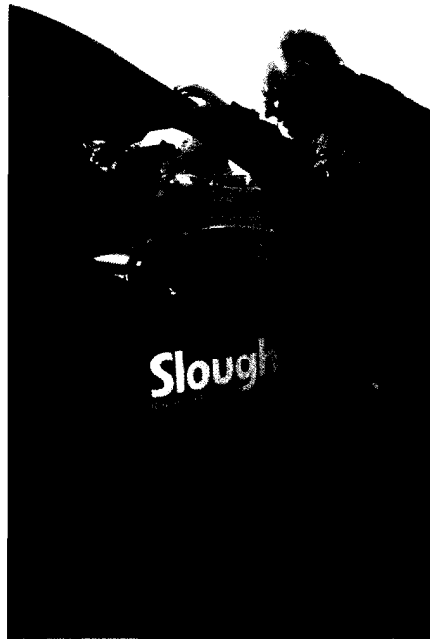


# Castleview Consultation

A Report For

Slough Borough Council



QA Research

14<sup>th</sup> February 2008

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**Project number: STAKE06-4026**

**Title: Castleview Consultation**

**Location:** S:\ProjectFiles\S\Slough\_Borough\_Council\STAKE06-4026\_Citizens\_jury\Reports\Slough\_Summary\_ReportV2.doc

**Date: 14<sup>th</sup> February 2008**

**Report status: Topline Draft**

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## **1. Introduction**

Since 1996, Slough Borough Council (SBC) has been negotiating with the developers Kelobridge Ltd over the development of a section of land situated behind Castleview Road in the Upton Court Park area of Slough. Planning permission for the site has since been granted and Kelobridge Ltd have now submitted a financial offer to SBC to purchase a strip of land (currently owned by SBC) leading to the development site which Kelobridge Ltd propose to use as access to the development.

Before taking a decision on whether or not to sell the land, SBC have commissioned QA Research (QA) to consult with residents of Slough on the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed sale.

The aim of the study is simply to:

- Consult with a sample of Slough residents via focus groups on whether to sell or not to sell the strip of land at Castleview to allow access to a proposed new development

This report presents the main findings of the consultation.

Please note, this report outlines the potential advantages and disadvantages of the sale of the land at Castleview/Upton Court Park according to the respondents attending the consultation. It does not outline a solution and is to be used by SBC to aid the decision making process only.



## 2. Methodology

### *Which Research Methodology?*

The first decision when designing any research project is which approach, qualitative or quantitative, is most suitable to answer the objectives set.

As the consultation was predominately exploratory in nature, requiring an understanding of not just 'what' but also 'why' respondents have the attitudes and reactions they do, going beyond a rational response to explore reactions on a deeper emotional, sub-conscious level, it was decided along with SBC that a qualitative approach should be used.

Although this has not produced *numeric* or *statistically reliable* results, it has enabled us to delve in depth and detail into the reasons behind the answers given, providing a deeper level of understanding than a quantitative approach can deliver. This project has provided robust results to help SBC to take the final decision as to whether the sale of the land should go ahead.

### *Which Qualitative Methodology?*

Before commissioning the work, SBC held a number of discussions with QA as to the most appropriate qualitative approach. The options discussed included the possibility of holding a citizens jury, in which an informed final decision on the sale of the land would be made by the jury; or using focus groups, in which the options regarding the sale of the land are discussed, but the final decision rests with SBC. The pros and cons of both methodologies are set out below:

#### **Citizens Juries:**

##### **Pros**

- Fully informed decision
- Chance to question experts

##### **Cons**

- Based on a small sample of people
- Not 'general community consultation'
- Decision could be seen as pre-determined – As a representative sample would only include one or two people directly affected, they could then argue that there are not enough of them to influence the decision.



**Focus Groups:**

**Pros**

- Larger sample size (more representative) – more of a general consultation with the community
- Not binding – so the final decision rests with the council

**Cons**

- No chance to question the experts (less informed)

After considering the merits set out above, it was decided that a focus group methodology should be followed.

