3: flats of four or more storeys.

The higher the density, the less land is needed. Type 1 uses the most land, Type 3 the least.

On the next three screens, you will be asked to say how much you would like each type of house to be built and how much you would like to live in each yourself. This is a hypothetical proposal. We are not proposing any actual new housing in your area.

Table 2 Relationship between size of site, type of house and density for a site of 50 hectares

	Dwellings/hectare	Homes and gardens (%)	Non-housing (%)	No. of dwellings
Detached/semi-detached	20	60	40	540
Terraces and town houses	30–5	40	60	900
4-storey flats	90–100	25–30	70–5	1,500

Type 1: Detached or semi-detached houses, with medium-sized private gardens. If only this type were built, 125 hectares of land would be used. (One hectare is the size of a large football pitch.)

Likely impact: uses the most amount of land of the three options.

Type 2: Two- or three-storey terraced or town houses, with small private gardens. If only this type were built, 55 hectares of land would be used. (One hectare is the size of a large football pitch.)

Likely impact: uses a medium amount of land.

Type 3: Flats of four or more storeys, with communal open space but no private gardens. If only this type were built, 30 hectares of land would be used. (One hectare is the size of a large football pitch.)

Likely impact: uses the least amount of land of the three options. New facilities will be closer to where people live.

The images that were tested in Medway and used in the final survey.



In this scenario, we stressed that the proposal was for a mix of house type and density. From talking to people at the workshops and later in the public survey, it was apparent that, in voting for a particular type, either to be built in their area or to live in themselves, people are both giving their absolute preference for this type and indicating what proportion of the proposed development of 2,500 homes should be built.

This suggests that we can interpret the results to mean what percentage of people would tolerate a particular house type to be built in their area and also what percentage of a particular type of housing would be acceptable in mixed developments.

The participants at the local workshops liked this new version and had no substantive criticisms. Overall, the experts thought this section was extremely interesting. They were keen to know what the general public might make of these questions and wanted to make sure they got a copy of the results.

Public opinion survey

The introduction to the survey explained that:

> *… the survey is targeted at people living or working in Aylesbury, Maidenhead and Medway. We are not proposing any specific housing developments in your area. We would like to know your general opinion about future housing to help inform government policy.*

Structure
The survey had three main sections:

- options
- statements
- house type and density.

Respondents were asked how much they liked or disliked, agreed or disagreed, using a five-point scale.

Options
The survey offered six options or ways in which towns could develop over the next 20 years. Respondents were told to:

> *Keep in mind that actual development will involve a mix of these options and that given the strength of the housing market building new homes may not reduce prices.*

The likely consequences of each option were described in terms of their impact on five key issues: housing supply, jobs, traffic, loss of open space and service provision.

Statements
The survey then offered ten statements about the future of the South East. Respondents were told that the statements were deliberately controversial and had been chosen to provoke a reaction. They were asked to vote how much they agreed or disagreed with each of them.

House type and density
The survey offered a balanced description of the pros and cons of three density options. It explained that, on schemes of 15 or more houses, there is normally a requirement to provide about 30 per cent affordable housing and that larger developments normally come with other facilities such as schools.

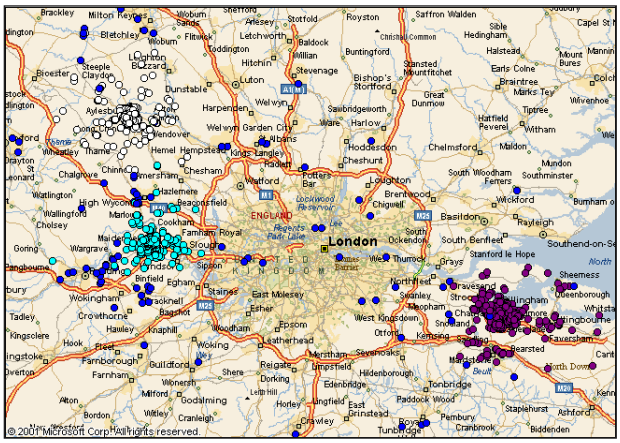


Exhibitions
We mounted large public exhibition stands in shopping centres and mini-exhibitions in libraries and hospital waiting rooms. Members of the public were able to fill in the survey either on computer or paper. The survey took about five minutes to complete, although some people took much longer to consider the options and give an opinion. Over 1,200 people completed the survey in this way.

The implications of each housing type were described in terms of the size of private garden, the amount of land used and nearness to services. The public were asked how much they would like or dislike each type to be built in their area and how much they would like them for themselves or their family.

Study area
The study area comprises the South East (excluding the London metropolitan area). Our initial proposal had suggested surveying ten towns. Our clients, JRF and the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA), suggested we reduce this number to three and nominated Aylesbury, Maidenhead and Medway.

Respondents mapped
The dots show respondents by home postcode: white for Aylesbury, turquoise for Maidenhead, purple for Medway and blue for others.



Base map: MapPoint®

Office of National Statistics data for the three towns suggest that they represent a wide range of different types of community (see Table 3).

Aylesbury is within the Milton Keynes/South Midlands major growth area. It is a compact town surrounded by countryside. Maidenhead is the most affluent town. It is in an area of constraint and is surrounded by green belt. Medway is a major area of urban regeneration and renaissance.

Table 4 compares average house prices of the three locations.

Organisation
The survey was made available in three different formats: on a computer, on paper and on the web. Our main effort went into organising public exhibitions in each town. We also mounted mini-unmanned exhibitions in public libraries and local hospitals. In Medway, which has two distinct poles of activity, we mounted exhibitions in both Chatham and Gillingham. We spent three days in Aylesbury and Maidenhead, and two days in Chatham and Gillingham (see Table 5).

Publicity
To publicise the survey we sent a press release to local radio stations and local newspapers. We telephoned the radio stations and did a live interview on at least one station on the first day of the survey in each of the four shopping centres. Some of the respondents mentioned hearing about the survey on the radio or in the local press.

On the first morning of the survey, having set up the exhibition stand in the shopping centre, we put up posters and stands with survey forms in the library and hospital main waiting area. With

Table 3 The three locations

	Classification	Population (Census 2001)
Aylesbury Vale	Prosperous growth area	166,000
RB of Windsor & Maidenhead	Most prosperous, established high status	134,000
Medway UA	New and expanding urban centre	250,000

Table 4 Average house prices of the three locations

	Detached	Semi	Terraced	Flat	All
Aylesbury Vale	£288,625	£165,020	£131,599	£96,009	£190,072
RB of Windsor & Maidenhead	£483,407	£241,251	£215,561	£170,491	£287,406
Medway UA	£198,822	£127,625	£96,313	£84,723	£115,912

Land Registry – data last updated 4 November 2002.

Table 5 Public exhibitions

Aylesbury	Maidenhead	Medway
8–10 July 2003	23–25 July 2003	15–18 July 2003
Friars Square Shopping Centre	Nicholson's Shopping Centre, Maidenhead	Pentagon Shopping Centre, Chatham
		Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre, Gillingham
County Reference Library	Main Library	Gillingham Public Library
Stoke Mandeville Hospital	St Marks Hospital	St Bartholomew's Hospital, Rochester
		Medway Hospital, Gillingham

permission from the chief librarian, we left leaflets advertising our web site next to every computer in the library. We toured the high street banks, buildings societies and estate agents, and left leaflets advertising the exhibition and our web site in at least a dozen places.

The people we interviewed in the police departments, hospitals and education departments also publicised the survey on their intranets.



Considered response

One of the most important things to say about the survey is how reflective people were. Nearly everyone who did the survey sat rapt in thought, considering their answers carefully and spending time to weigh the pros and cons of each option. Watching people complete the survey one couldn't help but conclude that they took it seriously and that their answers were significant.

Face-to-face survey

We designed an exhibition stand comprising tables, stools, display stands, computers and flowers. We had been advised that people dislike sitting on low seats in the middle of a public space, so the tables were made to the height of a kitchen work surface so that people could either stand or perch on a stool. Depending on how busy we got, we had up to five computers in action. These were secured to the tables with cables.

Three of the shopping centres were in the heart of town. The fourth, in Gillingham, was in an out-of-town shopping centre. At all four venues, we were allocated a 'good pitch' in the main concourse of the shopping centre. We would arrive at 8.00 a.m. and set up the exhibition stand. This was manned by at least two people at all times. Typically, we were open for business from 8.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. each day.

Four researchers worked on the survey. Two researchers from CAR worked in all four venues. Chris Lamaison, a market research specialist from Cambridge Resources, worked on the exhibition stand in Aylesbury and Medway, and Eleanor McKay, a market research specialist from London, worked in Maidenhead.

In Aylesbury, the first site surveyed, the shopping centre was very quiet and we had to be proactive in approaching everyone passing our stand. Without the example of the market

researcher, we would probably have been much too diffident to have met our daily target of 100 respondents.

Many of the people we approached were busy. Some were cutting through the shopping centre on their way to work or were on their lunch break. Many seemed to be on a mission to get somewhere quickly. The excuses people gave for not wanting to be stopped suggest that they thought we must have been selling something. For example, 'I've already got a house'. Or the opposite, 'I haven't got a house'.

We each developed our own one-liner to grab people's attention and convince them that this was not just a marketing exercise. We had to get over the idea immediately that this was a serious survey and their involvement was important. Saying that the survey was for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation helped a lot. And having an attractive stand with stools, flowers and display banners that described the survey also helped a great deal.

From an initial script describing the survey, each of us developed our own storyline. Towards the end of the ten days, we had found that the shorter and simpler the introduction the better. If people were going to stop, they would anyway and a long spiel only provoked a more determined brush-off. The simple phrase, 'We are doing a survey on housing for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, have you got a minute?' worked well.

Although each centre had its own character and some were much busier than others, there was a fairly consistent pattern to each day of increasing interest and activity up to lunchtime followed by a lull, which gradually built up again after three o'clock.

Some people said they were very busy or in a rush and asked how long it would take. They were told three or four minutes. Those who then protested it had taken longer did so with a smile, saying that they thought the survey had been interesting and worthwhile. In many cases, we were able to persuade the person to take away a paper form with a pre-paid return envelope.

Web-based survey

We handed out over 2,000 leaflets advertising our web site and publicised our web site in radio interviews and with local businesses. Despite this publicity, only 42 people completed the survey on the web.

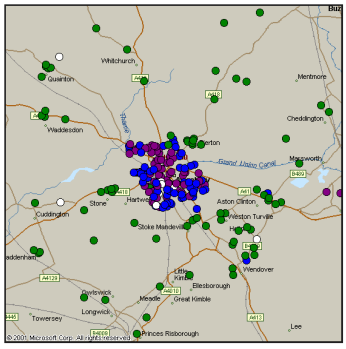
The reasons for this low response are complex. The survey on the web was exactly the same as that on the computers on our exhibition stand. People completing the survey in person on a computer seemed to be captivated by the experience and very few failed to complete the whole survey. We know that using the internet is a somewhat different experience. The web creates a feeling of urgency rather than reflection. Few of us, I suspect, are ready to spend the time or provide the type of information this survey requires when we are on the internet. To achieve greater success using this medium requires a different approach, perhaps working through groups such as civic societies or schools where established networks can be harnessed to legitimise the survey. This idea of working with secondary schools will be explored in the final chapter.

We also sent out about 500 forms in mailshots to key workers. This extension of the survey to key workers had not been envisaged in our original proposal and was suggested by our project manager.

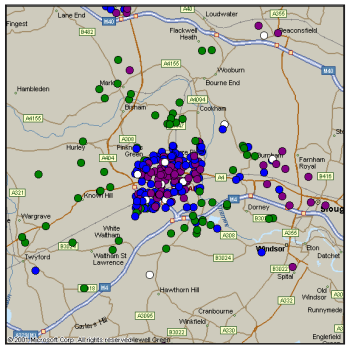
Teacher recruitment officers in education departments in the three local authorities agreed to mailshot schools with survey forms and leaflets advertising our web site. Police and hospitals in each town put leaflets and forms in their staff rooms.

Any returned surveys from key workers, whether on these paper forms or the internet, were marked so that they could be analysed separately from returns from members of the public. Only

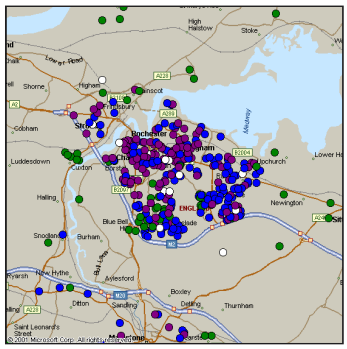
four surveys so marked have been completed. This poor response is disappointing, yet the reasons behind this failure are unclear. Maybe the mailshot was not as extensive as promised. The distribution of the survey forms was out of our hands and the forms were sent out only a few days before the school holidays.



Aylesbury



Maidenhead



Medway

Respondents mapped by their home area. Purple for urban, blue for suburban, green for rural and white for other.

Base maps: MapPoint®

The poor response to this aspect of the survey doesn't necessarily invalidate this method of research. The main lesson we need to draw is that, to be effective, the mailshot or intranet has to be in the hands of the people responsible for the survey. The people in the police, hospitals and education departments, although very helpful and attentive when interviewed, are busy people who have projects and enquiries of their own. To provide the kind of immediacy and legitimacy needed for success with this method of survey requires a level of enthusiasm and commitment beyond that to be expected from people who are fitting this in as a favour in their busy schedules.

Response

A total of 1,451 members of the public and 32 experts responded to the survey (see Table 6). (Since the end of August 2003, when we closed the returns, we have received a further three or four forms in the post, which have not been included in the analysis.)

A small number of responses to the computer survey, 23 in all, were discarded from the analysis because the researchers had doubts about the seriousness of the person's responses. The majority of these respondents were school children who were clearly inventing their answers, for example saying they were in the 75-plus age group. These records were marked for discarding immediately after the person had finished or had been asked to stop because they were causing trouble.

By far and away the highest response was achieved by asking people to do the survey immediately. The majority of respondents (84 per cent) completed the survey in person at the exhibitions. A total of 1,228 people completed on our exhibition stand (1,050 on a computer and 178 on paper). Approximately one in ten people we approached agreed to complete the survey – a notional response rate of approximately 10 per cent.

Table 6 Response to the survey

	Total	Incomplete	Complete (%)	Response (%)
On computer	1,050	61	94	10
Paper in person	178	22	88	10
Post	181	23	87	10
Web	42	7	83	–
Total public	1,451	113	92	10
Experts	32	1	97	62
Total	1,483	114	92	10

We handed out about 1,200 survey forms to people who promised to complete the survey at home and return it using the postage-paid envelope. We also left 600 survey forms at mini-exhibitions in public libraries, hospital reception areas, building societies and estate agents in each location. One-hundred-and-seventy-eight people returned these forms by post, a response rate of 10 per cent.

In general, we welcomed anyone who wanted to do the survey. We adopted an inclusive policy of asking anyone passing if they wanted to take part. In no respect was there any attempt to select only certain types or classes of people, or people of a particular age group.

Just over 100 young people aged 17 or under completed the survey. The majority of these were teenagers, but a handful were under 12. For the most part, they approached the survey with the same attention and seriousness as older respondents. In some cases, partners or married couples did the survey together. This tended to provoke a lot of discussion and these people usually took at least twice the average time to complete the survey.

Validity

A number of factors contribute to the validity of a survey. (Validity is the extent to which differences in scores represent true differences of opinion rather than systematic or random errors.) In the absence of direct knowledge of people's true opinions, validity has to be judged in relation to other evidence.

As well as the response rate, the completeness and consistency of the answers, the comments made by respondents and the representativeness of the sample all contribute to the impression we gain of validity.

One of the reasons people fail to complete a survey is that the questions don't allow them to reflect their views properly. In terms of completeness, only 113 members of the public failed to complete the survey fully out of a total of over 1,400 people. Many people talked to us after they had finished the survey. Hardly anyone complained that the questions had been biased, simplistic or illogical. In general, they told us what they thought about the current housing situation and some expressed thanks for the opportunity to have a say.

There is a strong internal consistency in the pattern of response from individual respondents. Those who strongly prefer the minimum growth option disagree with the statement that the region must be allowed to grow. Those who agree that 'the housing shortage is damaging the economy' and think that 'many more homes should be built' also tend to favour building more terraced houses and flats. Only seven responses were strongly inconsistent and these were discarded.

We have the strong impression that this type of sampling does provide an accurate 'slice of life' of a town. However, impressions are no proof of

representativeness. What is though is a comparison with the 2001 Census.

The pattern of age, employment and home tenure is similar to the 2001 Census in each of the three towns (see Figures 9 to 11). The differences are as follows.

- Our survey has 19 per cent fewer people in the extreme age groups of 17 and under, and 75 and over.
- Our survey has 10 per cent fewer employed people and 5 per cent more students.
- Our survey has 6 per cent more home owners and 6 per cent fewer people in rented homes than the Census.

