

BECG Winchester Development Focus Groups

Full report



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Objectives and methodology

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Objectives and methodology

BECG commissioned Savanta ComRes to conduct two 90-minute focus groups with residents of the Winchester City Council area. The objectives were to:

- Test views on how future housing should be provided across the Winchester District.
- Uncover residents' perceptions of the current housing situation, where any new development should be located, and which elements should be a priority for developers to meet local needs.
- Explore options for addressing the housing need which has been determined by Winchester Council.

Savanta ComRes conducted two focus groups consisting of several tasks and discussions which asked:

- What are the current local needs for housing, and what would be the benefits or drawbacks of introducing more housing?
- If more housing were to be introduced, where would it best serve local needs, and what considerations should be made?
- What aspects of other local developments appealed to participants, and which do they think should be avoided?
- Where do participants sit on key debated including spacing, public transport and jobs for local people.

Group:	1	2
Location:	Winchester	Winchester
Category:	Rural residents	Urban residents
Date:	5 th February	5 th February

A further note on methodology



- Focus groups are a standard research technique for this type of work. They are ideal for gathering the views of a population on a subject such as housing as they provide an open forum for discussion, disagreement and consideration of a potentially complex issue.



- A group size of 6-8 participants that are selected to be representative of the population allows for free flowing conversation, a mix of views and perspectives, and prevents a dominant participant from dictating the discussion.



- This report presents the key findings and themes from the conversation through a mix of direct quotes, and Savanta ComRes' professional summary of the points of view given by participants. The report was written entirely by the moderators that were present in the focus group, and all findings are corroborated by listening back through recordings of the conversation to mitigate any bias, and ensure they are an accurate representation of the views given. We can therefore be confident that this report constitutes local resident's genuine views on the topic.

How the focus groups were run



- Participants were informed that the discussion was going to be about an all new urban development in their local area. At no point were they given any information on who the moderators were representing, who had commissioned the work, or what the outcomes of the research would be.
- Micheldever Station was not introduced by the moderators at any point, therefore all mentions of the location were completely organic. Furthermore, all questions were asked in an open manner, and none of the points of view were obtained using leading questions or premises.



- No background information was given on any of the settlement images that were presented during the group conversations (Appendix slides 31-38), images were shown to participants who were asked to identify which looked like the most appealing generally, which looked like the least appealing generally, and the reasons why.



- During the task on priorities for a new settlement (Appendix slides 39-45), participants were split into two smaller groups and asked to consider if they were to design a new settlement from scratch, which elements from the lists they would see as most and least important.
- Near the end of the discussion, participants were asked to place themselves on a scale between favouring two opposing design concepts (Appendix slides 46-47). They were given a very brief explanation of the two concepts, asked to consider some of the pros and cons and to think about where their preference would be and why.

Information on participants



Participants were selected from the post codes **SO21, SO22, SO23, SO24, SO32, PO7, PO15, PO17**, with a follow up question to ensure that all of those recruited live within the Winchester City Council area.

Participants from the first group were all rural residents, while the second group consisted entirely of urban residents.

Participants were recruited by an independent agency with a combination of online and telephone methodology to remove any selection bias.

Each group was recruited to be balanced on age, gender, income and postcode to ensure a representative picture of views from across the Winchester district. We also ensured that groups contained a mix of participants with a higher and lower level of environmental consciousness.

Both groups were conducted at the Winchester Holiday Inn, two miles out from the city centre easily accessible to all in the Winchester district.