The focus groups were recruited to the following structure:

- Male/Female Split: 50/50
- Age Breakdown
  - 3 groups of younger residents
    - 18-24 years old - 4
    - 25-44 years old - 4
  - 3 groups of older residents
    - 45-54 years old - 4
    - Older- 4

Respondents were recruited from across Slough and included residents from within Castleview and the surrounding area. The group make-up was as follows:

<p><b>Group One:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Younger</li> <li>- Residents <i>directly</i> affected by sale</li> </ul>	<p><b>Group Two:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Older</li> <li>- Residents <i>directly</i> affected by sale</li> </ul>
<p><b>Group Three</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Younger</li> <li>- Residents who live within three miles (but not on the affected estate)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Group Four</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Older</li> <li>- Residents who live within three miles (but not on the affected estate)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Group Five</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Younger</li> <li>- Residents who live more than three miles away (but still within Slough)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Group Six</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Older</li> <li>- Residents who live more than three miles away (but still within Slough)</li> </ul>



### **3. Key findings**

#### **3.1 Respondents' Context**

- The overwhelming attitude amongst respondents is that Slough is becoming worse as a place to live in almost every aspect with increased levels of crime, anti-social behaviour, less green space, more development, over-crowding, a general shabbiness of the High Street, an influx of economic migrants resulting in a strain on resources and increased congestion.
- However some positives were mentioned including quick and easy access to London and surrounding areas, employment opportunities, some excellent schools and positive multi-cultural integration.
- There was widespread awareness of recent government initiatives to increase the number of houses and although there is an expectation that this will affect Slough where any housing stock is built, the style of housing appears to be more of the issue.
- Respondents in their twenties tended to feel less strongly about local changes because they did not aspire to remain in the area in the long term.

#### **3.2 Perceptions of Castleview and Upton Court Park**

- Castleview is perceived even by those who live outside the immediate area as one of a handful of 'nice desirable' areas within Slough offering green spaces, good housing and access to good local Primary schools.
- Those who currently live within Castleview see any change as a threat rather than an enhancement to their quality of life and the proposed housing development is viewed in this light.
- Upon Court Park is viewed positively and appears to be well used by local residents for a range of activities including walking their dogs, jogging, taking their children and attending events. Even some of those further afield mentioned going to the Park for community events throughout the year.

#### **3.3 Initial reaction to the sale of the land**

- Amongst those living closest to the proposed housing development, especially in the younger group of Castleview residents there was surprise at how advanced the plans for the development were and, amongst those living further away, surprise over how long the proposed development had been on the table.
- Respondents intrinsically linked the proposed housing development and sale of the strip of land owned by the council together and found it difficult to separate the two issues.



- 300 housing units was considered 'a lot' of new development within the area with some respondents equating this to over 1,000 new residents and approximately 600 additional cars all using the same access road.
- When respondents saw the plans for the access road concerns were voiced over several issues including increased congestion when trying to enter the main road and with traffic backing up throughout the area, increased pollution in the local area, harder access to the park and general falls in road safety.
- The term 'affordable housing' as written in the initial information presented to respondents raised some questions amongst those living near by about the type of people this might refer to. Respondents reported that attitudes are likely to vary, if this means key workers or helping 'their sons and daughters' get on the property ladder, then it is seen as a positive, however, if this refers to 'social housing' there are fears that this might have a negative impact on the neighbourhood.
- The potential for a new Primary school is seen as a red-herring *if* this simply means knocking down the existing school and building a new one.
- The financial wind-fall from the sale of the land was not mentioned until prompted, whereas the potential impacts on physical aspects (e.g. the view for those affected), the strain on resources (e.g. health, education) and congestion were.

### **3.4 Arguments against the sale of the land**

- It is not the physical value of this specific piece of land but the fact that the green belt covenant has been lifted which residents most strongly objected to. Even those who lived outside the immediate area were worried "where this might end" and felt the principle of upholding such designated land was important.
- Strains on infrastructure in general and increasing congestion were mentioned, highlighting that respondents found it difficult to separate the Kelobridge development from the sale of this specific piece of land.
- Those not directly affected could still empathise with the residents of Castleview Road who will lose their view.
- There were misconceptions that the land is part of Upton Court Park and fears that the Park might be built on in the future.
- When given the opportunity to look through the plans for the development, concerns were raised over issues of road safety especially for children wanting to use the Park.



### **3.5 Arguments for the sale of the land**

- The list of where any wind-fall could be allocated is deemed rather vague, so although not opposed to the general themes, without more specific details these tended to be dismissed as meaningless.
- If the choice is down to either selling the land or having an access road built by knocking down some of the houses on Castleview Road many living there felt the former option is preferable as the latter option will cause greater disruption and traffic congestion.
- Some (including older residents from Castleview) were resigned to the fact that the development will occur and although they do not support this, should it go ahead they 'may as well get something rather than nothing from it'.
- Initially the value of the land and potential wind-fall sounds significant but once discussed the £7-9 million is not thought to provide a massive impact. Indeed the expectation of some is that this money will either have to be used to provide additional resources for the new residents, will be 'wasted' by the council or spent on aspects which will have little direct benefit for Castleview residents.