Figure 9 Comparison with 2001 Census: age

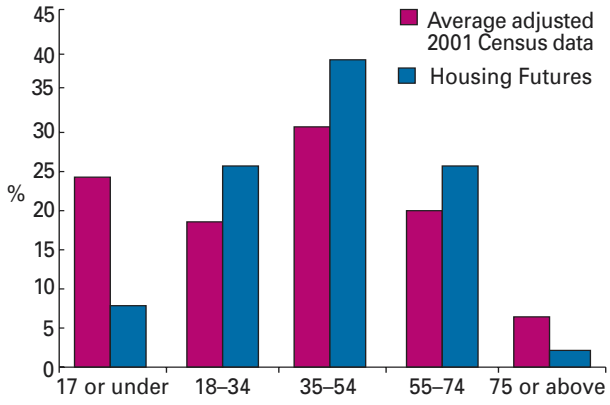


Figure 10 Comparison with 2001 Census: employment

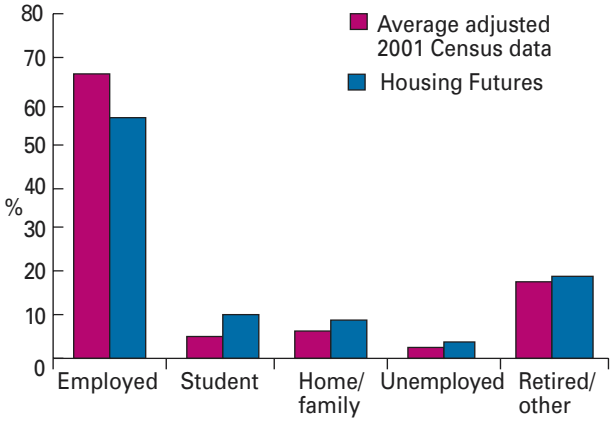
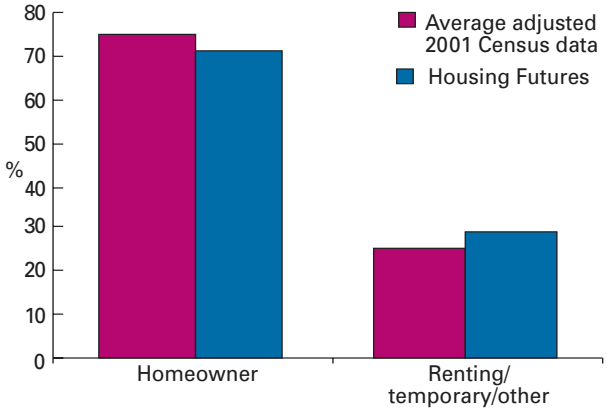


Figure 11 Comparision with 2001 Census: home tenure



Quantitative and qualitative data

We talked to as many as one in five people. Some of these conversations were fairly lengthy and, although we were unable to record them, they leave vivid impressions about people's attitudes and ideas, which help inform the findings.

Comments

The comment box at the end of the survey was used by 232 members of the public (16 per cent). Of these, only seven comments were critical of the survey methodology.

Three respondents suggest the questionnaire and sampling were flawed or introduced bias:

> *Some of the questions are put in a way to encourage positive views of new housing. I suspect trickery.*

Anticipating this type of criticism, we put considerable effort into trialling and testing the detailed questions in expert workshops with the express purpose of reducing positive or negative bias in the way the questions were framed:

> *Your survey is rubbish. It is not based on a random probability survey and reweighting on personal characteristics will not correct for bias in your sample due to mobility and access to the internet.*
> (A government survey statistician)

Clearly, our research design was not based on random probability sampling. However, to suggest that the survey is rubbish seems excessive. Random sampling also has drawbacks: it can be expensive and achieve low response rates. We made no attempt to weight the sample, as this person suggests, but our sampling method gave a sample with similar characteristics to the 2001 Census:

> *A very 'cleverly' worded questionnaire, giving the impression that the options are mutually exclusive, whereas they are not; it [the last section on house type and density] does not allow for combinations of types of houses.*

This last comment is slightly unfair since the survey explicitly states that: 'The scheme could have a mix of three types of house'.

Three respondents found the questions too general:

> *Very general – doesn't consider particular situations, e.g. urban extension may have spare transport capacity or be already over-burdened.*

> *There is no room to express the impact of quality of design on the urban environment. I'd prefer flats but not the bland buildings with minimum facilities (aesthetic included) that current planning seems to encourage.*

> *None of the above offer environmentally friendly or seemingly creative planning. Urban regeneration and brownfield build would be preferable.*

The seventh hostile respondent identified a key issue:

> *The problem with this type of survey which I am certain will be used as some great authoritative proof is that the questions are all self negating. In one village there may be a need for some increase in others no and of course the same every where. Do we need as many new houses as the Government would wish us to believe or can we build higher or use more brownfield sites – are the surveys correct! Everyone of your suggestions in themselves are applicable but not to a large area. Far too simplistic.* (Ex-district council planning committee member)

The fact is that some solutions will be appropriate in some situations and totally inappropriate in others, but this doesn't mean that the answers are self-negating as this respondent suggests. Rather, reporting the diversity of results is a benefit of this kind of survey.

In general, the survey was well received and there were many more positive than negative comments. Many people said that they had found the survey interesting and had enjoyed doing it. Positive written comments included the following:

> *I like the idea of letting people go through this experience. You can find out what people think about housing.*

> *Pleasant staff, nice people doing the survey, very friendly, not pushy at all, enjoyed it.*

> *Happy to take part in a worthwhile survey, nice to think that the public have some say.*

> *This is a very interesting survey. And is important to the future of Kent.*

> *Hope this helps to make changes for the better; especially to government housing [policy].*

> *Thank you for listening. Good survey guys; well done.*

4 Expert opinion

Local planners, estate agents and employers were interviewed to gather information about planning issues, local housing, job markets and public opinion about new development. Expert opinion was used to devise and test the content of the public opinion survey through a series of workshops. National and local experts included: planners, councillors, developers, housing providers, academics and environmentalists. One aspect of this process was to canvass for ideas about solutions to the housing problems of the South East.

This chapter reports the current issues emerging from the interviews and the suggested solutions.

Current planning issues

Information gathered in interviews with local planners, estate agents and employers provides a descriptive context for the survey.

Aylesbury

The district has a workforce of some 80,000, 80 per cent of whom work in the district. It is envisaged that major new employment land releases will attract significant growth in the professional services sectors and hi-tech industries.

Urban extension has been the main planning policy for the past 50 years. There is no green belt and no shortage of open land for development. There are also a number of brownfield sites from closed-down industries in the town itself. Aylesbury doesn't have much green space, there are no big parks, although there are green flood-plain areas along the river.

Currently, local planning policy demands 20–30 per cent affordable housing in new development. Local planners would like to raise this to 45 per cent.

The Principal Project Officer in the Strategic Implementation Group at Aylesbury Vale DC said:

> *A lot of new houses have been built in Aylesbury over the years. But there is a lack of affordable housing. Small houses and low-cost housing are also needed. Housebuilders have been producing four–five bedroom houses, but blame the planners for high prices.*

> *There is less opposition to developments on the periphery of the town than in open countryside. For example, there was little public objection to Fairford Leys, Berryfields and Weedon Hill, all large developments on the edge of town. But there is opposition to development in rural areas between Aylesbury and Milton Keynes where there are very attractive villages.*

A Project Officer at Aylesbury Vale DC said:

> *The main concern of the general public is traffic. People say they want investment in public transport but don't actually give up their cars. Aylesbury does not have bad congestion but people see it as an increasing worry. There were plans for a ring road but this seems very unlikely. Aylesbury is recognised as being a hub in the SEERA Draft Regional Transport Strategy and a decision is to be made this month on whether the west terminus of the proposed Crossrail link across London is Watford or Aylesbury. Aylesbury is on the boundaries of the South Midlands, the Thames Valley and the London Orbital area. Consequently it tends to be ignored in studies of these areas.*

Maidenhead

Maidenhead is in Berkshire and is part of a unitary authority that was created in 1998. A recent survey showed that the town had the highest house prices outside London, requiring an income of at least £79,000 to be able to afford a three-bedroom semi-detached house with a 95 per cent mortgage. As

well as being an affluent area, Maidenhead is surrounded by green belt. Yet it is not in open countryside. Slough and Windsor are almost contiguous and Marlow is close to the north.

Densification has been opposed recently and some residents are concerned that flatted developments in particular would harm the character of certain local neighbourhoods. There is strong opposition to any development in the green belt and the authority's green-belt policies have been well supported at appeal.

The Planning Policy Manager at the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) said:

> *There are still quite a few areas of deprivation in Maidenhead. They are small and so don't show up in the statistics. Maidenhead is constrained by green belt – 83 per cent of RBWM is green belt! The average house price is distorted by very expensive ones but there is a severe lack of affordable housing and lack of housing is the key issue for recruitment. We are exceeding our housing targets and have a successful policy of 30 per cent affordable housing on sites. But even if every new house built was 'affordable' it wouldn't meet needs.*

In summary, the green belt restricts development and Maidenhead has very low targets for new housing.

Medway

Medway is located in North Kent and was created a unitary authority in 1998. Medway is a conurbation of five towns: Chatham, Rochester, Gillingham, Strood and Rainham. The creation of a single unitary authority has enabled more effective strategic planning and a comprehensive local plan was adopted in May 2003.

Medway is part of the Thames Gateway, a major area of urban regeneration and renaissance. Chatham has a mix of modern and ancient architecture. The River Medway is an important feature of the town and there is a lot of new brownfield development along the river frontage.

Since the main employer in the area, the naval dockyards, ceased operation, there is MoD land for sale. The MoD is required to sell within three years to the highest bidder. It does not consult the community until the land is sold but there are some positive examples of developments where the local council and developers have collaborated.

The Acting Assistant Director Regeneration and Environment at Medway Council said:

> *Medway is highly atypical compared to the rest of the South East; it does not have that much lack of affordable housing. Policies in London have a huge effect on Medway, for example there is the issue of whether Medway continues to be a dormitory. The local plan is just about to be adopted. The planners feel that they have gone through all the scenarios and now have an up-to-date development plan. They feel that decisions are largely externally dictated and so the public don't have a choice … the local population is feeling sensitive – a lot is being forced on to the Thames Gateway.*

In summary, Medway has been designated as an area of major development and this has created some local resentment.

Staff recruitment and retention

We interviewed a range of employers in both the private and public sectors in each of the three towns to see if the lack of affordable housing is impacting on business and essential public services.

Public sector

We conducted interviews in three key service sectors – hospitals, police and schools. We asked if employers had difficulties in either recruiting or retaining staff and if these problems were related to housing shortage. We also asked which staff grades were most affected and whether any other aspects

of work, such as long commuting times or quality of staff, were affected by housing shortage or house prices.

Some, but not all, employers are finding staff recruitment difficulties that are related to housing shortage. But the impact of housing varies between the three towns being studied and even within the same town in different sectors. Not surprisingly, the biggest impact is felt in Maidenhead where house prices are highest.

Hospitals

Primary care hospitals have problems recruiting particular types of staff. St Bartholomew's Hospital in Rochester has problems in paediatrics and audiology. In Windsor, there are problems recruiting junior nurses at the first stage or D Grade. Many junior staff have to commute a long way. Many staff have come from other countries, for example Medway currently has a lot of staff from South Africa on temporary contracts who are prepared to live in shared housing.

Hospitals have relatively few problems recruiting senior clinicians, nurses, occupational therapists and other ancillary workers. These are typically mature women who are coming back into nursing after having a family and are settled in the area. The Chief Executive at the Princess Margaret Hospital Windsor said:

> *We have problems recruiting staff, but only in certain areas. It's easy to get mature staff because they are already settled and they often have a partner with an income. But we find it very hard to fill junior positions. Even senior managers find it hard and some are renting. A lot of people commute long distances, which could be the main reason for leaving.*

The Head of Site Services at St Marks Hospital, Maidenhead said:

> *There is a big turnover of staff in the NHS due, in part, to housing shortage. Housing is a big problem in this area especially for those on lower incomes as there is nowhere for people to live if they do get a job.*

The Chief Executive at St Bartholomew's Hospital in Rochester said:

> *We don't have any special provision for staff housing. NHS policy has been to sell off any housing. It's fairly easy to move up the housing ladder and there is a good mix of housing in the area.*

The HR Adviser at Medway Hospital in Gillingham said:

> *We have no problems either recruiting or retaining staff. As far as housing goes we have a loan scheme which is open to all staff – including non-medical.*

Police

Retention of officers at the end of their two-year training seems to be the biggest problem for police forces in the region.

A police inspector in Maidenhead said:

> *Accommodation is provided for the first six months' probationary period and in some cases for up to one or two years of initial posting. But once this initial training is over and officers have to find their own accommodation this comes as a shock. People then apply for jobs in the Met which carry a London allowance or move to areas where the cost of living is less.*

The police in Kent experience slightly different problems. There is a house price gradient from west to east of the county with much higher prices in Dartford or Medway than in Sittingbourne.

The Strategy Manager with Kent Police said:

> *We don't have problems attracting recruits. The problem we have is that officers living in West Kent tend to have jobs in the Met and officers working in West Kent tend to live in East Kent, some a considerable distance from their work. This impacts on policing in the sense that it is difficult to retain experienced officers, especially in Maidenhead and*

West Kent. So some areas have a much higher ratio of inexperienced officers than others. However, I struggle with the idea that we need more housing though; I see so many 'for sale' boards around. With urban sprawl there is a real risk of losing the Kentish way of life.

Police officers live relatively far from their work, which makes for long commuting. This makes it difficult for police officers to compete in a housing market fuelled by two full-time income earners, since the possibility of emergency overtime means that one partner has to be at home to cover for children.

A manager with overall responsibility for staffing and housing issues for Thames Valley Police said:

We have no problems with recruitment but retention is a big problem. London is a pull. Working officers of the same grade get an extra £6,000 London allowance plus free travel worth £3,000. The Starter Home Initiative is working well but is for first-time buyers only. People who have outgrown a starter home have big problems moving up to a family home. Lots of estates are being developed around Oxford but the homes are expensive. I'm also concerned about estates joining up and becoming a big conglomeration. Green space is important and local people can't afford to live in their own village.

Schools

Schools have the most severe problems recruiting and retaining teachers. For example, the Recruitment Strategy Manager at Buckinghamshire Education Authority, which covers Aylesbury, said:

The housing issue is raised constantly by head teachers, in meetings, conversations and on the telephone. It is a chronic and serious problem. Teachers coming in from outside Buckinghamshire are surprised at the price of housing. We tend to lose many of them after one or two years. There is a lack of take-up of the shared ownership scheme – it is important for teachers not to live too close to the school they teach in. Normally young teachers rent if they can't find a home in the right place. It seems like all the money to help with high housing costs is concentrated in London.

Recruitment officers in the other two local authorities covering Maidenhead and Medway reported similar problems.

Private sector

We also interviewed major private sector businesses, building societies, estate agents and job recruitment agencies.

Banks and building societies

Banks and building societies seem to have similar, although less severe, problems as the police retaining staff.

The Branch Manager at Nationwide in Maidenhead, which like the police and the NHS has a national pay structure, expressed concerns about housing shortage and affordability:

Whereas a manager in an area of low house price in the Midlands, North or Southwest might have 200 applicants for a job and can choose an applicant with good educational qualifications, we might have only one or two applicants and have to take what we can get.

It's very rare for someone's first house to be in Maidenhead and moving to a bigger house is too expensive – so people build extensions. As manager I want more houses. As parent I get a lot of enjoyment from the countryside. On its own, building more houses will just attract more people.

The Branch Manager of the Britannia Building Society in Aylesbury expressed similar concerns:

Our national pay agreement is causing recruitment and retention problems. Regional pay would make recruitment easier but push up prices. Pushing up the salary multiple for mortgages is pushing up house

prices. There is little affordable housing for first-time buyers. Most building is for the buy-to-let market. Better transport links to London will aggravate the problem as many more people would be able to commute.

The Branch Manager at the Halifax in Chatham said:

There is a lack of affordable housing in the area which does affect staff retention. The biggest problem is for people trying to get on the housing ladder. Halifax has a good reputation for staff training so people can leave us for higher paid jobs in London or somewhere with a lower cost of living. Further east towards Sittingbourne prices drop, so some staff live there and commute.

Estate agents

Estate agents in all three towns have little problem recruiting or retaining staff. A partner in Martin Kemp Estate Agents in Aylesbury said:

We don't really suffer from housing shortage. Schools are very important in people's decision on where to live and the main reason given for 50 per cent of house moves in the area. Jobs and work location are not a big driver. A major attraction for purchasers is housing newness. People are willing to sacrifice detached for newest. There is also an aspirational choice of village over town – though this romantic ideal is not always followed through in practice.

A partner at Machin Lane, Estate Agents in Chatham said that they don't have problems recruiting or retaining staff. He also said:

I don't see the link between new building and prices. There is a lot of new development and prices have still gone up. Unless you build thousands of homes it won't put prices down. The infrastructure is not able to keep up and the shortage of schools is a big problem. Social housing hasn't affected prices, there isn't enough being built. Not that many developments are big enough for Section 106 affordable housing.

A partner at Atkinson & Keene, Estate Agents in Maidenhead thought that the housing situation had no effect on recruitment, as staff are not at the starter home age:

I don't necessarily think it would be a good idea to build more houses. The problem is for people unable to get on the ladder. There is more than enough mid and high priced housing. The main need is for affordable housing, not more housing. To move up a rung on the ladder is a big jump. People have to stretch themselves because Maidenhead is one of the most expensive places to live.

Local businesses

In complete contrast to the public sector, the majority of employers we contacted in the private sector were not concerned about recruitment and housing shortage. At the time of our enquiries in the summer of 2003, many private sector companies appeared to be cutting back staff through natural wastage and had few problems of staff recruitment or staff retention. This is probably a reflection of the economic downturn in the hi-tech and IT employment sectors. This may be a temporary phenomenon.

National pay

National pay agreements mean that, outside London, staff in the same job in the police, the NHS, chains like Nationwide and many other organisations are on the same pay in different parts of the country. Because of different levels in the cost of living, people on the same pay in different places will be better or worse off and more or less able to afford the available housing. Building new homes may have little impact on these disparities.

There are indications that the Government is considering introducing regional pay agreements in essential services such as the police, fire brigade and NHS. Regional pay scales should make it easier for employers to compete for staff. But national pay scales make the Midlands and parts of

the North relatively more attractive. This advantage would be lost if people were paid more in the South of England and could add fuel to the fire in the housing market in the South East.

Summary

- Public sector is having more difficulty than the private sector.
- Difficult to get and retain staff at the 'starter home' age.
- Workers lost to London or lower-cost areas.
- Shared ownership has a low take-up.
- The Starter Home Initiative has worked well for key-worker first-time buyers but there is a shortage of affordable family accommodation for key workers.
- Young teachers in all three locations are experiencing problems.
- Local businesses and estate agents have few problems.
- Aylesbury and Medway have more problems with retention than recruitment. Maidenhead has problems with both recruitment and retention.