Information on participants continued

The demographic make up of the two groups was as follows:

Rural group

Participant	Gender	Age	Employment	SEG	Household Income	Home ownership
A	Female	47	Homemaker	C1	£75,000	Own or shared ownership
B	Male	48	Self Employed	C1	£50,000	Private Rent
C	Male	35	Self Employed	B	£105,000	Own or shared ownership
D	Female	27	Student	C1	Less than £10,000	Living with family/guardian
E	Female	20	Employed	C2	£20,000	Living with Parents
F	Female	30	Employed	A	£70,000	Private Rent
G	Male	74	Retired	A	£15,000	Own or shared ownership
H	Female	56	Employed	B	£45,000	Own or shared ownership

Urban group

Participant	Gender	Age	Employment	SEG	Household Income	Home ownership
A	Female	47	Self Employed	C1	£150,000	Own or shared ownership
B	Female	65	Employed	C2	£10,000	Own or shared ownership
C	Male	48	Un-employed	D	£41,000	Own or shared ownership
D	Female	44	Employed	C1	£26, 000	Own or shared ownership
E	Female	45	Employed	B	Not disclosed	Own or shared ownership
F	Male	51	Employed	B	£20,000	Renting

Executive summary

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Executive summary

There is a general negativity about new builds in Winchester

Participants struggled to share any positives about new builds in the Winchester area beyond the national need for more housing.

Negativity about new builds is centred around three factors: the impact new residents have on local facilities and infrastructure; the perception that new builds are poorly designed and built; and that they are built for commuters rather than local residents.

The ideal development would be self-sufficient

Reflecting residents' concerns about the impact of new builds on existing services and facilities, the strong preference among participants is for a self-sufficient town development as a place to work and live, rather than a dormitory or commuter town.

Although for many residents there is no 'ideal' location for a new town, Micheldever was spontaneously raised by participants in both groups as an ideal location partly because of its existing transport links and low likely impact on existing infrastructure and services in the area.

Settlements should be varied and have residents' needs at their heart

When asked to prioritise facilities in new developments, participants struggled to provide clear ideal facilities. For many, variety itself is a desirable outcome, especially when it comes to housing type. An ideal development would contain a mixture of types.

Some elements that most residents would like to see in every new development are: schools and healthcare facilities, green spaces, two parking spaces per house, and good transport links.

Section 1 – General negativity about new builds

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General negativity about new builds



It is important to note that individuals from both groups indicated a clear scepticism about new build developments in the local area. There is a perception that they are aesthetically unappealing, described as ugly, Lego, copy paste. And also that they are poorly built, and unlikely to last.

“There's no character to it. It's just the same house copy and pasted over and over.”
Rural Group



There are major concerns that there is insufficient infrastructure to service large numbers of new people in the region. In particular schools, roads, public transport, shops, doctors and entertainment. Facilities around Winchester are already at capacity, with bad traffic at rush hour times, even in surrounding suburbs.

“There seems to be loads and loads of houses going up, which is great, but then not so much for the Winchester infrastructure.”
Urban group



Kings Barton was spontaneously raised in both groups as an example of a settlement that was both poorly designed and poorly executed. It was described almost unanimously* as soulless, having no variety and having had no thought put into its design, ignoring local concerns.

“I was really shocked to see Barton Farm, it was as though we'd gone back 30 years, in terms of design ethos.”
Rural group

One of the most significant reasons for negativity to new builds is pressure on infrastructure and local services. Many felt that the current provision of schools, healthcare, entertainment and other facilities are already at capacity, and that any additional housing in the area would put too much pressure on services. Residents are also concerned about pressure on the local road networks

“

“We've got a development now that's about to start, about 250 homes. The only problem we've got is the infrastructure's not there for that.”

Rural group

“

“The schools are rammed, they just can't cope with the number. If they build more new houses opposite the school that have just been planned... I think the traffic up there is already hideous.”

Rural group – on Waltham Chase

“With these new people coming in, you lose a bit of the character and become a bit soulless.”
Urban group

Other concerns about new builds were that:

- They are not built for the needs of local people but for others moving into the area, especially from London.
- They are soulless and prevent community spirit.
- They are ugly and monotonous in design.
- They are built to maximise profit with little regard to being designed well either for the target residents or existing local populations

“No-one's thinking about our interests all they're thinking about money and businesses making profit, that's the incentive for Cala, they want to make maximum profit.”
Rural group



Section 2 – Positive sentiment toward a stand-alone town

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Positive sentiment toward a stand-alone town



Generally there was a rejection of the idea of expanding Winchester. A stand-alone, self sufficient settlement was a popular concept among both urban and rural participants.