### **3.6 Reactions if the land is sold**

- There is likely to be disappointment that the council has broken the green belt covenant (again – respondents reported that they believed the land Tesco's recently built a store on was protected by green belt) and that no green space in Slough is safe from future development.
- Further ammunition to support the views of those who are already cynical towards the council and councillors breaking election promises. No-one party was singled out, rather the feeling was a collective blame placed on councillors and the council, with respondents not differentiating between the two.
- General resignation that little can be done (judged by their body language and tone of voice). There is an overall perception that a decision has already been reached and the development will go ahead regardless of this consultation.
- Initial suggestions where any wind-fall could be allocated tended to be related to topping up existing council budget (e.g. road improvements, lighting, greater police presence, improved health and education services) but when discussed further the overall view was that these should be covered by council tax.
- Therefore, any wind-fall should deliver a clear additional benefit to Slough residents to improve the quality of life. Suggestions included funding a new medical centre, financially supporting the town's football club, providing youth activities, improving the look (and feel) of the town centre or being used to protect other green spaces. The theme running through all of these is the





delivery of a tangible and noticeable benefit both in the short and long term, making Slough a better place to live in.

- Some of those living in the immediate area wanted compensation in the form of reduced council tax or improvements to the facilities in the immediate area to maintain the value of their homes as they assumed the price of their property will fall post the development of the new housing estate.
- There were mixed opinions as to whether any money should be allocated for spending within the Castleview area or across the whole of Slough. If not spent directly in the immediate area respondents from Castleview at least wanted to feel the tangible benefits to their quality of life (e.g. clear improvements to the town centre).
- There was a universal desire for any money to be used in the immediate future to benefit the town's residents rather than keeping it in reserve for future needs once careful consideration has been given to ensure the monies are not wasted.



## 4. Conclusions

- Throughout the group discussions respondents were distracted by the possibility of the housing development and found it difficult to separate this from the issue of the sale of the land owned by the council for a potential access road.
- In an ideal world respondents would prefer that the housing development and hence the sale of the land for the proposed access route did not take place; those near to the proposed development felt strongly that the development will impact negatively on their quality of life and additional housing should be built elsewhere, where as those further out and not directly impacted had concerns over the principle of selling green-belt land and the precedent this sets.
- Blame for the sale of this strip of land is likely to be attributed towards the council and councillors as a whole rather than singling out specific individual or parties.
- However, most respondents are resigned to the development occurring and feel there is little at this stage that they can do to prevent it happening. **This is based on the belief that if the land under discussion is not sold then the developers will gain access anyway** by knocking down houses they have purchased in Castleview and Blenheim Road.
- Reactions were split between respondents who felt the principle of not selling green belt land should be upheld even if this results in an access road elsewhere and those who thought if the development is going to go ahead anyway that they might as well benefit from the potential wind-fall.
- The tangible benefits resulting in any sale need to be clearly communicated to residents, who need to perceive there has been some real positive and additional change.
- If the land is sold respondents are likely to feel disappointed and disillusioned, with those living in the immediate vicinity having most concerns about the negative impacts of this development (including the access road) but appear to be unlikely to take their protests further.
- When specifically asked the question 'Should the sale go ahead?' most respondents stated that it should not. However it is important to understand the reasoning behind peoples responses:
  - Respondents who answered 'Yes' did so as they felt that the development was in such an advanced stage that the Council 'may as well get the benefit of the money' from the sale of the land.



- Those who stated 'no' did so for a number of reasons:
  - There were some respondents who were actually apposed to the development rather than the selling of the land. For these respondents, opposing the land sale is a method to prevent the development *itself* from taking place.
  - Some felt that the development would go ahead anyway but pointed to the potential access through the houses purchased by the developer as a reason not to sell greenbelt land.
  - Some respondents felt that the lifting of one covenant on the greenbelt land would lead to others being lifted leading to concerns as to where it would stop. In many cases, this was very much down to respondent's empathy towards those who lived in the area and the feeling that they would not like something similar to happen in the areas that they lived in.



## 5. Appendix

### 5.1 Focus Group Script

#### ***Focus Group Script***

##### NOTE

This script provides a guide for the focus group and wherever possible the moderator will seek to keep questions in order. However, feedback from the audience may require her to adjust the nature of the questions and the sequence of questioning.

#### **Section 1 Introduction**

**5 mins**

Welcome & thank you all for attending. My name is XXX and I am from a company called QA Research.