Table 7 summarises staff recruitment and retention problems as reported by local employers. The shading indicates increasing difficulty from right to left, with schools experiencing the greatest problems and local businesses the least.

Solutions to the housing problems of the South East

Process

Each workshop of national and local experts began with an exercise in which participants were asked to think of solutions to the housing problems in the South East. This was to provide the context for the rest of the workshop, to allow participants to express ideas about the broader issues rather than focusing immediately on our research. The active nature of the session meant that it also acted as an ice-breaker.

Participants were asked 'What are solutions to the housing problems of the South East?' (In local workshops, this was preceded by 'From the perspective of living in Aylesbury …/Medway …'.)

They were asked to vote individually by sticking green dots and red dots on to cards depending on whether they agreed or disagreed with the propositions.

Results

Similar cluster headings from different workshops were combined. The following summary analysis used the 'for' and 'against' voting data. We took

Table 7 Problems with staff recruitment and retention

	Schools	Police	Hospitals	Building societies	Estate agents	Local businesses
Aylesbury	Recruitment and retention	Retention	Recruitment	Varying recruitment and retention	No problems	No problems
Maidenhead	Recruitment and retention	Retention	Recruitment and retention for certain staff	Recruitment and retention	No problems	No problems
Medway	Recruitment and retention	Retention	Recruitment and retention for certain staff	Varying retention	No problems	No problems

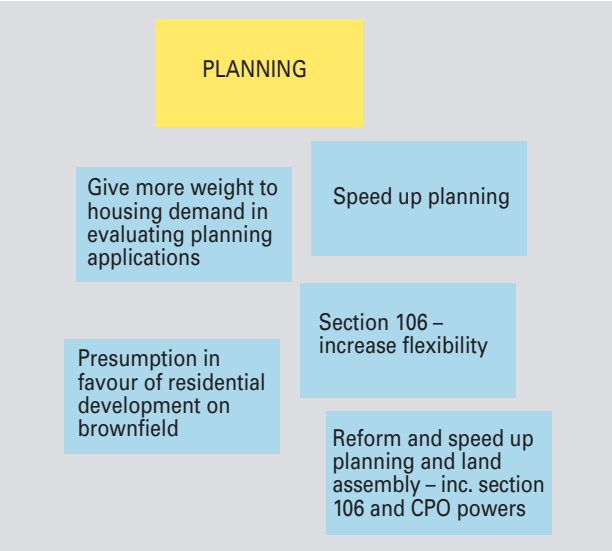


Figure 12 Solutions exercise
Having brainstormed individually for five minutes, working in pairs, the workshop participants were asked to write five to seven of their best ideas. If there was disagreement, they had to compromise. They were asked to include issues they both agreed and disagreed about.

three or more green votes to mean that that solution was seen as useful or important. An equal number of red and green votes indicated divided opinion. Three or more red votes were taken as opposition to that idea.

Planning
There was agreement about the merits of reforming planning, including improving compulsory purchase powers and increasing the flexibility of Section 106 agreements. There was division of opinion about speeding up planning. Opinion was divided on the use of development corporations.

Production capacity
There was almost unanimous support for training more people to work in the construction industry.

Public transport
There was very strong support for improved public transport.

Land supply
There was general agreement about the need to release more land for housing and that local authorities should produce a list of suitable sites. There were differences of opinion about favouring residential development on brownfield land. There was unanimous agreement that criteria needed to be developed to help choose land for development.

Green belt
Although a minority of experts attending the workshops were strongly opposed to changes in the green belt, most of them supported a review of the green belt to utilise low-quality land.

Brownfield versus greenfield
Opinion was divided on the merits of the Government's target of 60 per cent of new homes on brownfield sites. Some experts pointed to the increasing evidence that brownfield land supports greater biodiversity and is of higher ecological and social value than open land used for large-scale agriculture. Many brownfield sites in urban areas are important for adult recreation and children's play. There was general agreement on the need to protect urban open spaces.

Supply/demand management
Making better use of existing housing stock, creating incentives for employers to help with housing and private sector involvement in providing affordable housing solutions were seen as ways of increasing supply.

Density
There was strong support from experts for building at higher densities. (This stands in marked contrast to public opinion, which will be reported in the next chapter.) However, expert opinion was divided on whether to build at higher densities in urban expansion projects.

Type and tenure
There was agreement that buildings should be able to adapt to changing needs and that more flexible tenures were needed.

Some participants thought the market should provide for need rather than for profit.

Affordability
More funding for affordable housing was unanimously supported, as was increasing council/social housing stock. Building more homes to increase the affordable supply was seen as a solution by some. Increasing the income of lower-paid key workers was not seen as a solution to affordability.

Community involvement
There was strong agreement about the importance of community involvement and the creation of new mixed communities. Experts argued that better community understanding would deliver what people wanted and reduce resistance to new development.

Infrastructure
Infrastructure was seen as very important. There was strong agreement to funding infrastructure through land value uplift. Mixed developments, encouraging shorter distances between home and work, and sustainable development in general were popular. It was noted that investing in transport and schools everywhere would affect housing choices.

Fiscal policy
There was agreement for decentralisation and regional incentives. Tax breaks for affordable tenancies were seen as a solution by some. Opinion was divided about taxing options on undeveloped land. There was strong dislike for two proposals: capital gains tax on owner-occupied houses and restricting the maximum loan available.

Funding
There was agreement that affordable housing should be subsidised and that below-market rents and shared ownership schemes are needed. Opinion was divided over whether employers should contribute directly to housing costs.

Regional policy
There was strong support for the need for solutions outside of the South East. Addressing the problems of northern cities was supported, as were tax incentives for industries to relocate. The proposal to 'send them North' was disliked.

Quality
Quality was seen as affecting most of the above issues. More innovation, better quality and design, and avoiding dormitory suburb status were all seen as important. Many decisions need to have the caveat 'only if the development is of high quality, sustainable and fits in with what the community needs and wants'.

Public consultation
There was strong support for more effective methods of public consultation.

5 Results

The results of the public opinion survey are presented in two parts: a summary of what the public think followed by the survey data, which is shown in Appendix 1. These data aggregate results for all members of the public, followed by results for each of the three towns and then for sub-groups, for example people looking for a new home. Although well over half the respondents could be classed as 'haves' in terms of housing, about a quarter have a genuine stake in new housing being built because they are either dissatisfied with their current accommodation or will be looking for a new home in the next year or two.

Respondents

A total of 1,428 members of the public have been included in the analysis. The majority of respondents are long-term residents of the towns surveyed. Forty-four per cent have lived in their current home for more than ten years and 31 per cent between three and ten years. Only 25 per cent have lived in their home for less than three years.

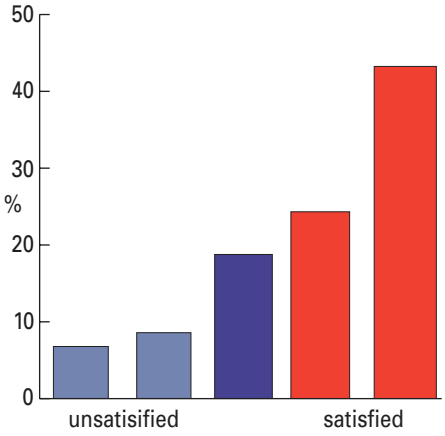
The majority work locally. Seventy-five per cent have a journey-to-work time of 30 minutes or less. The three towns are within easy commuting distance of London, but, since the main response was from people using the shopping centres and libraries, our sample may under-represent commuters. Nevertheless, 22 per cent said they worked outside the local area. A total of 568 people (40 per cent) gave us their work postcode. Of these, 11 per cent commute to work in London.

One of the most important things to highlight is the proportion of 'haves' and 'have nots' in terms of their existing accommodation.

There are many more 'haves' than 'have nots'. Seventy-one per cent of respondents are homeowners. (This compares with data from the 2001 Census of 68 per cent owner-occupied housing in England.) Fifty-three per cent say they have adequate room and 67 per cent say they are satisfied with their current accommodation (see Figure 13).

Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of the sample are 'have nots'. Twenty-three per cent say they have less room than they need and 27 per cent are living with parents, have an adult child at home or live in a shared house.

Figure 13 Satisfaction with current housing
People were asked how satisfied they were with their current housing arrangements. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents are satisfied with their current housing (43 per cent are very satisfied) and 14 per cent are dissatisfied (6 per cent are very dissatisfied).



A substantial proportion (27 per cent) plan to move house in the next year or two and so can be said to be in the market for a new home. Eight per cent (116 respondents) are looking for a starter home; 14 per cent are looking for a bigger home; and 5 per cent want to downsize.

Appendix 1 presents graphs showing all the survey data collected.

Options

Although none of the six development options received overwhelming support, three options are favoured. Although some people express strong dislikes, more people like the densification, urban extension and new town options than dislike them.

Densification and urban extension are most liked by the elderly while the new town option is most liked by the young.

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

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

The three preferred options – new town, densification and urban extension – are more liked by people in Aylesbury and less liked by people in Medway than the average for the whole sample. This suggests that people in Aylesbury are more pro-development, in the sense that they like the development options more, and people in Medway more anti-development.

There are interesting differences between different age groups in their attitude to growth and housing development. People in the youngest age group, 17 or under, are the most undecided about whether they like or dislike minimum growth, while those in the older age groups, over 55, have more extreme views with a large proportion strongly liking minimum growth but also a large proportion strongly disliking it. This suggests that older people have stronger, or possibly more entrenched, views than younger people who either don't know or are still forming an opinion.

Densification is increasingly liked with age, which is possibly related to accessibility to services. Urban extension is most liked by some younger and some older people. New town is most liked by the young; old people have very divided opinion about new towns.

There are also differences depending on where people live. Urbanites are least conservative, disliking minimum growth more than average. Suburbanites are more neutral, while people living in rural areas are the most conservative, liking minimum growth more than average.

Since no single development option is strongly favoured, the findings suggest that a balanced pattern of settlement growth would broaden public acceptance of new housing.

Settlement patterns

Like density, the appropriate pattern of settlement will depend on the specific locality. In green-belt authorities, for example, densification may be the only option. But we can use the results to make suggestions about where new homes might be built to meet with maximum public support. Normalising the votes in favour of the five development options gives the following figures: densification 22 per cent; urban extension 23 per cent; village growth 14 per cent; new settlement 17 per cent; new town 24 per cent.

Simplifying these figures suggests the following overall pattern of settlement for new housing in the South East: about 25 per cent of all new homes in each of the three most liked options and the remaining 25 per cent in existing villages and new settlements.

Acceptable growth

The public is likely to support new development if they are convinced growth can be achieved without sacrificing quality of life. People 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 that sustainable communities need.

People are evenly divided on whether or not they favour minimum growth. About a third like minimum growth and a third dislike it. People voting in the middle may be undecided, or they may accept growth is necessary or inevitable but are concerned about the negative impacts of development such as traffic congestion.

The general public are not convinced that planned growth can deliver affordable homes within sustainable communities. In part, this is a public relations task to highlight examples where well-planned development has delivered quality communities. But Government will also have to find ways of providing the necessary investment for services and transport that need to accompany new housing development.

Statements

The majority of people agree with four of the ten statements.

- 'Quality of life is more important than economic development.'
- 'More should be spent on public transport than roads.'
- 'Housing quality is more important than quantity.'
- 'The region must be allowed to grow.'

Clearly, people value both quality of life and quality of housing, yet want to balance this with the benefits of economic development.

Future of the South East

While most people agree 'Quality of life is more important than economic development', 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 agree on is that 'More should be spent on public transport than roads'. Traffic congestion is one of people's biggest concerns and the dominant message is that public transport must take a leading role in future development.

House type and density

Detached and semi-detached dwellings (20 dw/ha) are the preferred type of dwelling. But a substantial proportion of people find medium-density terraces (45 dw/ha) acceptable and a substantial proportion of people looking for a starter home would like to live in terraces.

Most people reject very high-density living (>80 dw/ha). They don't want to live in flats and don't want to see them built in their area. Only 21 per cent of people would like flats to be built in their area as opposed to 62 per cent who would dislike them. Nevertheless, a small proportion (14 per cent) would like to live in one.

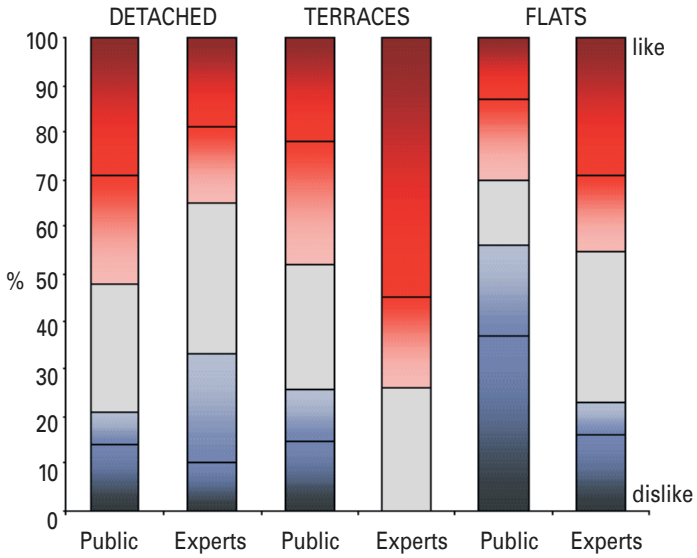
To put this in perspective, 20 per cent of households in England live in flats. The main demand for flats comes from 20–29 year olds and currently 12 per cent of the total population of the South East are in this age group.

Not surprisingly, people living in existing urban areas find terraces more acceptable than do people living in suburbs and rural areas. And, in general, the older the respondent the less they like higher density.

Public antipathy to flats is in contrast to expert opinion expressed in the workshops. Thirty-two experts filled in the same questionnaire as members of the public. Figure 14 shows how expert opinion differs markedly from public opinion.

Experts are marginally less in favour of detached housing than the public but the big difference is experts' preference for both terraces and flats. Significantly more experts than public like medium-density terraces and higher-density flats.

Figure 14 Attitudes to building different types of houses



Higher density

Dramatically increased density is not favoured as the answer to housing shortage. The clear message is that the majority of people aspire to live in detached or semi-detached homes with gardens. A modest increase in density with terraced housing is acceptable in certain situations. Terraced housing is also acceptable to those starting out on the housing ladder. High density needs to be matched to specific situations where there is clear demand.

ODPM Circular 01/02: The Town and Country Planning Direction 2002 (Residential Density London and South East England) makes it clear that the Minister will intervene in planning applications for housing that involve a density of less than 30 dwellings per hectare. This means that local planning authorities in the South East are unlikely to regard lower-density developments favourably.

Although the appropriate mix of densities depends on the specific site, this survey suggests that a mix of homes of different densities would be acceptable to a majority of people. Normalising the votes in favour of the three types and density of housing suggests that, overall in the South East, building 45–50 per cent low density, 35–40 per cent medium-density terraces and about 15–20 per cent higher-density flats would be acceptable. This would achieve the Government's target density of 30 dwellings per hectare.

Written comments

The survey allowed people to write comments. A fairly large proportion of people (16 per cent) made written comments. Some of the more interesting were as follows.

Anti-growth

The current proposals for housing and infrastructure deficiency will result in a vastly deteriorating environment. Who wants to live in the middle of a building site which will result in the slums of the 21st century?

Pro-development

Housing development is increasingly important. Lack of affordable housing especially for young first time buyers will have a detrimental effect on social well being of the community. Brown field sites need to be developed, however, creativity needs to be employed

to avoid the creation of new ghetto areas. Expansion of existing urban areas must be sympathetically handled with infrastructure being developed in conjunction with new housing developments. However, it is no longer viable for the 'not in my back yard' mentality to ambush long term housing objectives.

Regional policy

Government should try to get more wealth distribution in the non SE areas. The use of modern technologies should limit the need for more travel and housing in the SE.

House price

There is a massive shortage of affordable housing in this area. This has reduced our expendable income. Surely this is a dearth of council provision, meaning cheaper rents are unavailable to us, to the detriment of our standard of living.

Affordability

Would affordable housing be permanently affordable or would it return to full market value?

Infrastructure

If Aylesbury is to expand, the region's official bodies need to invest huge amounts in its infrastructure, primarily public transport and our road network. I have no problems with the idea of Aylesbury becoming a larger, more diverse town, but investment will be needed.

Quality

I live in a one bedroom first floor maisonette. It is one of a block of twelve, in a suburb on the edge of Aylesbury. These maisonettes could have been built with another storey and still have been acceptable and comfortable, thereby saving land. The sheer 'sterility' of modern housing developments, is possibly THE strongest reason why so many people object to their construction. Where, is our 'Imagination'. The Victorians already appreciated that balconies, bay windows, iron railings, turrets, cornices, date stones, etc., were added to stimulate the minds, not just of the owners, but also the passing public!

Brownfield land

I feel strongly that brownfield development should be subsidised and more emphasis placed on encouraging developers to build smaller more affordable housing for smaller family units/individuals.

6 Next steps

The main motivation for this study was a concern that people on modest incomes can't afford a home in the South East. We found, from talking to many members of the public, that they also share this concern. However, they are not convinced that building many more homes will necessarily result in homes being more affordable. Most of the people we spoke to at the exhibitions were concerned about high house prices and thought that there was a need for houses to be more affordable. Yet the majority of people disagreed that many more homes should be built in the South East. Although it is outside the scope of this study, this issue of affordability will need to be addressed in ways other than just building more homes.

Feedback and dissemination

The planning teams from the three towns, together with planners from Cambridge City who had been involved with Cambridge Futures, were invited to a workshop to comment on the second draft of this report. They had said from the outset that they were interested in seeing the results. Clearly, the approach is different from the consultation they normally do.

Professor Ian Cooper, the independent consultant appointed by JRF to evaluate the project, also attended this workshop. His main observations were as follows.