“Personally, I think you should build new towns with their own roads, their own infrastructure, their own everything. Milton Keynes being a good example.”

Rural group



The urban group disliked the idea of expanding Winchester due the impact on Winchester’s beauty and practicality, concern about loss of character and less useful shops. The rural group had major concerns about the impact of traffic on having new developments near Winchester or other existing towns and villages.

“There were lots of lovely independents when I first moved here, and they've all just been squeezed out.”

Urban group



Although most residents would prefer a self-sufficient town away from existing developments, many also said they would prefer development to be built on brownfield sites, as opposed to empty fields. This indicates a conundrum where, for some residents, there is no ‘ideal’ location for a new development.

“I have put a sense of space and greenery [as the most important thing in a new development] but, at the same time, I'm a bit paranoid about developments taking up all the greenery.”

Rural group

Micheldever Station was spontaneously introduced in both groups as an ideal place for a new town. Multiple individuals thought that it would be perfect as there are already transport links, there is enough space and it is in a good location for road networks. It is also not too close to the city of Winchester, and also not a field/woodland area that local people like to visit.

“ Micheldever's the obvious place to put a new town in. There's just a very small, pub and some houses, and lots of people park there to get on the train to go to London.”

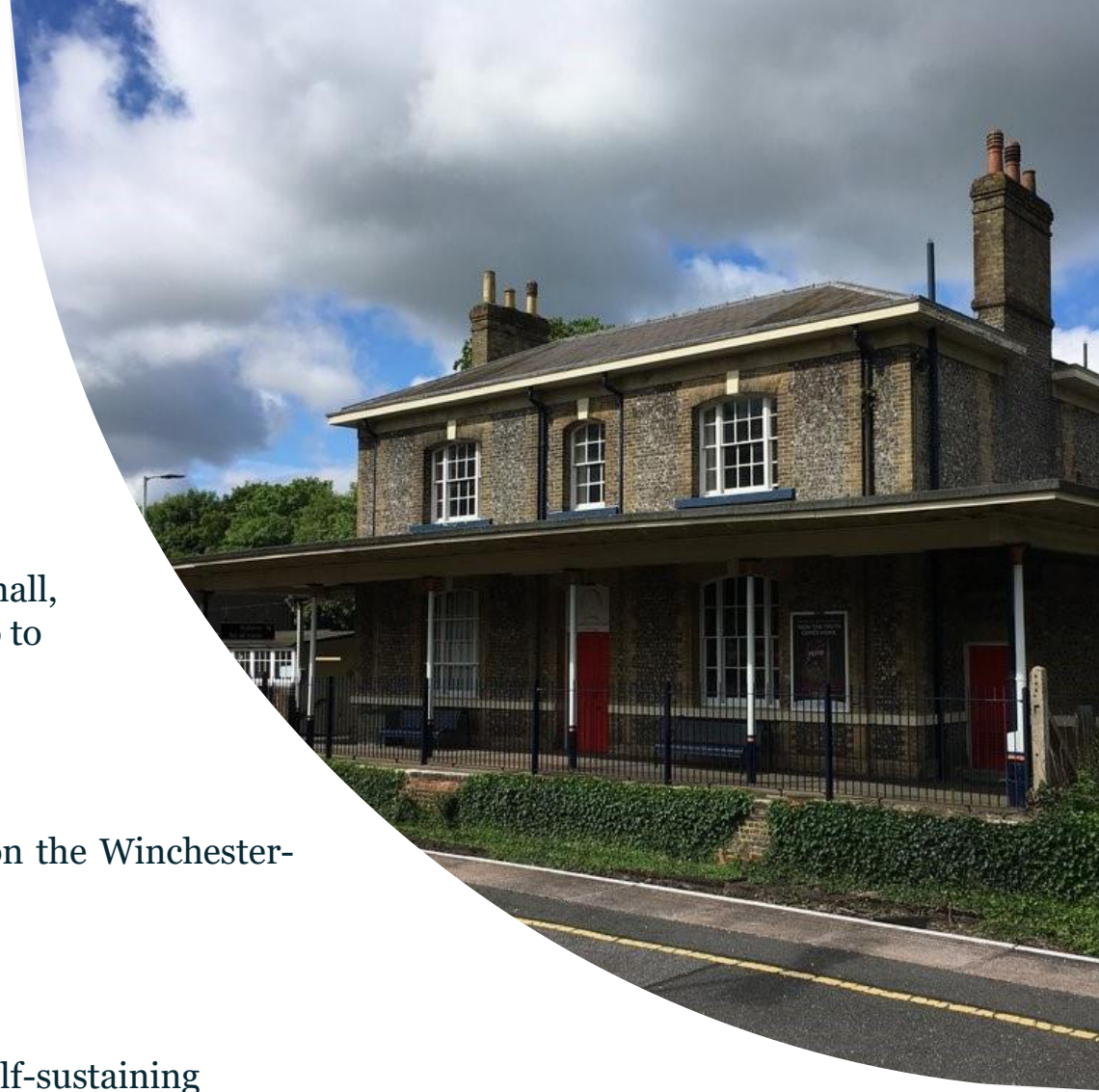
Urban group

“ You've got a main road; you've got a train station that is on the Winchester-London line. You've got everything you need. Build there.”

Rural group

“ Micheldever is on the A34, the M3 and the A303, perfect place to build a self-sustaining town. It wouldn't affect many people in terms of traffic whatsoever because you've got the A-road up to Basingstoke from Winchester.”

Rural group