QA Research has been asked by Slough Borough to consult with Slough residents on whether to sell or not to sell the strip of land at Castleview/Upton Court Park to allow access to a proposed new development. We have recruited groups across Slough to ensure that each section of the community has their say in the proposals, including those directly affected at Castleview/Upton Court Park as well as residents from across Slough.

The objective of the group is to discuss all of the possible advantages and disadvantages of the proposed sale in order to come to a conclusion that will inform local decision makers on what route to take in relation to the issue

- For those of you who don't know about focus groups:
  - Everything you say is confidential
  - There are no right or wrong answers
  - Please do not talk over each other – but feel free to make comments or opinions in response to other people's points
  - **I would like to record this – any objections?**
  - The group should last for 90 minutes.
  - You have the right to leave at any time.
  - *Mention refreshments/ toilets etc.*
  
- First of all, can we go around the group and **introduce** yourselves? Can you tell me:
  - Your name
  - How long you have lived in Slough
  - One or two words which you'd use to describe Slough



**Section 2 Current and future Housing 10mins**

**Before we start, I'd like to get a bit of background about Slough I'd like to start by talking about Slough**

1. How do you feel about Slough? – Explore why

PROMPT: LOCAL ENVIRONMENT/LEVEL OF PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT ACROSS SLOUGH/LOCAL FACILITIES/GREEN SPACE

2. Specifically, how do you feel about Slough as a place to live?
3. Where in Slough do you live now? How long have you lived there...?
4. What are your housing plans for future?

PROMPT: ARE YOU PLANNING A MOVE (WITHIN OR AWAY FROM SLOUGH)? WHAT SORT OF HOUSING WOULD YOU MOVE INTO (NUMBER OF BEDROOMS/TERRACED/DETACHED ETC)?

**Section 3 Castleview/Upton Court Park 20 mins**

**We are now going to focus on the Castleview/Upton Court Park area of Slough**

5. How well do you know Castleview/Upton Court Park and the surrounding area?
6. What are your perceptions of the area?

PROMPT: GREEN AREA/TOO BUILT UP?/GOOD/BAD PLACE TO LIVE?/RICH/POOR

7. Do you use the park?

PROMPT: HOW OFTEN/WHAT FOR

**We are here to talk about -**

The possibility of selling a strip of land at Upton Court Park/Castleview which will be used as an access route to a new development.

MODERATOR PASS AROUND SHEET HEADED: **Proposed development at Castleview**

WHEN RESPONDENTS HAVE LOOKED THROUGH THE SHEET READ THROUGH THE FOLLOWING BULLET POINTS:

- The development is at the rear of 2-78 Castleview/Upton Court Park Road
- When developed, it will be made up of predominantly family housing – houses rather than flats for example (over 80% site will be this accommodation) 40 of



300 units will be affordable housing (120, of which 96 will be houses rather than flats)

MODERATOR TO PASS AROUND PICTURES/MAPS OF THE DEVELOPMENT/LAND WE ARE DISCUSSING WHICH SHOULD SHOW:

- What will it look like
  - House price/type of housing/consumer aimed at
  - **Where development is compared to land we are discussing**
  - Where the land we are discussing is
8. Having had some time to digest all of this, what are your initial reactions? (positive/negative)
9. What would you consider to be the likely impact of such a development if it was to go ahead?
- a. On you?
    - i. Why? (SPOIL VIEW/USE OF PARK/USE OF THE MONEY...)
  - b. Slough
    - i. Why? (USE OF PARK/USE OF THE MONEY...)

**Section 4 Advantages and disadvantages of selling the land 15 mins**

MODERATOR TO PRODUCE SHEET LISTING ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SELLING THE LAND

10. Having read through the arguments, what are your reactions?

PROBE FOR CREDIBILITY/RELEVANCE OF THE ARGUMENTS

11. Are there anymore arguments you can think of that should be considered?

MODERATOR TO COLLECT ARGUMENTS AND WRITE ONTO SORT CARDS (Add to the three we have)

12. Which of all of the arguments discussed would you say are the strongest/weakest?
- a. Why?

MODERATOR TO GROUP SORT CARDS INTO STRONGER/WEAKER ARGUMENTS

13. Have any of the arguments outlined changed your initial point of view regarding the sale of the land?
- a. Why?



**Section 5    Should the land be sold?    15 mins**

14. What would your reaction be if land sale went ahead?

NOTE TO MODERATOR: PROBE CAREFULLY WITH THIS QUESTION. COLLECT THE VIEWS OF ALL RESPONDENTS AND FIND OUT HOW MANY ARE FOR/AGAINST THE SALE

IF ANNOYED:

15. What would you look to do – what are next steps for you?

16. If the land was to be sold who do you see as being responsible for the decision?

PROMPT: COUNCIL/LOCAL COUNCILLORS? /GOVERNMENT

**Section 6    The land has been sold...    15 mins**

**We are now going to consider a possible future scenario**

MODERATOR STRESS THAT NO DECISION HAS ACTUALLY BEEN MADE YET

**After consultation, it has been decided that the land should be sold**

17. What should Slough Council do with money if plans go ahead?

MODERATOR TO WRITE DOWN IDEAS AND THEN RANK OPTIONS THAT COME UP INTO THREE POTS: -

PRIORITY/IMPORTANT/NICE TO HAVE BUT NOT ESSENTIAL

PROBE: WHY HAVE THESE BEEN RANKED LIKE THIS?

18. Is the money needed?

19. How/where should money be spent?

PROMPT:    IN CASTLEVIEW/UPTON COURT PARK /WITHIN 3 MILES/ACROSS SLOUGH  
WHAT SORT OF THINGS SHOULD THE MONEY BE SPENT ON? ANTI-  
SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR/PARKS/SOCIAL HOUSING ETC

20. Should it be spent now or banked for future? E.g. is it Rainy day money or should it be spent immediately. – Explore reason for answer.



**Section 8 FINALLY...**

**10 mins**

ASK EACH PERSON

21. Should the sale go ahead? Please give **one** main reason why you say that.

22. Any other comments?

Next steps:

We write a report – which goes to SBC

The report will then go to Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 28<sup>th</sup> Feb and to cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> March where a decision should be made





## 5.2 Additional Information provided to Respondents

### Proposed development at Castleview; Key stages in the planning process

1996	Land owner promotes site for development.
1999	Draft Local Plan for Slough: Site proposed for residential development with access across corner of park.
2000 October	Local Plan Inquiry 1999. Inspector holding inquiry agrees principle of releasing site from green belt for residential development.
2004 September	Developer submits two outline planning applications.  1: access from Castleview Road (involving demolition of two houses) number of dwellings not specified.  2: access across corner of Upton Court Park with new roundabout on Upton Court Road for 300 homes plus land for a primary school.
2005 January	Both applications refused by Planning Committee; developer lodges an appeal.
2006 March	After a public inquiry in January 2006 Secretary of State makes a decision on applications.  1: Refuses permission for scheme with access from Castleview Rd  2: Approves outline application for 300 homes plus school land with access across park. The approved scheme is subject to various conditions and a legal agreement. See below.
2007 October	Developer's master plan for development approved by Planning Committee.
2008 February	Planning application for the details of the residential development submitted by developer. (Known as 'reserved matters' application). Decision expected at Planning Committee March 18 <sup>th</sup> or April 17 <sup>th</sup> .
2008 February	Developer indicates that they will soon submit a new application for access to the site from Castleview Road.

#### Notes

Two applications by the developer for alternative access options off Castleview Road where also made and considered at the public inquiry. All involve 26-32 Castleview Road and alteration of junction with Upton Ct. Road.



The developer is Kelobridge Ltd; they are linked to Belmont Homes.

The grant of planning permission does not allow the developer to carry out work on land that they do not own or have control of.

Blenheim Rd: Approved scheme includes emergency, cycle and pedestrian access only onto Blenheim Road.

Key items of the legal agreement linked to the approved scheme:

10% of the development site to be public open space.

Provide play equipment both within the site and in Upton Court Park.

40% of dwellings to be affordable housing split into groups.

Financial contribution towards increasing the number of secondary school places.

Financial contribution towards better public transport services in the area.

Financial contribution towards highway improvements associated with extra travel demand generated by development including road safety improvements, safe routes to school.

Offer 2 hectares of land for a new primary school.

Option for developer to be involved with building a new school if they reach agreement with Castleview School.

## **SALE OF PART OF LAND AT UPTON COURT PARK**

### **Arguments for:**

Any money from the sale of the site will be treated as capital. This means it is only available for investment in fixed assets (such as buildings) and could not be used for the day-to-day running costs of the council.

The council has not budgeted for any income from this land and, if sold, the money received would be a "wind-fall". It would be for councillors to decide how to spend the money but examples of the type of projects the money could support are:

- Improvements to parks, open spaces and play areas.
- Improvements to schools or community buildings.
- Improvements to road safety, street lighting or other environmental improvements.
- Investment in regeneration schemes.
- Investment in regeneration schemes such as 20mph zones, air quality and congestion action plans, civic pride, highway improvements, new recycling wheelie bins, additional CCTV cameras.