- The planners were overwhelmingly supportive of the study.
- The report and its findings were seen as being helpful and non-threatening.
- Independent consultation, not conducted by the local authority, was seen as a major benefit.
- The report also energised discussion and stimulated reflection of current practices and experience.

As well as this limited dialogue with the planners involved in the study, JRF plans to disseminate the findings to a wider audience and to consult planners at both national and local level on the practicalities of using this process of consultation.

Developing the methodology

The consultation process – of using expert witnesses to develop the survey and running it on computers at exhibitions in shopping centres – proved very effective. However, the process is labour intensive and needs well trained and motivated staff.

We were disappointed with the poor response to the web version of the survey, but, since this is potentially such an efficient method of consulting people, we think it would be worth further work.

One way of doing this would be to involve secondary school geography teachers in redesigning the survey to fit in with the National Curriculum. Workshops could be organised in class time and students could involve their families in completing the survey online at home.

Expanding the coverage

The three towns we surveyed are different, yet the pattern of public response was, with some minor differences, very similar. This is a most interesting finding and suggests a common set of values and preferences. It would be useful to find out how far this viewpoint extends. People living outside the metropolitan area in the South East may hold similar views, but do people in London think the same? Do people in other parts of the country hold similar or widely different views? Do people in other countries in Europe have different values and preferences?

Going into detail

Some of the issues in the survey, for example transport, could be dealt with only superficially. There is obviously scope to use our approach to explore other issues, for example how best to locate services like schools, shops, hospitals, parks and open spaces. We are currently helping Cambridge Futures 2 in a survey of public attitudes to different transport options for the region.

Three options – densification, urban extension and new town – were marginally preferred. Yet a substantial proportion of people voted in the middle on these options. It would be interesting to find out why. Were the options too hypothetical or were people undecided on these issues? If so, what factors would encourage them to vote in favour of these options?

Over a third of people (34 per cent) said they would move from the South East if they could get a job. What is stopping them? What encourages new residents to move back into run-down urban areas?

A very high proportion of people voted for quality of housing over quantity. What exactly do they mean by quality? And how can we build this desired quality into new communities? How can medium- or high-density housing be made more acceptable? What are the factors that make some higher-density housing schemes desirable? Can we pre-test the life cycle of developments being built now and predict which will stand the test of time?

Transport and traffic congestion is a major issue. One of the main things influencing people's resistance to new development is the prospect of more traffic. How can we reduce car use? For example, what would encourage parents to walk their children to school?

Public consultation

This research has shown that this consultation process produces informed answers. Getting the public to engage with problems at a strategic level is both possible and highly effective.

One of the objections to a wider adoption of this approach to consultation might be the additional cost to local authorities. In Cambridge, the cost, in terms of both time and expense, was borne by a consortium of local government representatives and officers, the business community, housing developers, academics, pressure groups and local residents. There is considerable merit in this shared responsibility. The many stakeholders to new development are involved from the beginning in devising alternative scenarios and engaging in consultation with the general public.

It is recommended that this consortium approach to organising and funding public consultation be developed.

References

Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) (2000) *Sustainable Urban Extension*. CPRE

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2002) *The Town and Country Planning Direction 2002 (Residential Density London and South East England)*. Circular 01/02. ODPM

Urban Task Force (1999) *Towards an Urban Renaissance*. Urban Task Force

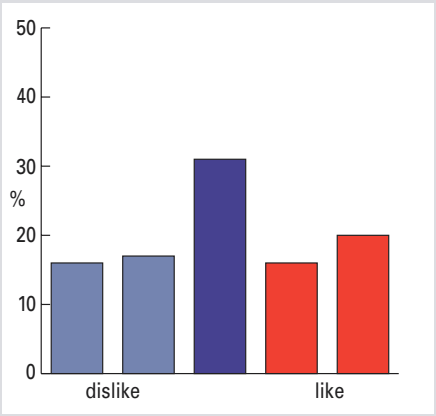
Appendix 1

Survey data

Table A1 Options

More people like the densification, urban extension and new town options than dislike them. Two options – village growth and new settlement – are strongly disliked. People are divided on whether or not they favour minimum growth. About a third of all respondents like minimum growth, a third dislike it and just under a third are in the middle.

The data

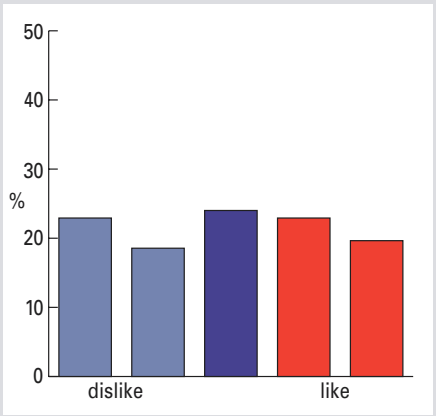


Minimum growth

People are almost equally divided about whether they like or dislike minimum growth – 36 per cent like minimum growth, 33 per cent dislike it and 31 per cent are in the middle.

Comment

Respondents were almost equally divided about change and growth.

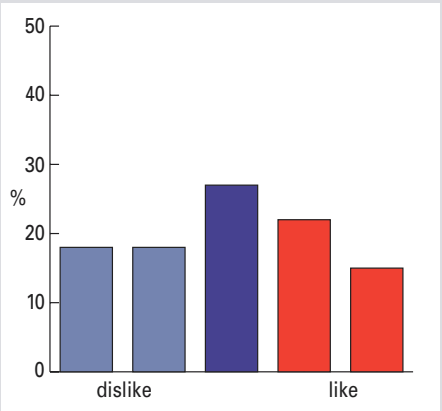


New town

The most liked option – 42 per cent like and 37 per cent dislike new town.

Comment

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



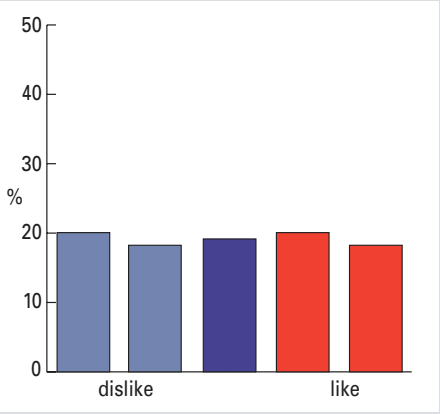
Urban extension

37 per cent like and 36 per cent dislike urban extension.

Comment

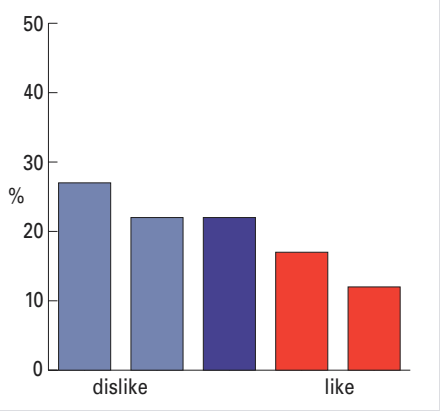
This option uses existing services but also uses open land.

Table A1 Options - *continued*



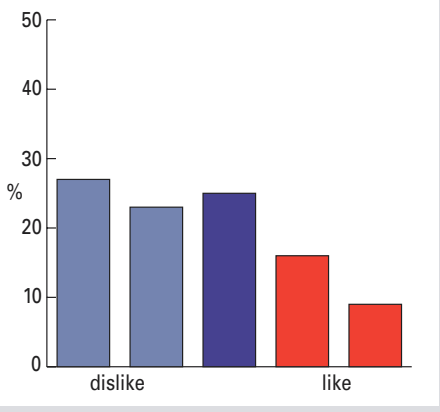
Densification
39 per cent like and 39 per cent dislike densification.

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



New settlement
29 per cent like and 48 per cent dislike new settlement.

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



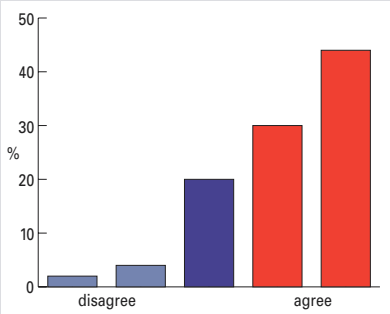
Village growth
The most disliked option – 25 per cent like and 50 per cent dislike village growth.

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

Table A2 Statements

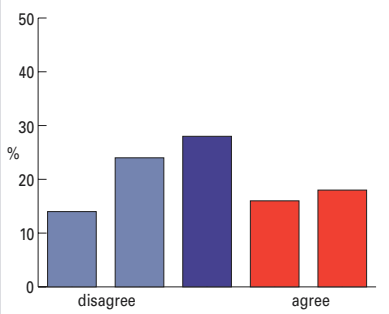
The public overwhelmingly agree with three statements: 'Quality of life is more important than economic development', 'Quality of housing is more important than quantity' and 'More should be spent on public transport than roads'. The majority also agree that 'The region must be allowed to grow'.

Quality of life is more important than economic development



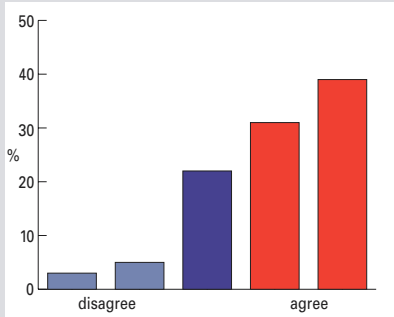
74 per cent of people agree and 6 per cent disagree.

The town and its surroundings should be kept just as they are



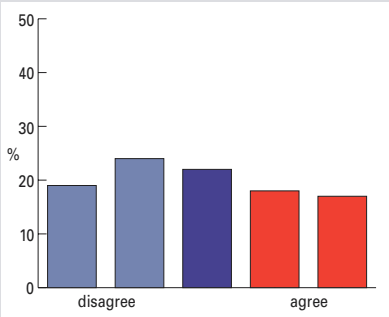
34 per cent of people agree and 38 per cent disagree.

Quality of housing is more important than quantity



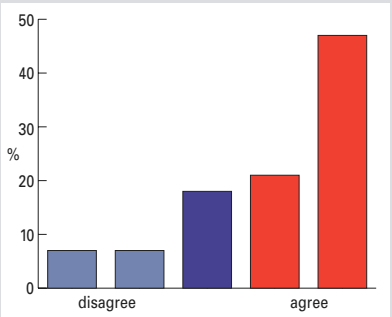
69 per cent of people agree and 9 per cent disagree.

More houses will mean a much poorer quality of life



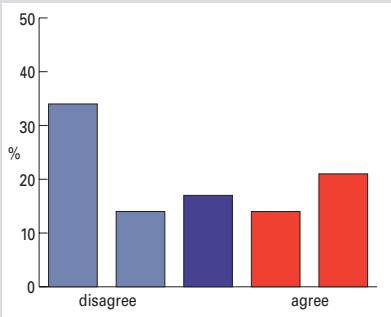
35 per cent of people agree and 43 per cent disagree.

More should be spent on public transport than roads



68 per cent of people agree and 14 per cent disagree.

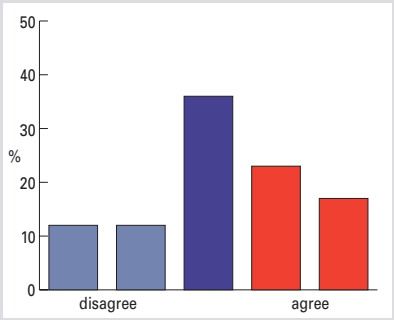
I would move from the South East if I could get a job



35 per cent of people agree and 48 per cent disagree.

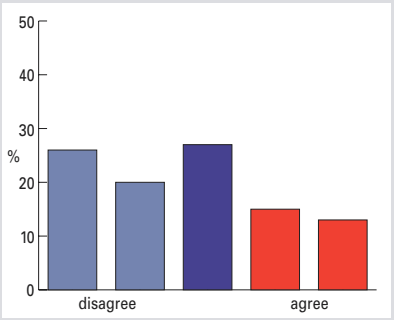
Table A2 Statements - *continued*

The region must be allowed to grow



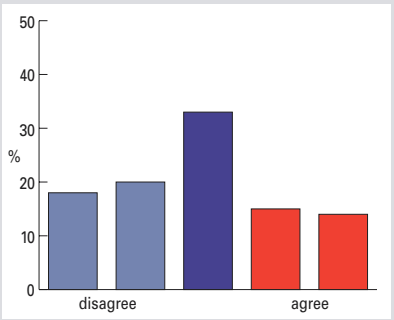
40 per cent of people agree and 24 per cent disagree.

Many more homes should be built



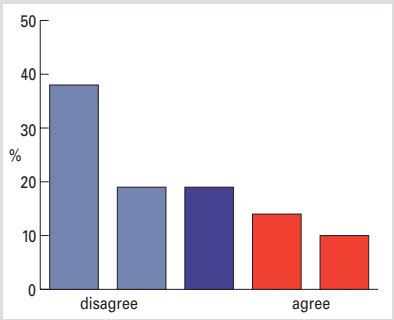
28 per cent of people agree and 46 per cent disagree.

The housing shortage is damaging the economy



29 per cent of people agree and 37 per cent disagree.

Some greenfield land should be released for development



24 per cent of people agree and 57 per cent disagree.

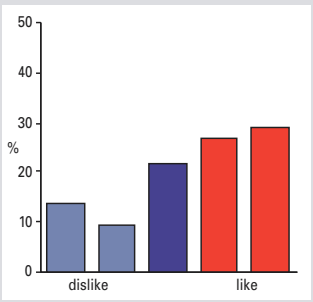
Table A3 House type and density

The public clearly prefer detached and semi-detached housing both to be built in their area and to live in themselves. Terraces are liked by a significant proportion of people but flats are overwhelmingly disliked.

Type 1



Built in your area



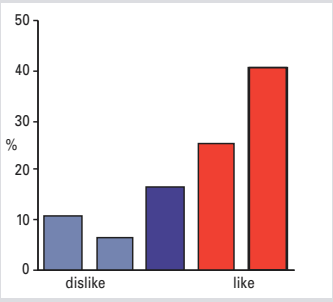
Detached and semi-detached

20 dw/ha

Most popular type. Acceptable to 55 per cent and desired as a home by 66 per cent.



For you or your family



Comment

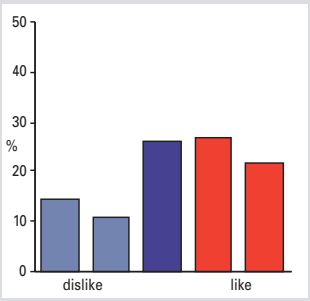
Clearly the preferred house type, but not by as large a proportion of people as might have been expected.

Table A3 House type and density - *continued*

Type 2

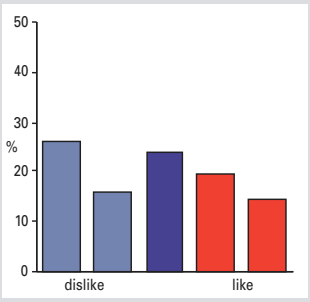


Built in your area





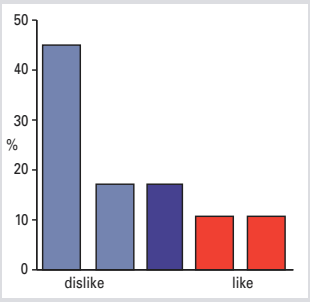
For you or your family



Type 3



Built in your area





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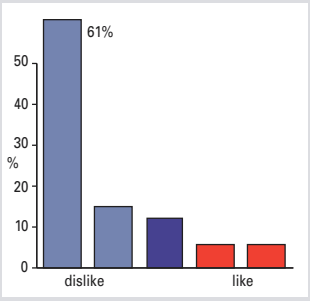


Two- or three-storey terraces

45 dw/ha
Acceptable to 47 per cent but desired as a home by only 34 per cent.

Comment
This type of home is acceptable to many and will deliver the Government's target density.

Flats of four or more storeys

83 dw/ha
Least popular type. Acceptable to 21 per cent but desired as a home by only 12 per cent.

Comment
This suggests that people will need good evidence that flats can offer high-quality living.

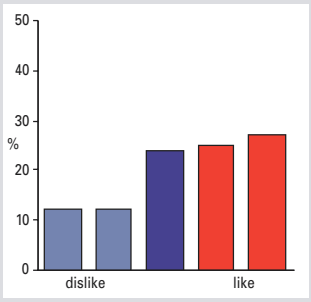
Table A4 First-time buyers – house type and density

First-time buyers are significantly more tolerant of higher-density options for themselves and their family than are the public as a whole.

Type 1

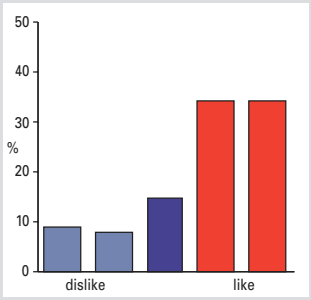


Built in your area





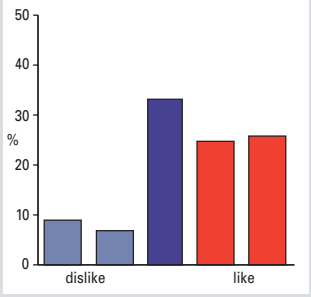
For you or your family



Type 2

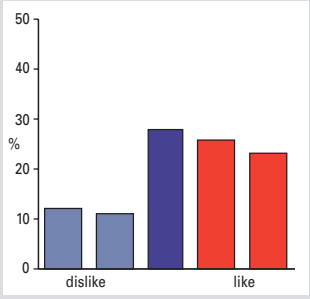


Built in your area





For you or your family



Detached and semi-detached

20 dw/ha

Most popular type. Acceptable to 52 per cent and desired as a home by 68 per cent.

Comment

The pattern of preferences for first-time buyers is very similar to that for the whole sample shown in the graphs in Table A3.

Two- or three-storey terraces

45 dw/ha

Acceptable to 51 per cent but desired as a home by only 49 per cent.

