

# Owenstown - Surrounding Residents Consultation

## Consultation Report

09 October 2009



# Summary

The consultation aimed to gauge views of those living in the area surrounding Owenstown towards the proposed new settlement. More specifically, it aimed to assess initial reactions to the size and core principles of the town and what impact, if any, it will have on them and their family. The consultation was not conducted for the purpose of generating interest in moving to the town.

It was evident that the vast majority rate the area as a good place to live. The majority of the 508 people who took part had lived in the local area all their life – many of whom having chosen to stay in the area because of schooling, friends and family, the cost and availability of housing and the peace and quiet. Those that have moved to the area were largely attracted by friends and family or by their partner's family. This suggests ties to the area are extremely important - many may have been attracted back or preferred to stay while friends and family remain in the area. Feedback also suggested parents are likely have stayed put while their children were at school and those that have retired are likely to have made a conscious decision not to move again.

A minority said they were attracted to the area because of the cost and availability of housing or because of work. However, they were rarely the sole motivations for having moved to the area. From experience, both cost and availability of housing and work are likely to have been 'hygiene' factors. That is to say, they are unlikely to have been strong motivators themselves, but likely to have been basic necessities. Without them, many would not have considered moving to the area and those that have grown up in the area may not have felt the need to move while there were able to work locally. A small but significant minority from across the catchment area expressed interest in working in Owenstown. However, it is likely a combination of work and other factors would be needed before they were interested in moving to the new town.

Given many have lived in the area for over 20 years, that there is no existing settlement on the proposed site and that, as yet, nothing has been built, it is unsurprising few expressed interested at this stage in living in Owenstown.

A further indication of what is important to local people was highlighted by comments on what they would set as priorities for improving the quality of life for people in the area. In areas where many rate the area highly as a place to live, such as Lanark, the most common mention was activities for young people. In areas where locals are less likely to rate the area highly as a place to live, such as Rigside, Blackwood and Douglas, the most common

mentions were more job opportunities and tackling crime or anti-social behaviour. This suggests that some factors are basic requirements e.g. job prospects and tackling crime. Until these have been addressed, residents are unable to consider other priorities.

Initial reactions to the proposed new settlement were very positive. From experience, local people are generally opposed to new developments in their area. However, very few expressed concern about Owenstown. The overwhelming attraction was the prospect of new jobs. Investment of this scale has been very rare in this area and, therefore, interest is high. Furthermore, the location is sufficiently remote that very few envisaged any detrimental impact on them or their family, but it would be sufficiently close that it would be an appealing location to work.

Enthusiasm for the development was only tempered by some concerns that the development would put pressure on existing services, such as medical and sewerage services, and considerable scepticism as to whether the development would go ahead.

When a description of Owenstown was provided, only a handful of local residents expressed unprompted interest in the principle of a co-operative community. However, once outlined that, as it grows, the new community itself will decide what it needed, there was general support. Most automatically felt this was an intuitive and logical approach to development. However, those that considered this approach in more detail questioned how this would work with a community of 8,000 homes. In particular, questions were raised as to how decisions would be made and whether individuals would be selected to make decisions on behalf of others and whether those individuals would be qualified to make decision on behalf of others. Ultimately, while local residents were supportive of the principle, it was clear that much more explanation would be required than could be provided in the short consultation.

In conclusion, despite the scale of the development, there was considerable support among local residents for Owenstown. Some concerns were raised about the pressure on existing local services. However, these were outweighed by the prospect of new employment opportunities in the area. As with any proposed new development, very few local residents express immediate interest in living in Owenstown. Nevertheless, it is clear that there will not be a single motivation for considering relocating. Instead, locals are likely to be attracted by a combination of job and housing opportunities while remaining close to ties in the area. While there was support for the principle of a co-operative society, much more will need to be done to determine the most appropriate messaging before it can become an attraction of the new development.

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