

Work here, like to live here? Survey of graduates and workers in Newcastle and Gateshead

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Sustainable communities require a mix of people at different life stages and on different incomes. Retention, and attraction, of economically active people is extremely important to the future success of housing market renewal (HMR) in the Bridging NewcastleGateshead (BNG) pathfinder area. With over 100,000 commuters coming into NewcastleGateshead each day to work, it is essential that BNG continues to better understand how perceptions of the area as a place to live are changing, to inform policy and strategy.

The study

This study, carried out by DTZ builds on an earlier Baseline Review of existing information about the housing needs, aspirations and regeneration implications of students and graduates in the area. This phase of the assignment was dedicated to filling in the gaps in secondary information, with primary research, via two surveys:

- **Worker survey:** a survey of the housing needs, aspirations and perceptions of people working in Newcastle and Gateshead. In total, 2,404 people employed locally responded to the survey, including workers in the public and private sectors.
- **Graduate survey:** a survey of the housing needs, aspirations and perceptions of alumni of Newcastle and Northumbria Universities. A separate report contains these results, as well as those of the workers identified as graduates from the worker survey. 1,393 graduate views are contained within the report.

RESULTS
EVIDENCED BASED
MARKET RENEWAL

Key findings

- The BNG area is considered to be affordable but perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour still need to be overcome.
- A 'whole place' approach is needed with a combination of new build and improving existing streets.
- More well designed and larger homes are needed as well as good quality open space and public realm.
- Graduate workers appear to be more demanding in their housing expectations.
- Promotion of the interventions planned and how this will improve different places in BNG needs to be stepped up.
- Younger graduate workers are most likely to be attracted to the BNG area to live.
- Broadband and mobile phone coverage, energy efficient housing and a desire not to do any DIY are important for this younger group when deciding where to live.
- There is a need to rebalance the housing profile within the BNG area, through introducing more housing for private sale and a broader range of housing types.
- Housing renewal needs to happen alongside economic growth; employment opportunities were the primary driver in graduate housing decisions.

Attractiveness of the BNG area

Views of BNG neighbourhoods are somewhat varied. Areas such as Saltwell, Dunston and Kenton are seen to be improving by the majority of people whereas this is still not the case for Benwell, Deckham and Elswick.

The BNG area is considered to have the following positive attributes:

- Affordable
- A sense of community
- House types - good quality refurbished older homes are popular

And would become more attractive if:

- The surrounding area was sufficiently regenerated
- Concerns regarding safety/anti-social behaviour were alleviated

The interventions perceived to have the strongest potential impact on improving the area were a combination of building new homes (50%) and whole street improvement (60%). Graduates were interested in schemes that sought to improve the neighbourhoods and create new homes close to community facilities.

The research also points towards the need for site-specific development briefs along with area-wide planning policies which encourage the development of well designed areas of public realm and open space to support new and existing housing development. Of particular importance was provision of attractive green space and larger properties which at the moment, are perceived to be in short supply and are key reasons why existing BNG residents are considering relocating.

Graduate housing expectations would seem to be higher than those of the 'average worker' – and graduates feel more likely to move away from the pathfinder area in the future unless its 'offer' changes. Graduates were more likely to want to move in order to find a more attractive location and a larger garden, for instance, than workers overall. This may be a factor of their potentially higher wages and expectations. Graduates were also vocal in expressing how important they thought a sense of community was in the attractiveness of an area.

Awareness of the regeneration initiatives and potential of the BNG neighbourhoods was highest among those who already either live there, or have previously lived there. There are emerging positive perceptions about the impact regeneration may make in the future. Those who have had little contact with the BNG neighbourhoods have stronger negative perceptions of reputation and safety issues.

Housing type and tenure

The findings relating to demand for different house type/size and tenure have revealed relatively traditional views. Survey respondents were most likely to live in a semi-detached house with three bedrooms. Size, space (internal and external) and location of houses are the primary drivers in the attractiveness of a home.

- The main message derived from the analysis is that while houses in the pathfinder area are more affordable than in the rest of Newcastle and Gateshead, graduates perceive them to be based in less attractive locations, and have less garden space.
- Garages, off road parking and good views are desired more frequently by people currently outside the pathfinder area.
- Broadband and mobile phone coverage, energy efficient housing and a desire not to do any DIY are all more prevalent desires within the pathfinder area.
- People in the younger age range have a greater propensity to move house, and also to live in the pathfinder area. They will consider buying houses in different ways such as obtaining a mortgage with friends and using their parents as guarantors. The results suggest that there is great scope to attract young people into pathfinder neighbourhoods.

In terms of current household type, the majority of respondents (69% of 2,404 respondents) owned their home with a mortgage. Respondents were most likely to own their house with their partner – 51%, with a further 14% having a mortgage on their own. A small proportion (3%) of respondents had a mortgage with their parents and no respondents had a mortgage with friends.

Identifying potential target markets

Target groups have been identified from the research which highlight clearly that people with positive perceptions of BNG housing initiatives and/or neighbourhoods have some shared characteristics:

- Group 1 would consider moving into a house like those developed or refurbished by BNG and partners in a BNG neighbourhood. They are typically young (aged 19–35), graduates and are looking to get on the property ladder or buy a house with a garden.
- Group 2 are also willing to consider moving into a house like those developed or refurbished by BNG and partners in a BNG neighbourhood. The majority are aged between 40 and 49 years, are well settled in their family lives and careers. They were likely to have studied in Newcastle (but not necessarily be from the region) and more than average already live in a BNG neighbourhood.
- Group 3 are willing to move into a house such as those developed or refurbished by BNG and Partners but would not consider moving into a BNG neighbourhood. The majority are aged between 40 and 59 years and have remained in the region most of their lives. Reasons for them not considering the pathfinder areas include fear of crime, the associated bad reputation of some areas.

The analysis also shows a need to rebalance the housing tenure profile within the BNG area, particularly through introducing more housing for private sale. The target group analysis presented also supports the need to develop policies which promote the development of a broader range of housing types, which may include family housing, detached and semi-detached housing. The 'space' within the house is far more important than the flexibility of housing.

Perceptions

Perceptions of the BNG neighbourhoods amongst the target groups could be improved upon as the research has indicated that across the entire set of target groups there is a lack of awareness of the possible housing options to be provided in the pathfinder area and the neighbourhoods within it. There is therefore a need for strong marketing in order to raise awareness and combat negative perceptions of some parts of the pathfinder in the short to medium term particularly to those living outside the area.

Graduate retention

Graduate retention was raised in the Baseline Review as particularly important to economic and housing development in the region. Newcastle and Northumbria Universities, One NorthEast Regional Development Agency and Newcastle City and Gateshead Councils are engaged in economic policy support that is aimed at retaining a skilled population, ultimately linking with the aims of the Northern Way.

The importance of the availability of graduate employment opportunities continues to be identified as one of the main drivers in determining why people choose to move away from the core of the Tyneside conurbation, and the North East. Survey respondents who had left the region were asked what factors would encourage them to return – the over-riding theme focussed on the availability of work/career opportunities for themselves or their partners.

Further information

The study was carried out by DTZ between March and September 2007.

The full reports – one for all 'workers' and another for 'graduate workers' – are available on Bridging NewcastleGateshead's website: www.bridgingng.org.uk. Complementary work on understanding the perceptions of private landlords is also available on the website.