Many people liked the idea of developments that are self sufficient with facilities and jobs, so that people will work and want to spend time there. When asked to place themselves on a scale between favouring a commuter town, and a town to live and work, there was a consensus that a self sufficient town with jobs and facilities would be more appealing.

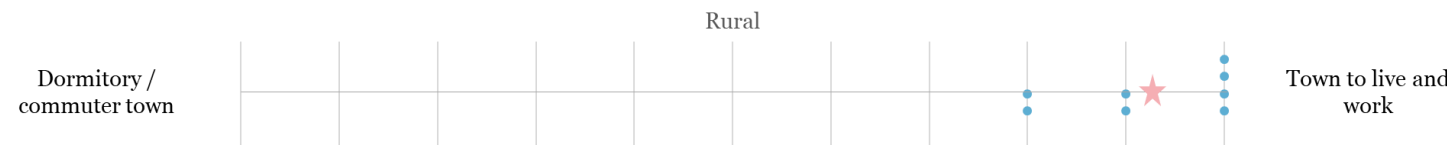
“When I look at that I go, 'Where's the centre? Where's the soul? Where's the community? Where are people going to come together and find each other?’”
Urban group – On Kings Barton

“Because this is about life. It's about living, rather than just going home to sleep, and ghost town.”
Urban group




“I think if you create a town where there is the possibility of jobs and infrastructure and things like that, you'll get a mixture of people.”
Rural group

“There's no mix, and because these are stuck with nowhere to work, all you're doing is creating people having to do these stupid commutes which just knocks on and everything.”
Rural group – On Stoneham Park




Good and bad examples of developments


 **Kings Worthy** – New housing here is considered an eye sore and adds too much pressure to the road network.

 **Micheldever** – A “perfect place for a self sustaining town”, with transport links and a good location.


 **Kings Barton** – Aesthetically unappealing, and a feeling that this development ignored local concerns, Kings Barton is an example of what to avoid.


 **Alresford** – Perceived to be expensive, hard to get on the ladder and not enough infrastructure.




 **Colden Common** – There are areas of development with too much housing where the space has not been considered. “They’ve literally just squeezed them in as much as possible.”

 **Wickham** – Houses don’t feel like they’ve been stacked on top of each other, plenty of space.

 **North Stoneham** – There are lots of people in the area of working age, need more local jobs so as not to add to commuter congestion.

 **Knowle** – A good example of a stand-alone town, that is not an eyesore and doesn’t impact the local roads

 **Whitely** – Has plenty of shops, a cinema, and a nice town feel “I feel like I live somewhere now, not always getting in the car to go places”.