Comment

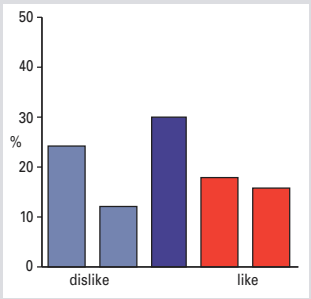
Marginally more acceptable to first-time buyers than the general population.

Table A4 First-time buyers – house type and density - *continued*

Type 3

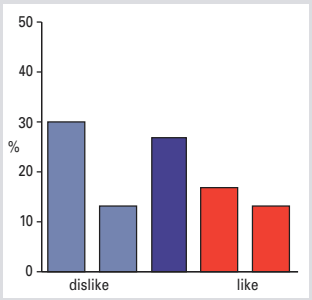


Built in your area





For you or your family



Flats of four or more storeys

83 dw/ha

Least popular type. Acceptable to 34 per cent but desired as a home by only 30 per cent.

Comment

Significantly more acceptable to first-time buyers than the general population.

Table A5 Options – comparing towns

Although the differences are not large, people living in Aylesbury like development options more than people living in Medway.

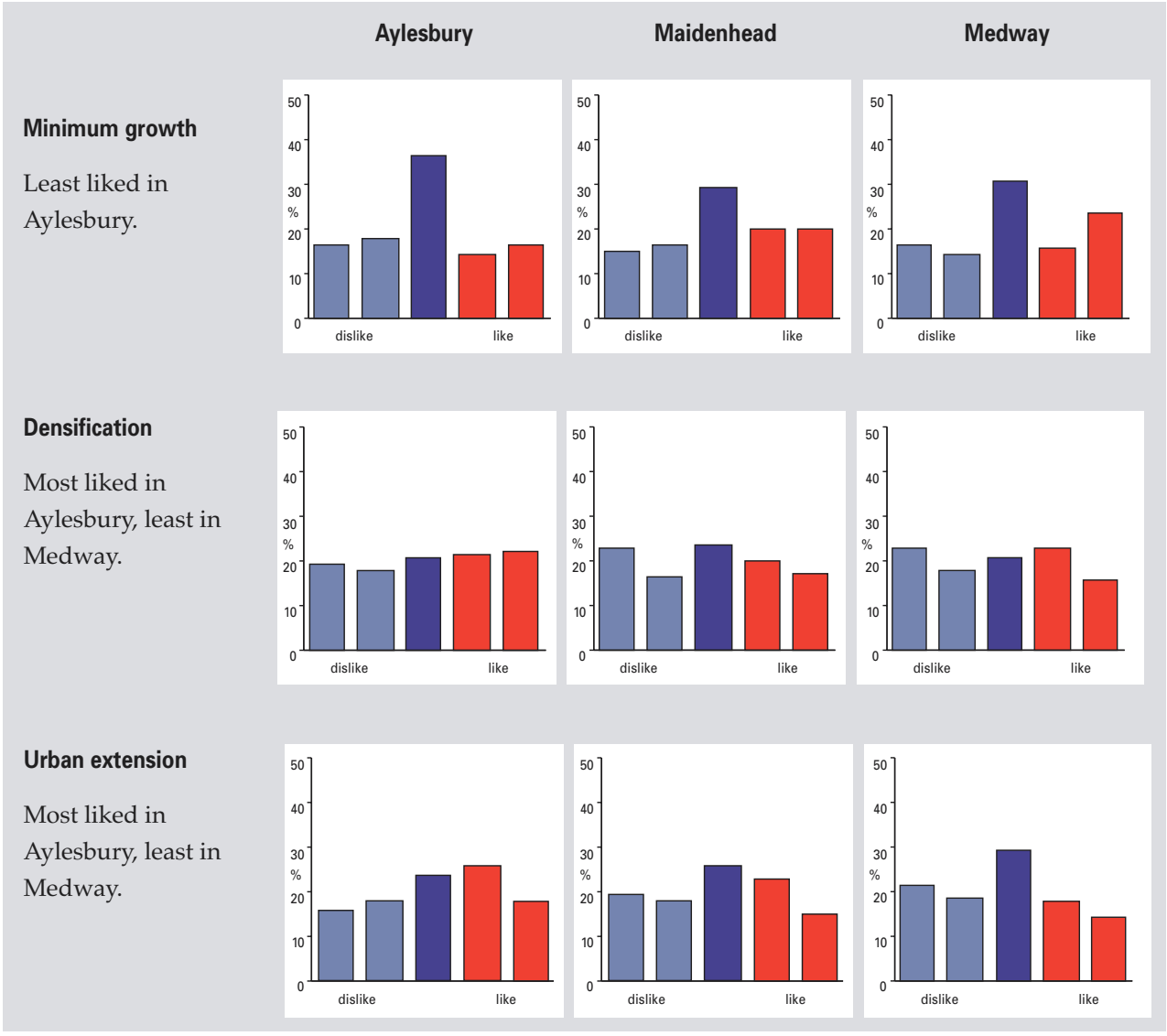


Table A5 Options – comparing towns - *continued*

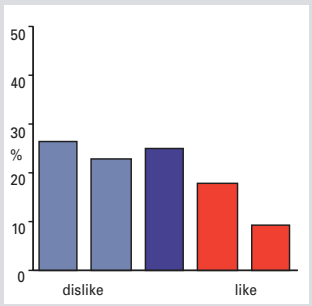
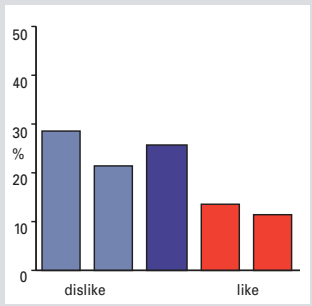
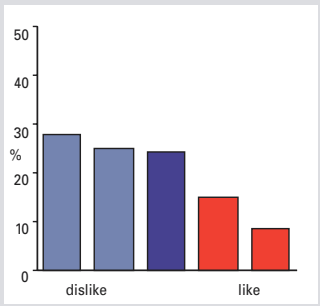
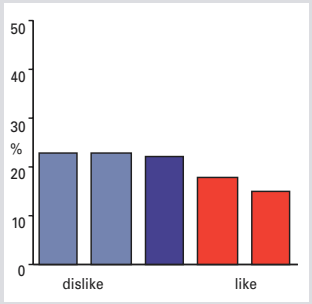
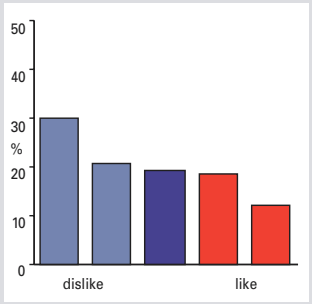
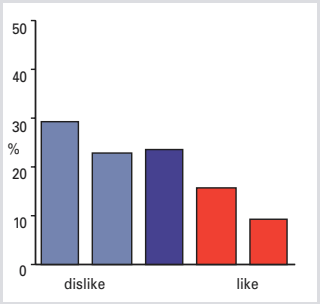
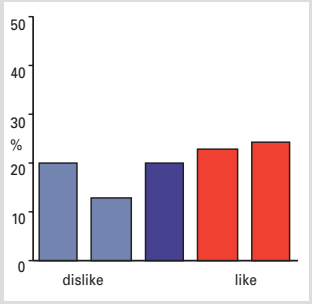
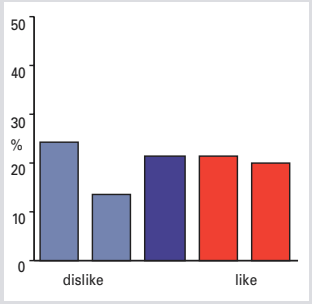
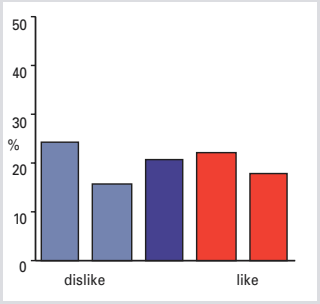
	Aylesbury	Maidenhead	Medway
Village growth Disliked in all three towns.			
New settlement Most liked in Aylesbury, least in Medway.			
New town Most liked in Aylesbury, least in Medway.			
	Most pro-development		Least pro-development

Table A6 Statements – comparing towns

Statements supporting more development, for example, 'The region must be allowed to grow' and 'Many more homes should be built', received more support than average from people living in Aylesbury and less from people living in Medway.

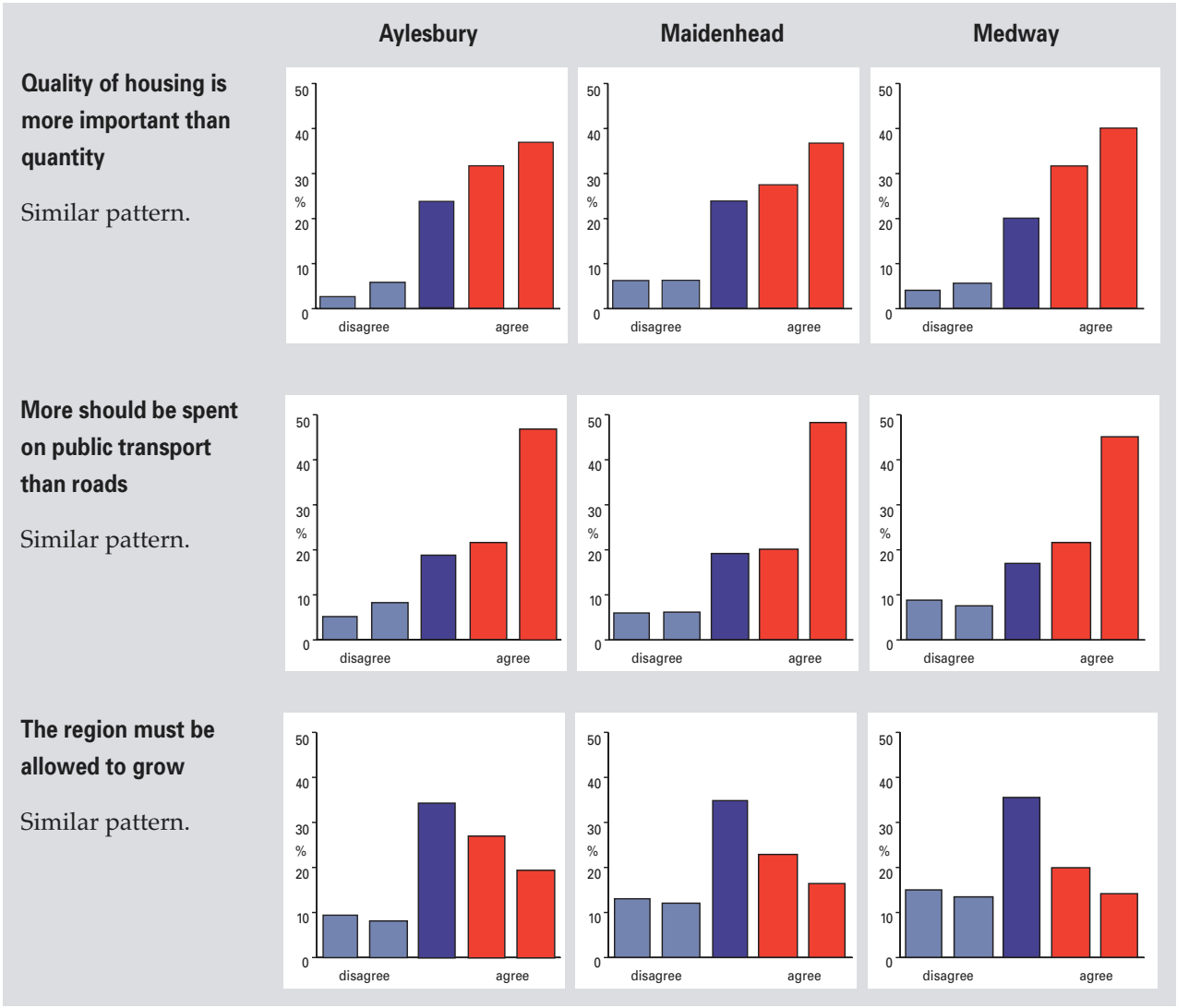


Table A6 Statements – comparing towns - *continued*

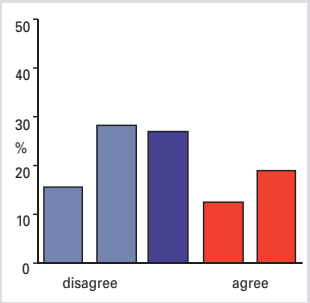
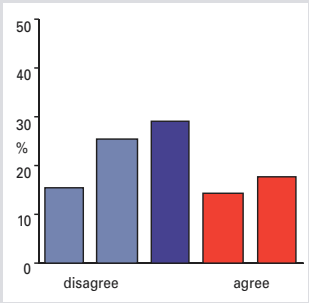
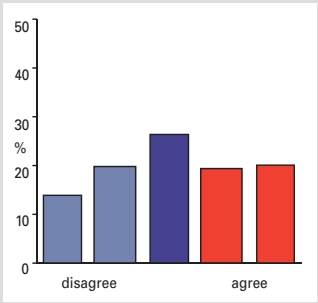
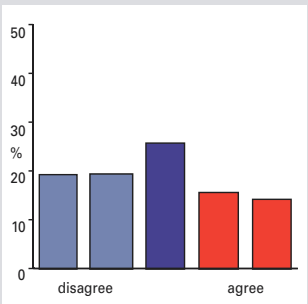
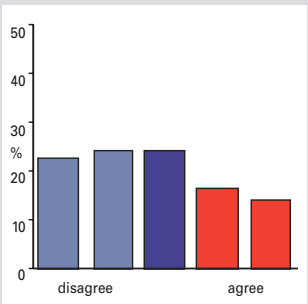
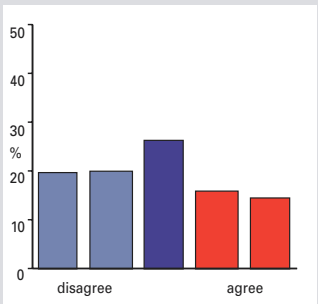
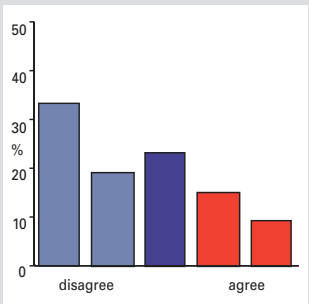
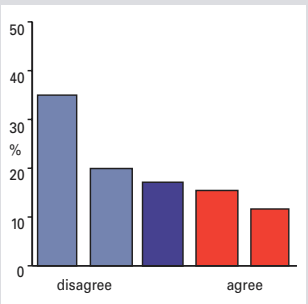
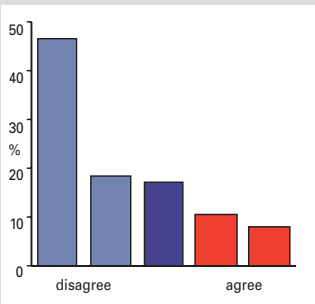
	Aylesbury	Maidenhead	Medway
The town and its surroundings should be kept just as they are Most agreement in Medway.			
Many more homes should be built Least agreement in Medway.			
Some greenfield land should be released for development Least agreement in Medway.			

Table A7 House type and density – comparing towns

The pattern of voting is similar in the three towns with the exception that people in Aylesbury are more tolerant of flats being built in their area while people in Medway are much less tolerant of flats.