Section 3 – People-centred design

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People centred design



In terms of looks and design, the most important thing for the majority is that there is a sense that the designers have ‘put some thought into it’. The design itself – for example traditional or modern – is less important than a feeling that someone has deliberately designed the homes and spaces as opposed to building ‘Lego houses’.

“You want to live in a nice area, a nice home, you don't want it to be an eyesore. I think aesthetic is important, not as important as money and being able to afford it, but you don't just want to settle somewhere you still want to enjoy where you live.”

Rural group



One key theme throughout the groups was variety. When shown the example of Great Kneighton, participants liked the variety in building design and infrastructure. This was also seen is important when it came to provision and housing type: there was not a strong preference for a particular characteristic because the very existence of variety is seen as an end in itself.

“It's a variety of shape, size. I don't necessarily like all of the details, but the overall effect is easy on the eye, and there's a lot of greenery.”

Urban group



The strongest positivity was given for the Poundbury example because of the greenery, the space but most importantly it looks like thought has been put into its design.

“They've really thought about it, they've kept trees and grass in the middle.”

Rural group

“That looks as though somebody's thought about it. That's not, 'Let's stick some there without thinking.’”

Rural group

Some green space is seen as important to keep natural beauty of the area, rather than cover it up. Participants acknowledged that one of the biggest benefits of living in the Winchester area is its natural beauty, and that it is integral that this be protected. This sentiment was particularly strong among those in the rural group.

“

“They've got a doctor's, they've got a village hall, they've got nice green areas, they've got shops. I think they've done it quite nicely.”

Rural group – On Knowle

“

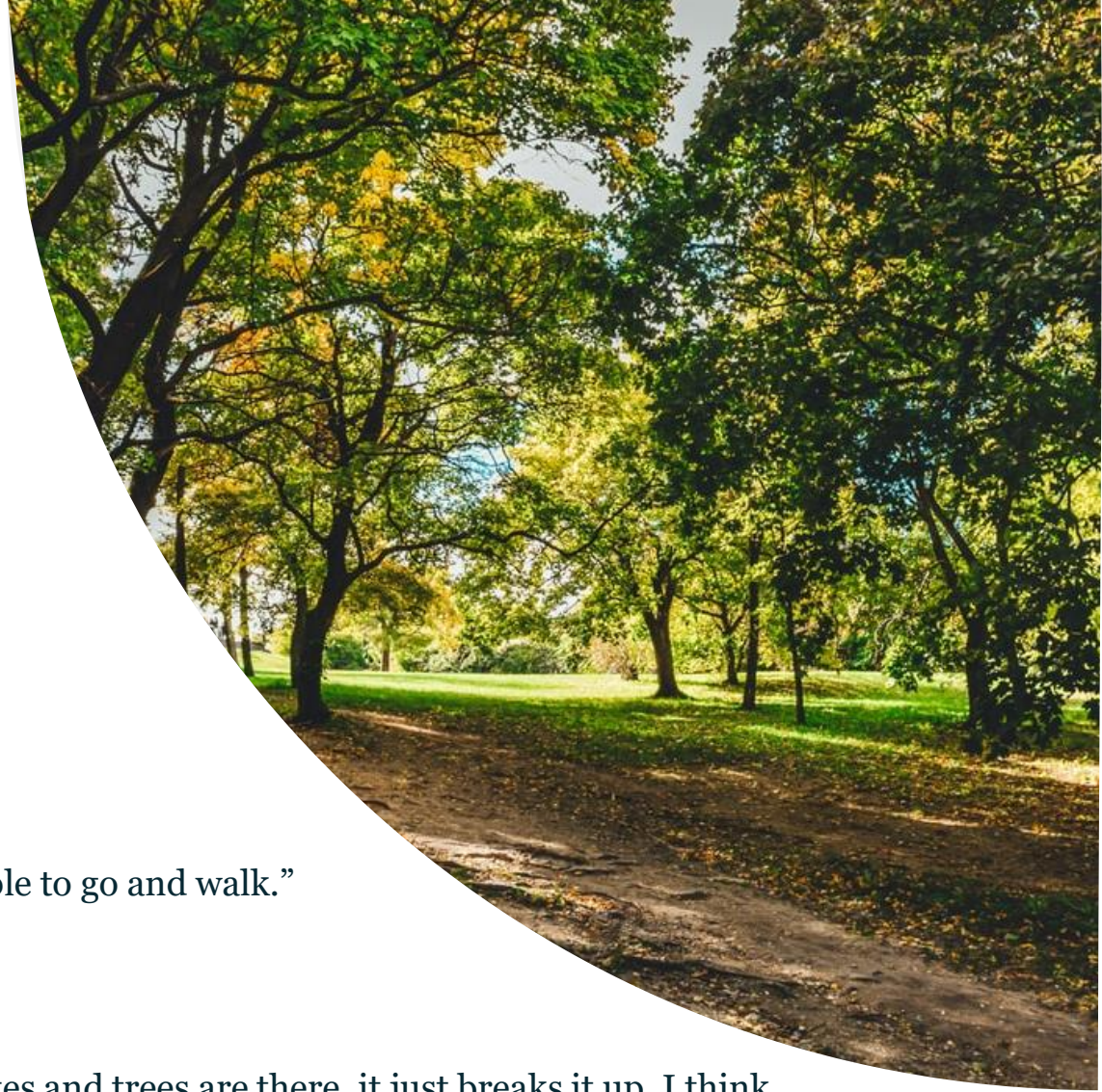
“An open space. I want to be able to go and walk.”