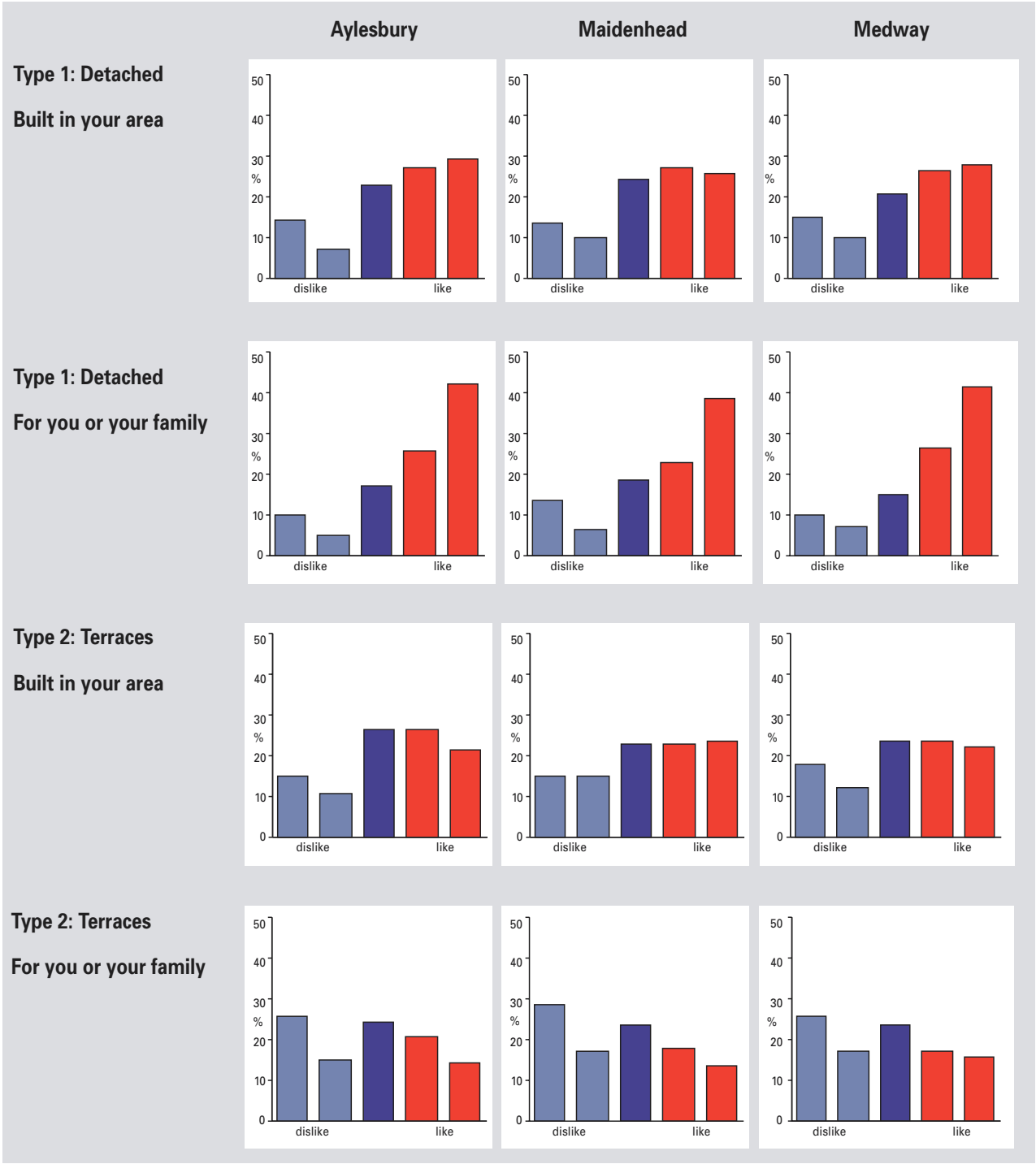


Table A7 House type and density – comparing towns - *continued*

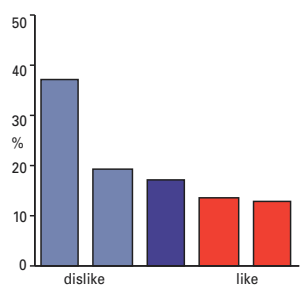
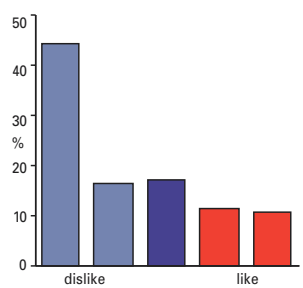
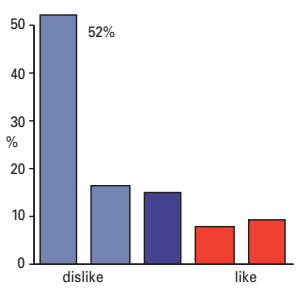
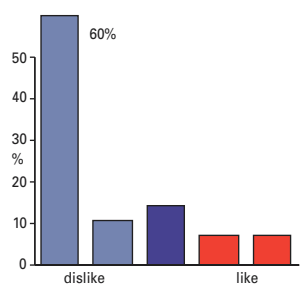
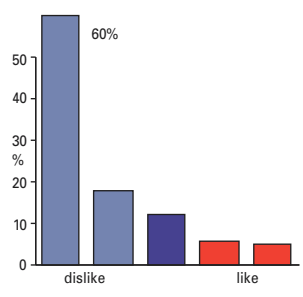
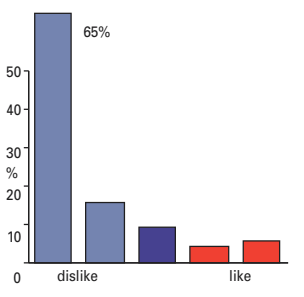
	Aylesbury	Maidenhead	Medway
Type 3: Flats **Built in your area**			
Type 3: Flats **For you or your family**			

Table A8 Age

Apart from densification, which is liked by the elderly, all the other development options are liked more the younger the person is. The two pro-development statements, 'Regional growth' and 'Build more houses', are also liked more by the young. Young people are also less 'Nimby' than older age groups and, perhaps because few of them own their own home, are more tolerant of flats and terraces being built in their area.

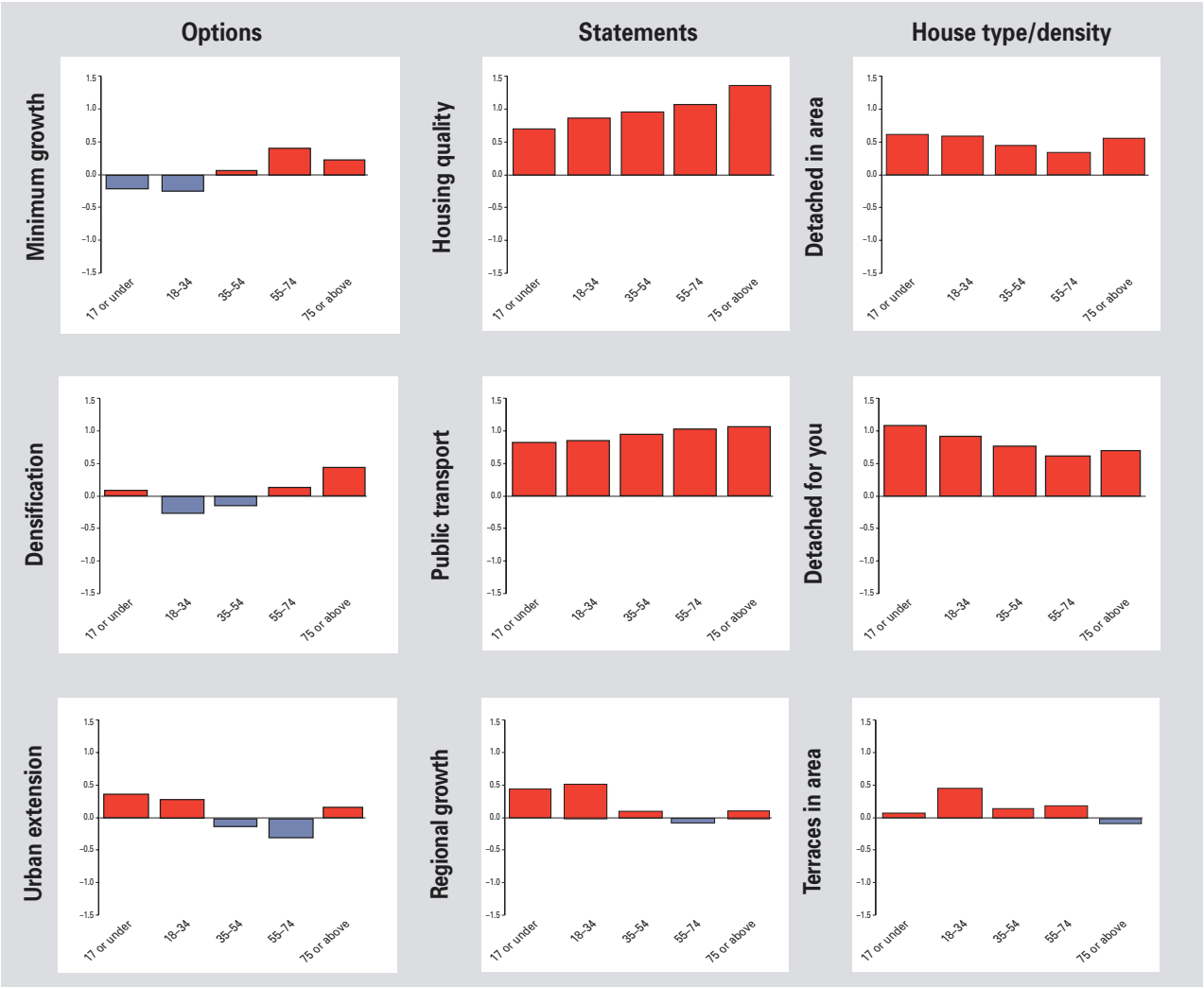


Table A8 Age - *continued*

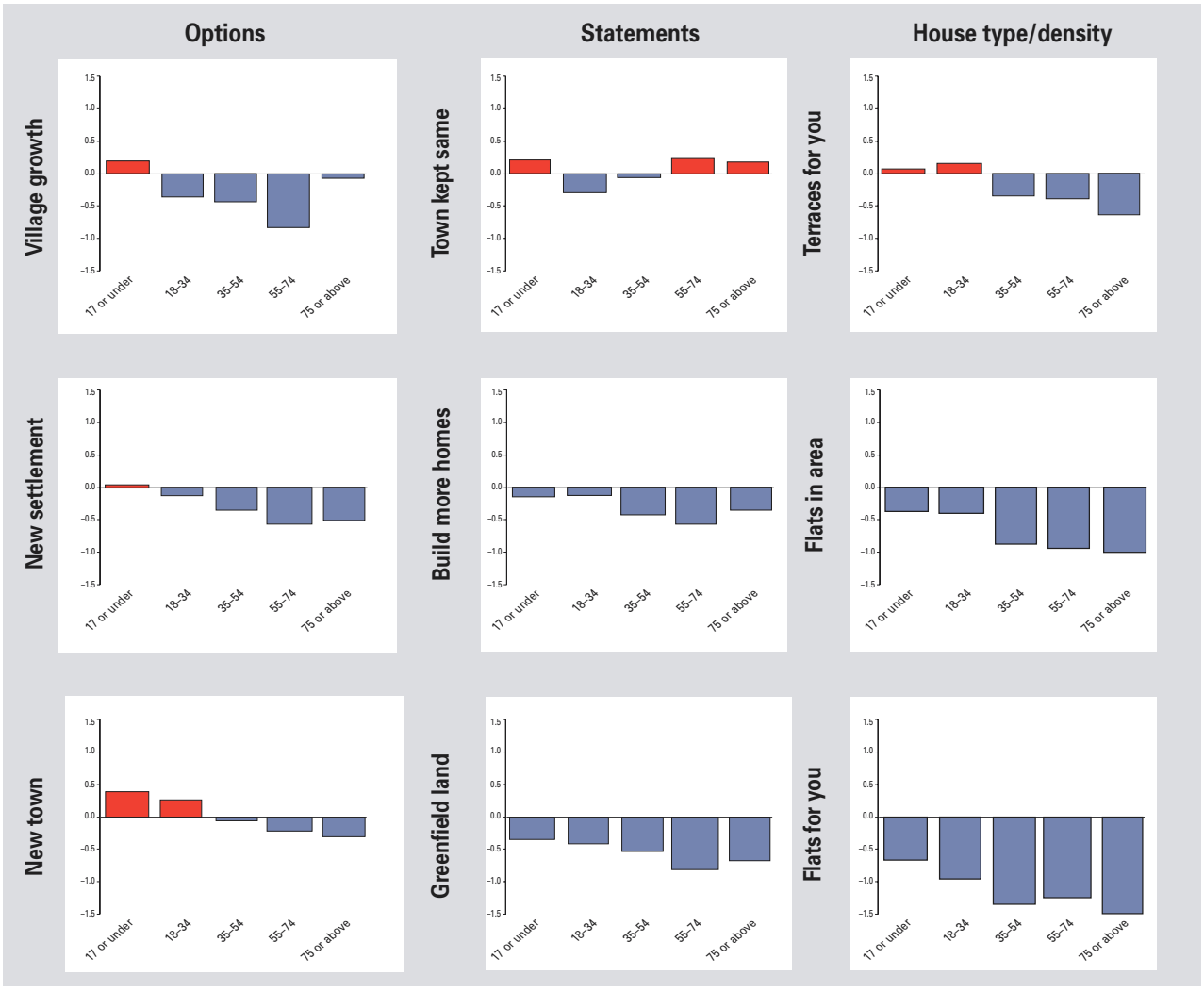


Table A9 Home area

People in villages are more anti-development; people living in villages like the minimum growth option more and disagree that the region should grow more than do people living in towns. People in towns like the new town option more and people living in urban areas like densification slightly more than average. Higher densities, not surprisingly, are liked more by people living in urban areas.

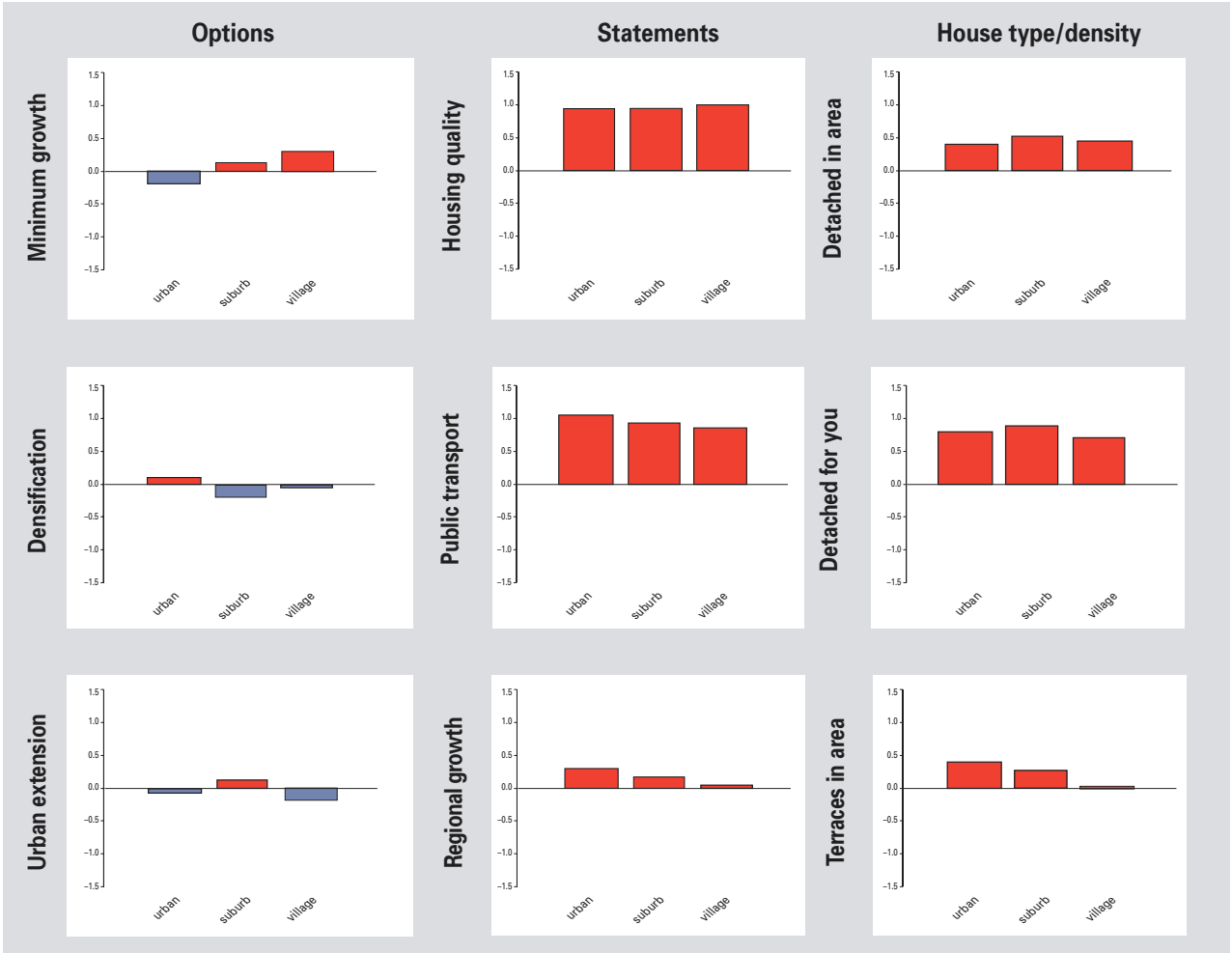


Table A9 Home area - *continued*

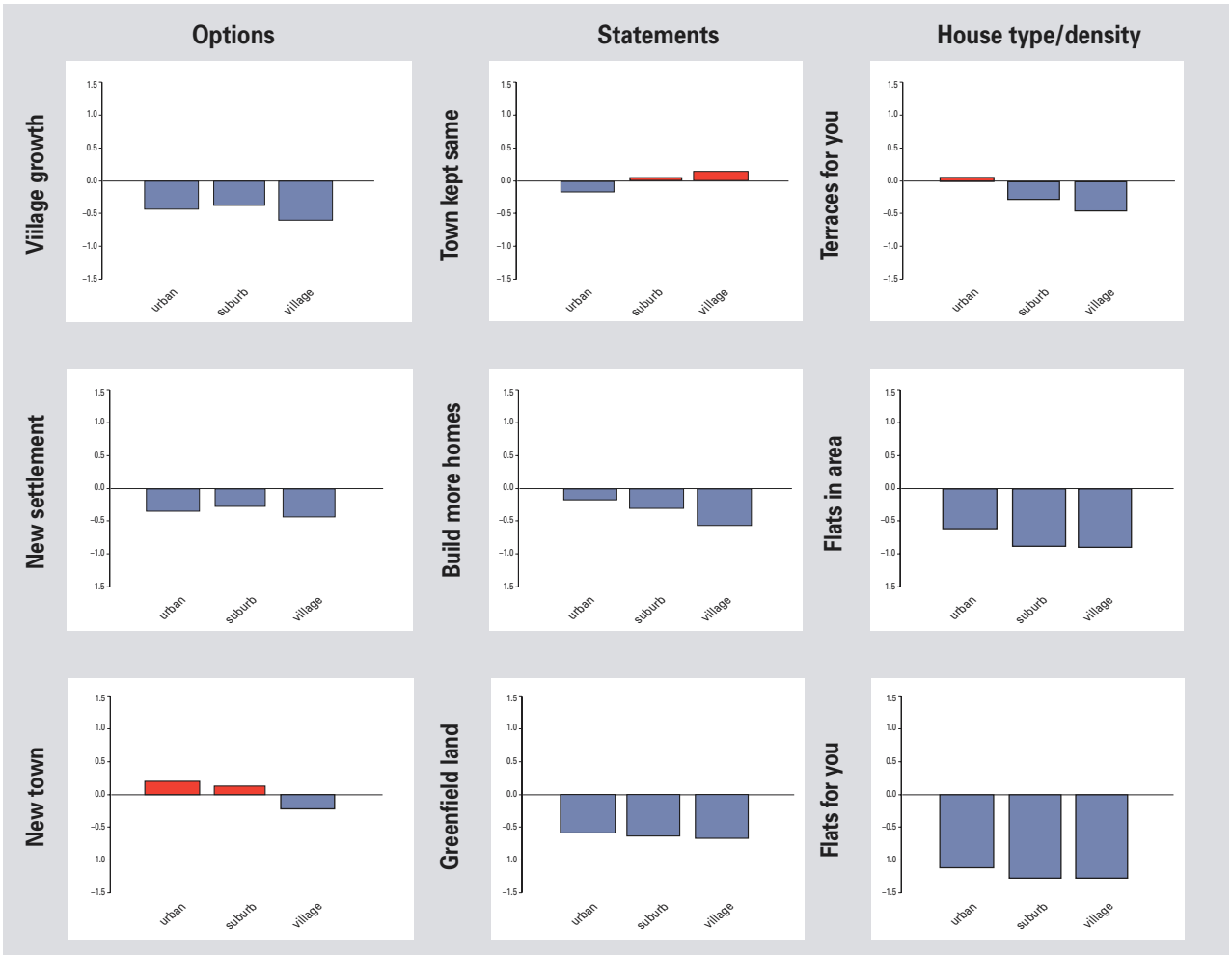
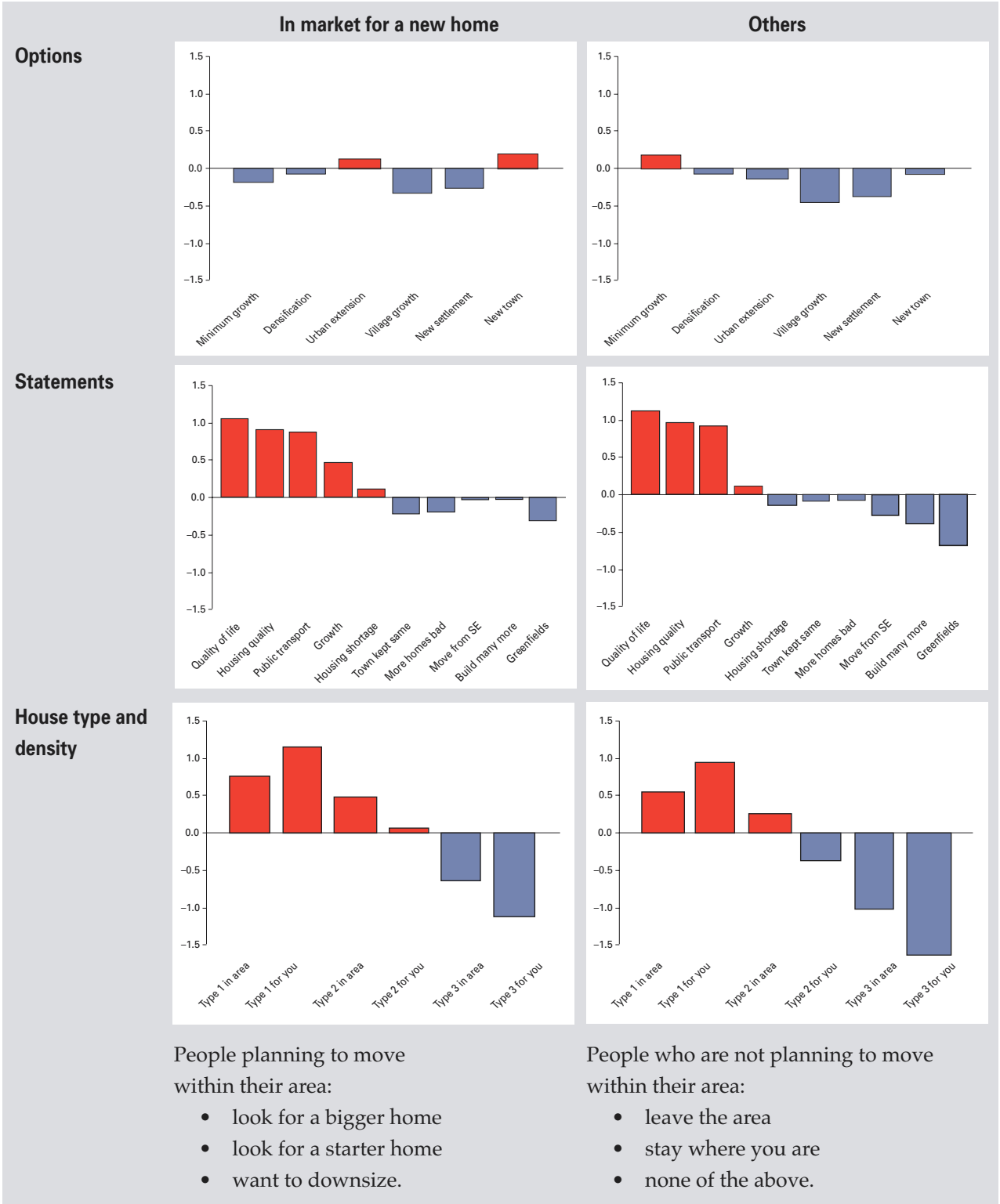


Table A10 In the market

People in the market for a new home include: those looking for a starter home, those looking for a bigger home and those wanting to downsize. These people like minimum growth less and urban extension and new town options more than others. They are more concerned about the housing shortage.



People planning to move within their area:

- look for a bigger home
- look for a starter home
- want to downsize.

People who are not planning to move within their area:

- leave the area
- stay where you are
- none of the above.

Table A11 Inadequate living conditions

People who say they have less room than they need in their home like urban extension and new town more than others. More people think many more homes should be built and they are less opposed to the use of greenfield land.

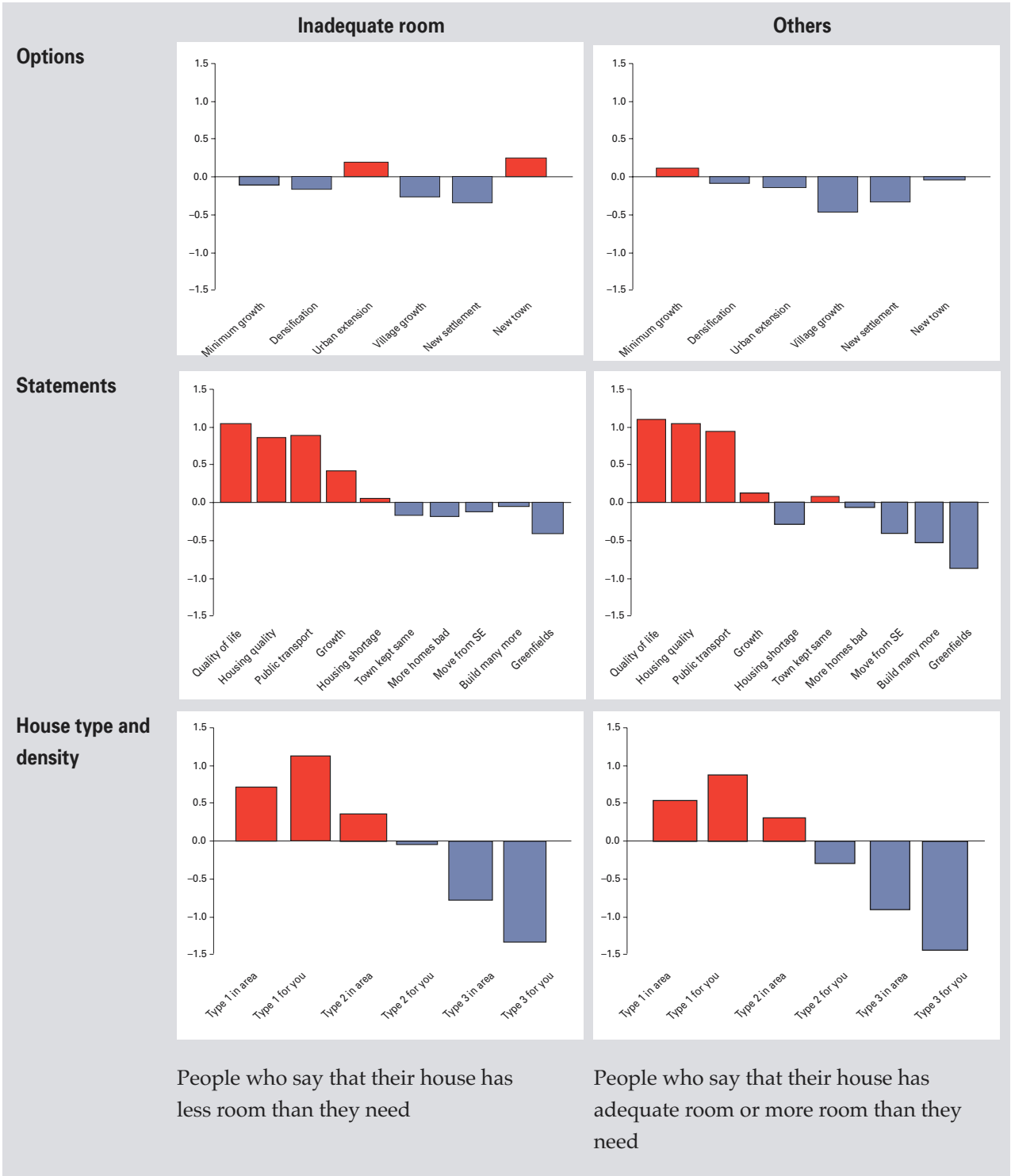
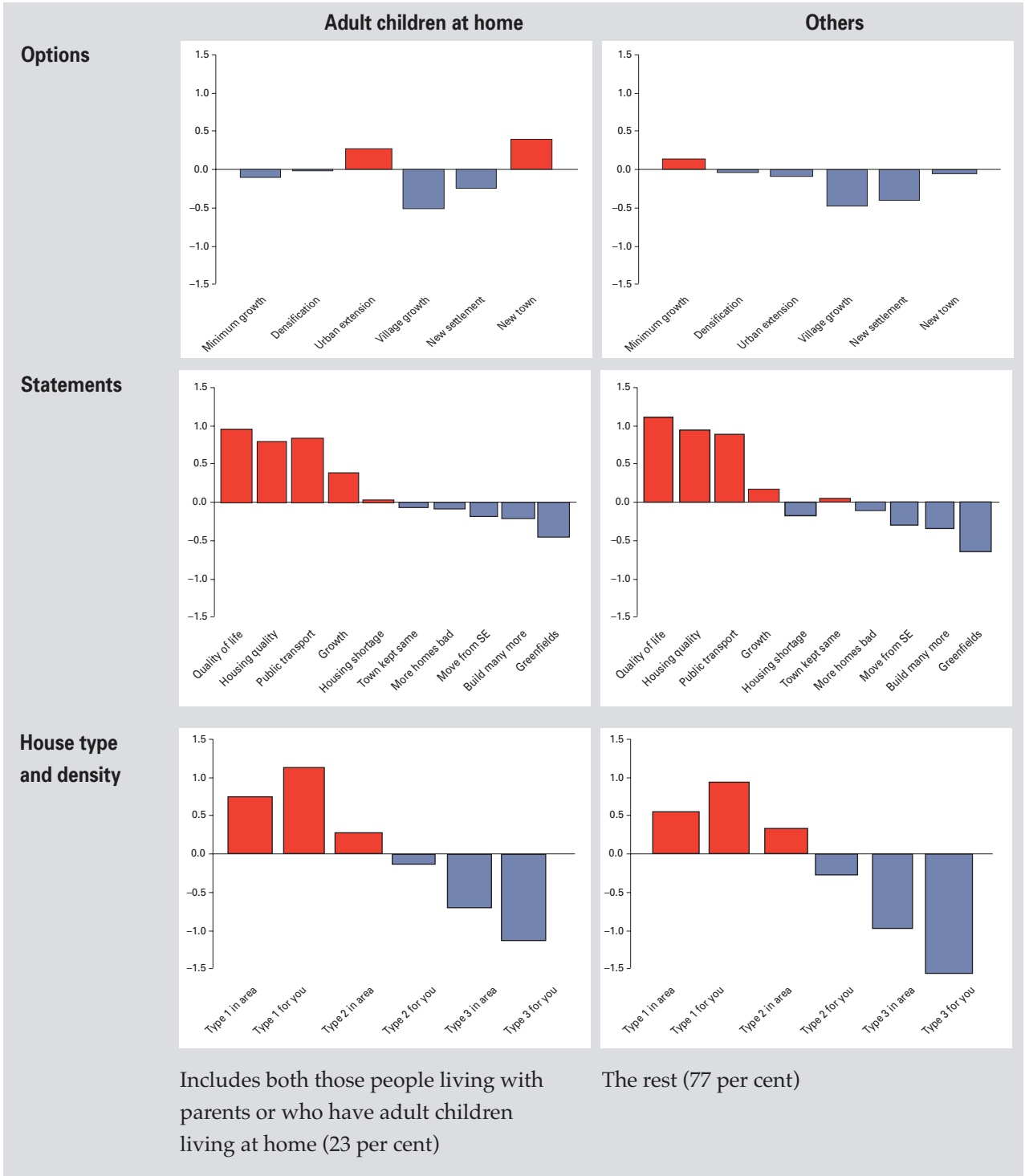


Table A12 Living with parents

Adult children living with parents or parents who have adult children at home are more pro-development than others.

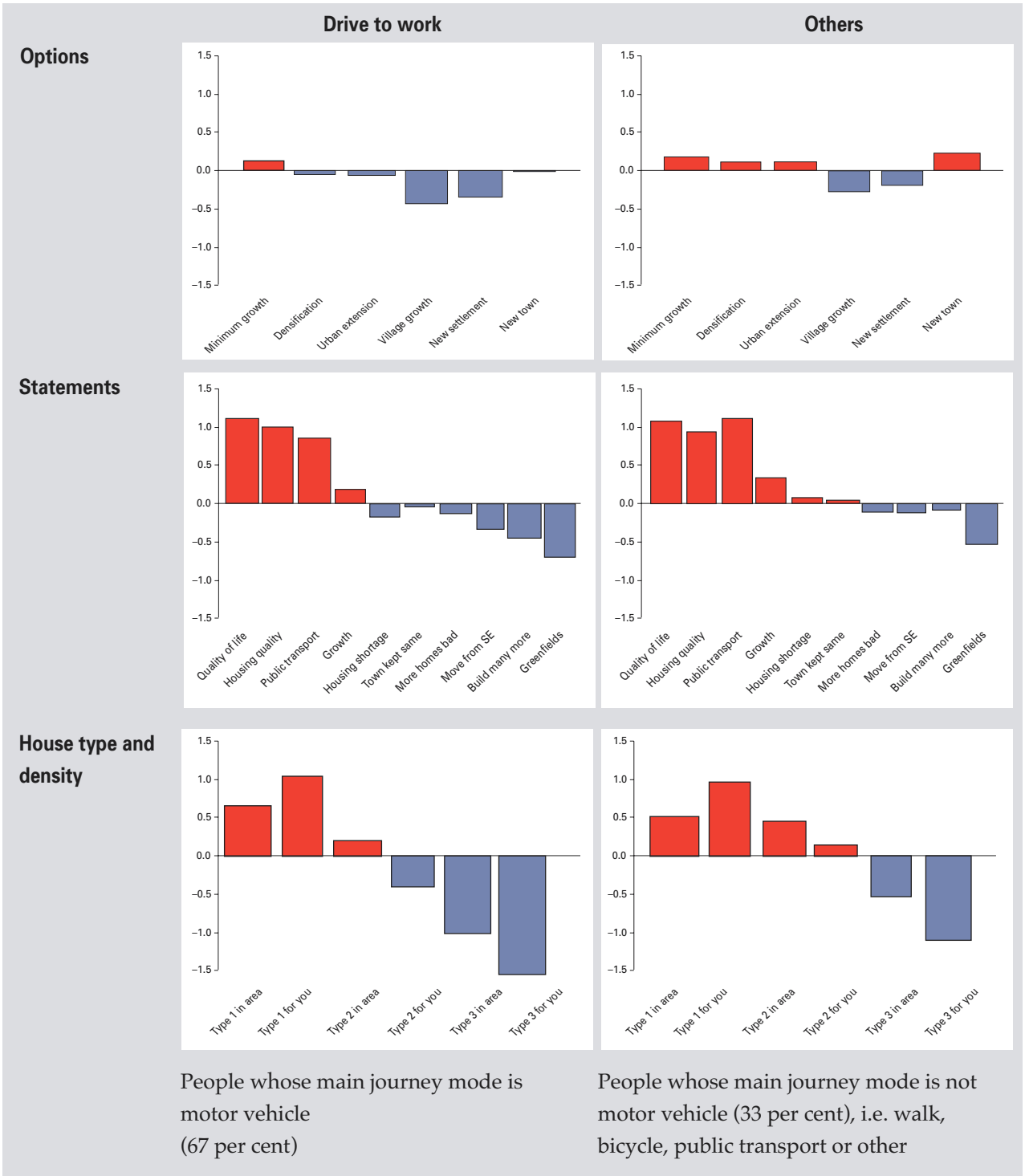


Includes both those people living with parents or who have adult children living at home (23 per cent)

The rest (77 per cent)

Table A13 Car drivers

People who drive to work are significantly more opposed to development. They like all the development options less than people who don't drive to work. They are less in favour of growth, less in favour of higher-density terraces and flats, and disagree that the housing shortage is damaging the economy.



People whose main journey mode is motor vehicle (67 per cent)

People whose main journey mode is not motor vehicle (33 per cent), i.e. walk, bicycle, public transport or other

Table A14 Comparison of public and experts

The experts answering the survey were much more pro-development than the public. They like the three development options – densification, urban extension and new town – more than the public. Experts disagree more strongly than the public that 'The town and its surroundings should be kept the same' and agree more strongly that 'The region must be allowed to grow'.

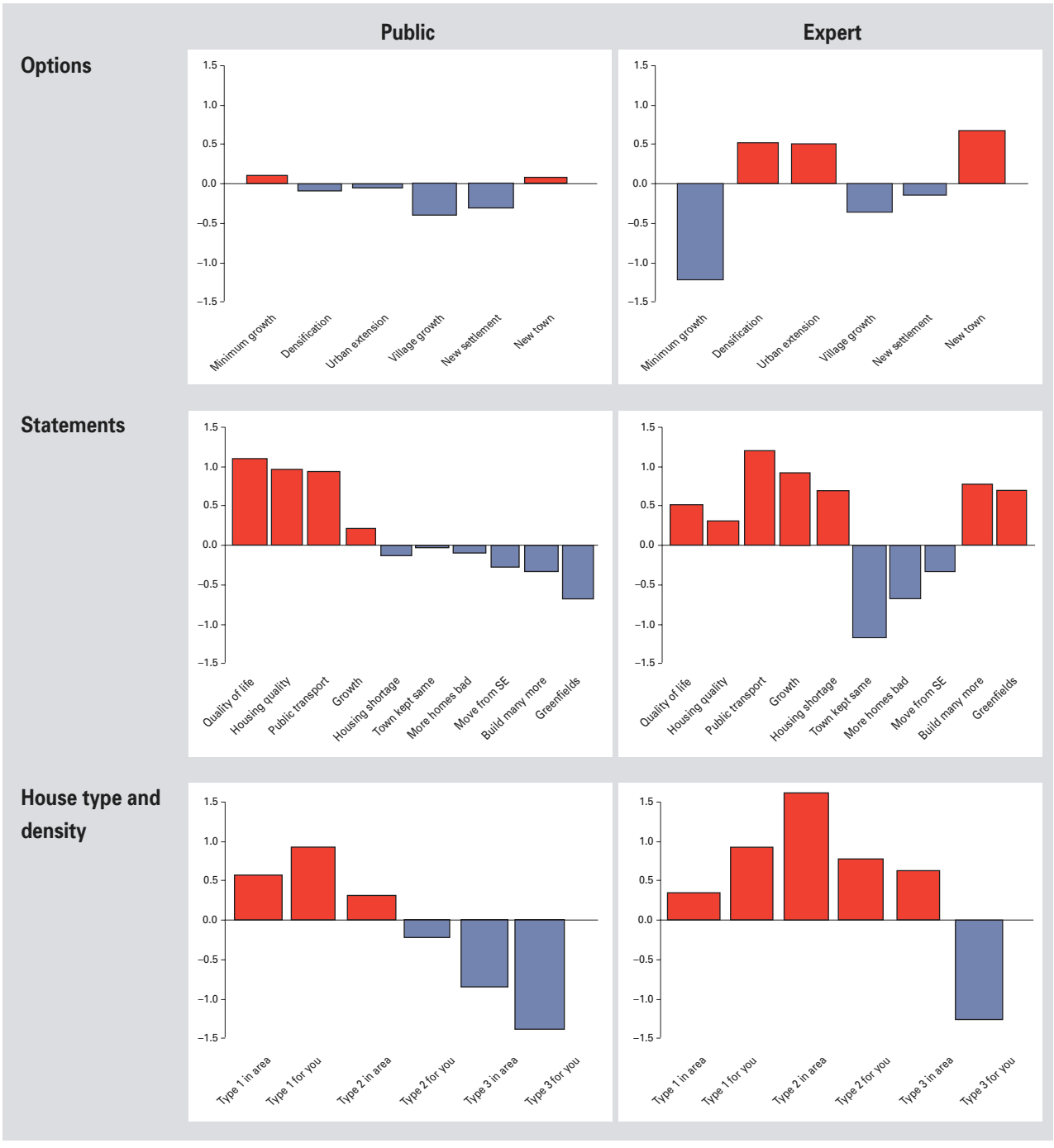


Table A15 About the respondents

The graphs show the demographic information collected in the survey.

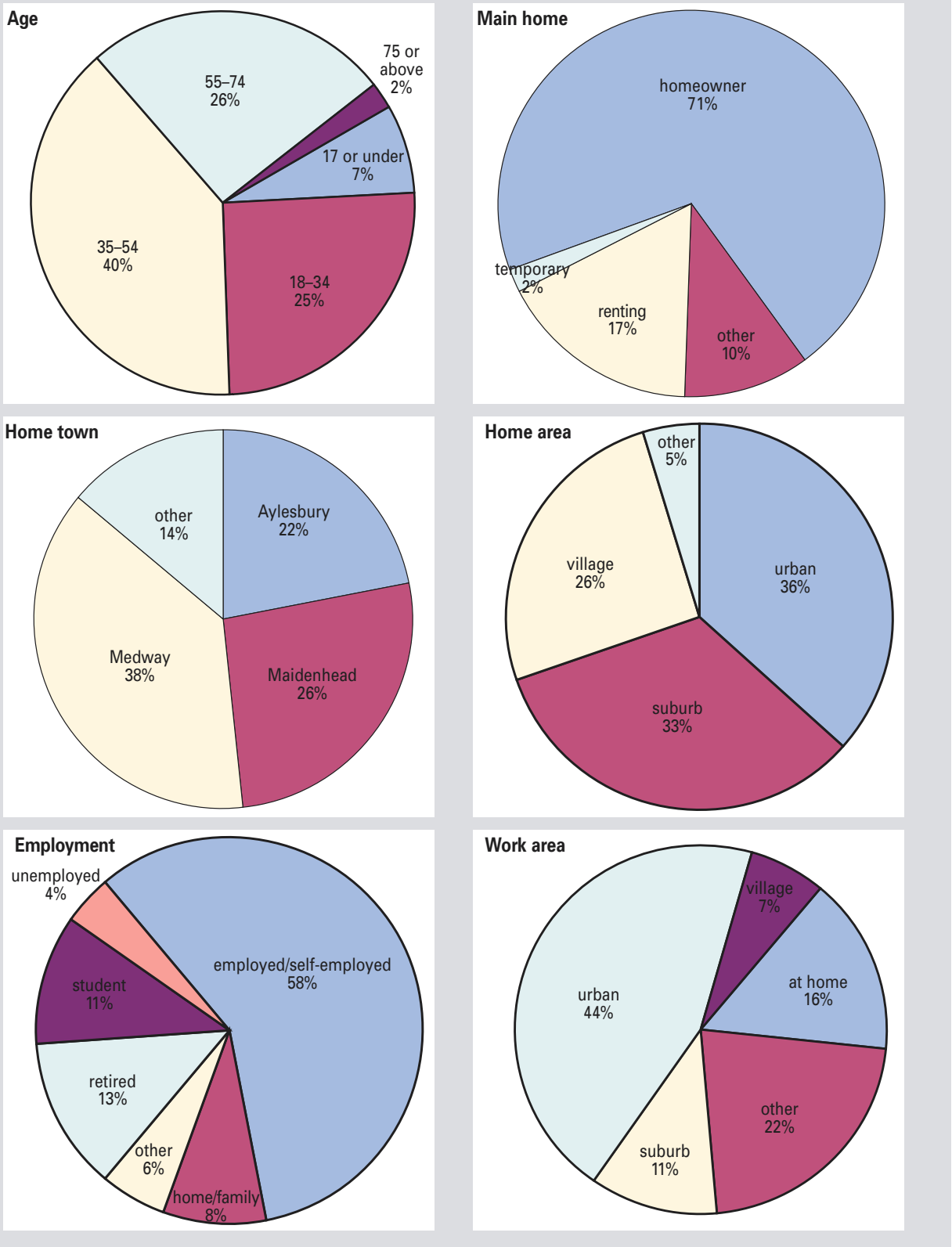
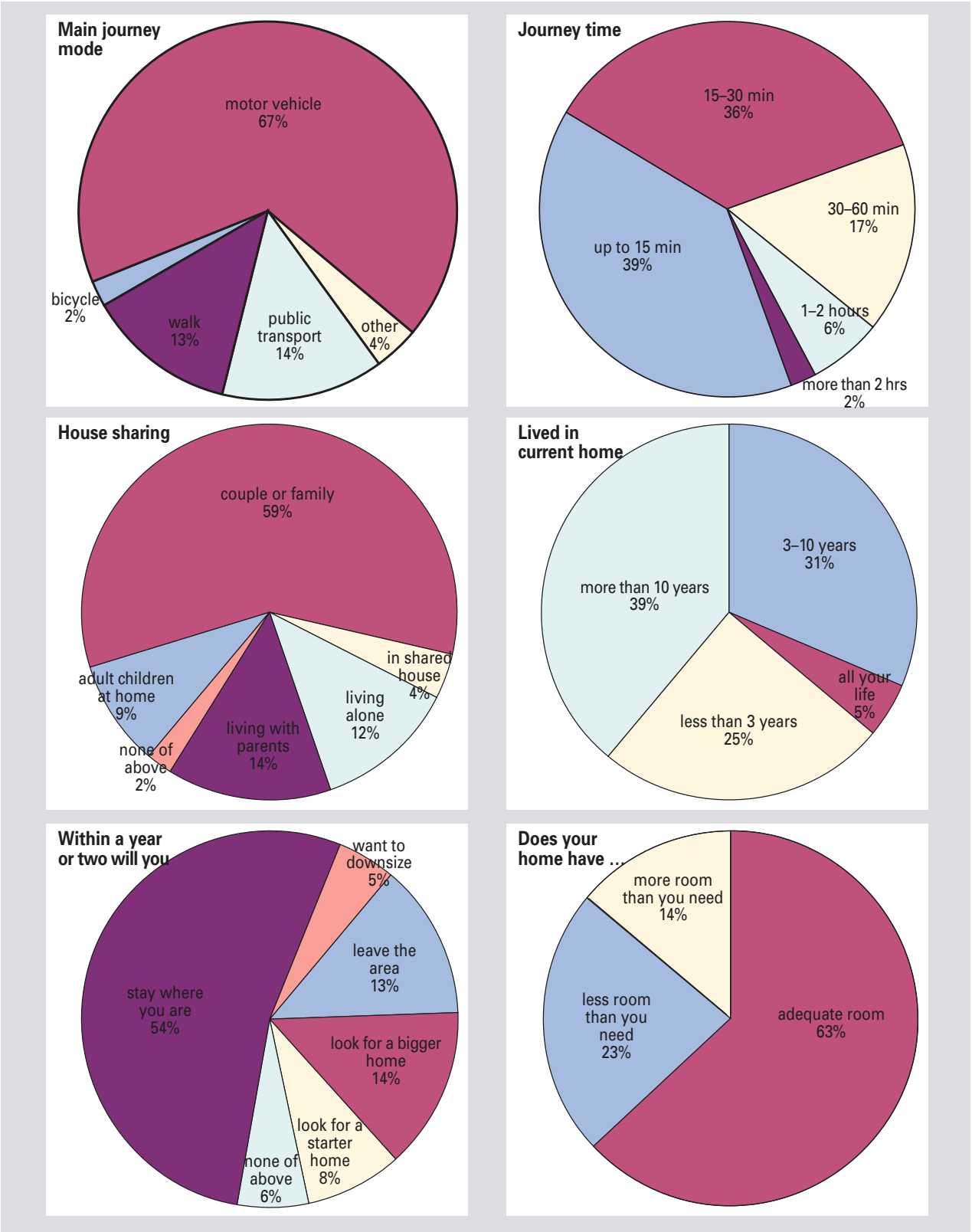


Table A15 About the respondents - *continued*



Appendix 2

Survey form

statements

The following statements about the future of the Southeast are deliberately controversial and have been chosen to provoke a reaction.

Please indicate whether or not you agree with them

	disagree			agree
Quality of life is more important than economic development	○	○	○	○
I would move from the Southeast if I could get a job	○	○	○	○
Quality of housing is more important than quantity	○	○	○	○
Some greenfield land should be released for development	○	○	○	○
Many more homes should be built	○	○	○	○
The housing shortage is damaging the economy	○	○	○	○
The town and its surroundings should be kept just as they are	○	○	○	○
More houses will mean a much poorer quality of life	○	○	○	○
More should be spent on public transport than roads	○	○	○	○
The region must be allowed to grow	○	○	○	○

houses

1 hectare is the same as a full sized football pitch

The higher the density the less land needed. Type 1 uses the most land, Type 3 the least.

Imagine that there is **a proposal to build 2500 new homes on the edge of town** together with a new school, shops, facilities and open space.

The scheme could have a mix of the three types of house shown below.

How much would you like to see each type of house built, and how much would you like to live in each yourself?

We are not proposing any new housing in your area.

In the Southeast people are finding it hard to get a home and employers are having problems getting staff who can afford to live near their work.

Should we build more houses?

type 1

Detached or semi-detached houses with medium sized private gardens -

125 hectares

Uses more land than the other options. New facilities further from homes.

Would you like this type of house to be built in your area?

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

dislike like

Would you like to live in this type of house yourself?

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

dislike like

type 2

Two or three storey terraced or town houses with small private gardens -

55 hectares

Uses a medium amount of land.

Would you like this type of house to be built in your area?

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

dislike like

Would you like to live in this type of house yourself?

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

dislike like

type 3

Flats of four or more storeys with communal open space but no private gardens -

30 hectares

Uses least amount of land. New facilities closer to where people live.

Would you like this type of house to be built in your area?

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

dislike like

Would you like to live in this type of house yourself?

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

dislike like

Post the completed form back to us in the envelope provided **or** visit our website **housingfutures.com** and complete the survey online. **THANK YOU**

Housing Futures
Cambridge Architectural Research
FREEPOST NAT4508
Cambridge
CB1 2BR

about you

Tick the boxes that best suit you

Your main home
○ home owner
○ renting
○ temporary
○ other

Location
○ Aylesbury
○ Maidenhead
○ Medway
○ Other

Area
○ urban
○ suburb
○ village
○ other

Lived in current home?
○ no children
○ children at home
○ adult children at home
○ children flown the nest

Does your home have...
○ more room than you need
○ adequate room
○ less room than you need

Home postcode

This will be treated in strictest confidence

How old are you?
○ 17 or under
○ 18-34
○ 35-54
○ 54-74
○ 75 or above

House sharing
○ living alone
○ living with parents
○ in shared house
○ couple or family
○ adult children at home
○ none of the above

Within a year or two
○ stay where you are
○ look for a starter home
○ look for a bigger home
○ want to downsize
○ leave the area
○ none of the above

Satisfaction with current housing arrangements

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

unsatisfied satisfied

Work postcode

This will be treated in strictest confidence

Your job status
○ employed/self employed
○ student
○ home/family
○ unemployed
○ other

Where do you work?
○ at home
○ urban
○ suburb
○ village
○ other

Main journey mode?
○ walk
○ bicycle
○ public transport
○ motor vehicle
○ other

Average journey time
○ up to 15 minutes
○ 15-30 minutes
○ 30-60 minutes
○ 1-2 hours
○ more than 2 hours

options

These options are ways in which towns could develop over the next 20 years. Each option is explained in detail below. You are asked to vote how much you like or dislike them. Keep in mind that...

Actual development will involve a mix of these options.
Given the strength of the housing market building new homes may not reduce prices.
On schemes of 15 or more homes there is normally a requirement to provide 30% affordable housing.
Larger developments will come with other facilities such as schools etc.

Minimum growth

Preserves the status quo with the minimum of change.



Likely consequences

- Does not add to the supply of housing
- Does not help employers who are short of staff
- Traffic congestion likely to increase with increasing affluence and as more people commute in from other areas
- Preserves countryside, urban open land and boundary of town

Your view

○ ○ ○ ○ ○
dislike like

Urban extension

Allows expansion into selected areas of open land around the town.



Likely consequences

- Could provide significant amount of housing and some affordable housing
- New homes fairly near existing work
- Traffic into town is likely to increase
- Town boundary extended with some loss of countryside
- If new schools and other facilities are provided access would be improved, if not congestion would increase

Your view

○ ○ ○ ○ ○
dislike like

New settlement

Concentrates development in a new settlement of 2,000 - 4,000 homes.



Likely consequences

- Could provide significant amount of housing and some affordable housing
- Could reduce recruitment difficulties
- Likely to increase commuting and traffic congestion
- Loss of countryside, but preserves the existing town boundary
- May not provide the population to support new services like schools and shops

Your view

○ ○ ○ ○ ○
dislike like

Densification

Puts new homes within the existing urban area by infilling on open land and large gardens plus replacing redundant buildings.



Likely consequences

- Modest increase in supply but homes may not be more affordable
- New homes will be near to existing work
- Traffic congestion is likely to increase but more potential for public transport, cycling and walking
- Loss of urban open land but preserves countryside and boundary of town
- Could over-stretch some services if new facilities were not provided

Your view

○ ○ ○ ○ ○
dislike like

Village growth

Growth concentrated in existing villages through infill and modest extension.



Likely consequences

- Will only provide a small number of new homes which may be no more affordable
- Could provide homes for locals but might mean an influx of commuters
- Increased commuting and reliance on car use
- Small loss of countryside, but preserves boundary of town
- Could make existing services more viable but could change the character of a village

Your view

○ ○ ○ ○ ○
dislike like

New town

Concentrates development in a large new town of at least 20,000 homes.



Likely consequences

- Could provide a lot of new housing and potentially a lot of affordable housing
- Could reduce recruitment difficulties
- Commuting likely to increase unless businesses relocate
- Loss of countryside, but preserves open land in and around existing town
- Comprehensive development would provide the population to support new services including public transport

Your view

○ ○ ○ ○ ○
dislike like

Independent survey
The project is being undertaken by Joseph Rowntree Foundation, an independent social policy research and development charity.

Confidentiality
The information you provide will be treated as confidential. No individual data will be released to third parties.

Survey devised by Cambridge Architectural Research Ltd

Important
This survey is targeted at people living or working in Aylesbury, Maidenhead and Medway. We are not proposing any specific housing developments. We would like to know your general opinion about future housing to help inform government policy.

Results
The results will be available on our website, housingfutures.com, in September 2003. JRF will also publish the findings.

In you have any comments please write them here