Urban group

“

“It has lots of green. It is very organised in how the hedges and trees are there, it just breaks it up. I think it would probably look very different without the trees and the bushes. I think I wouldn't like it nearly as much.”

Rural group – On Great Knighton



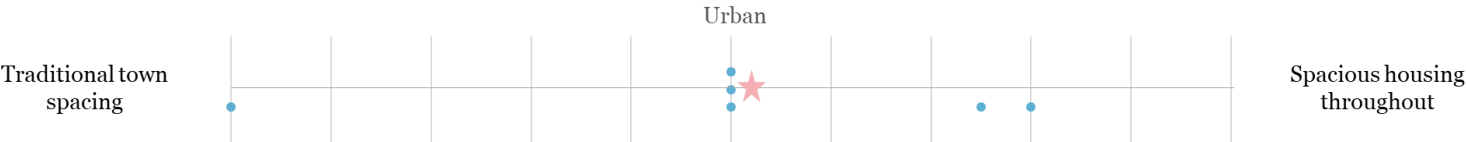
Participants were initially polarised on their preference for the town’s distribution when asked to place themselves on a scale. They liked the traditional town spacing as it added variety, but they also wanted enough space for themselves, and shared open space for the community.

“Wickham, for example, beautiful, little village, it doesn't feel like it's just stacked on top of each other, there's still plenty of spaces around, but it doesn't feel like an empty space.”
Rural group

“I put towards traditional town a bit more just because I think it's still nice to be able to walk to a pub or a shop and I think, the more spacious you get, it's harder to then do that.”
Rural group



“If there's an option of having everybody getting space around them across the board, then that seems more attractive to me.”
Urban group



Section 4 – Settlement priorities

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Settlement priorities



Each group struggled to engage with the task on town priorities. While there were a few strong views, these were largely driven by an individual's specific context. The clear message was that variety is desired, particularly in the type of housing. If there is a variety in both look and facilities, this brings with it the sense that thought has been put into design, and that it caters for everyone.

*"It's not bland, so it's got more interest. It's got more variety."
Urban group*



Some of the elements that had the most strong positive sentiment were: primary and secondary schools, healthcare facilities, green space nearby (not necessarily in the town centre), a space to be socially active and jobs within the development.

*"I want good supporting infrastructure, the schools, doctors, shops and leisure."
Urban group*



There was split opinion around the topic of public transport, with neither group in complete agreement. There was a consensus that in an ideal world, people would prefer to use public transport, but that this is an unrealistic in the context of Winchester, with some working as far as Oxford and Southampton. Therefore they accepted that ample parking provision would be needed.

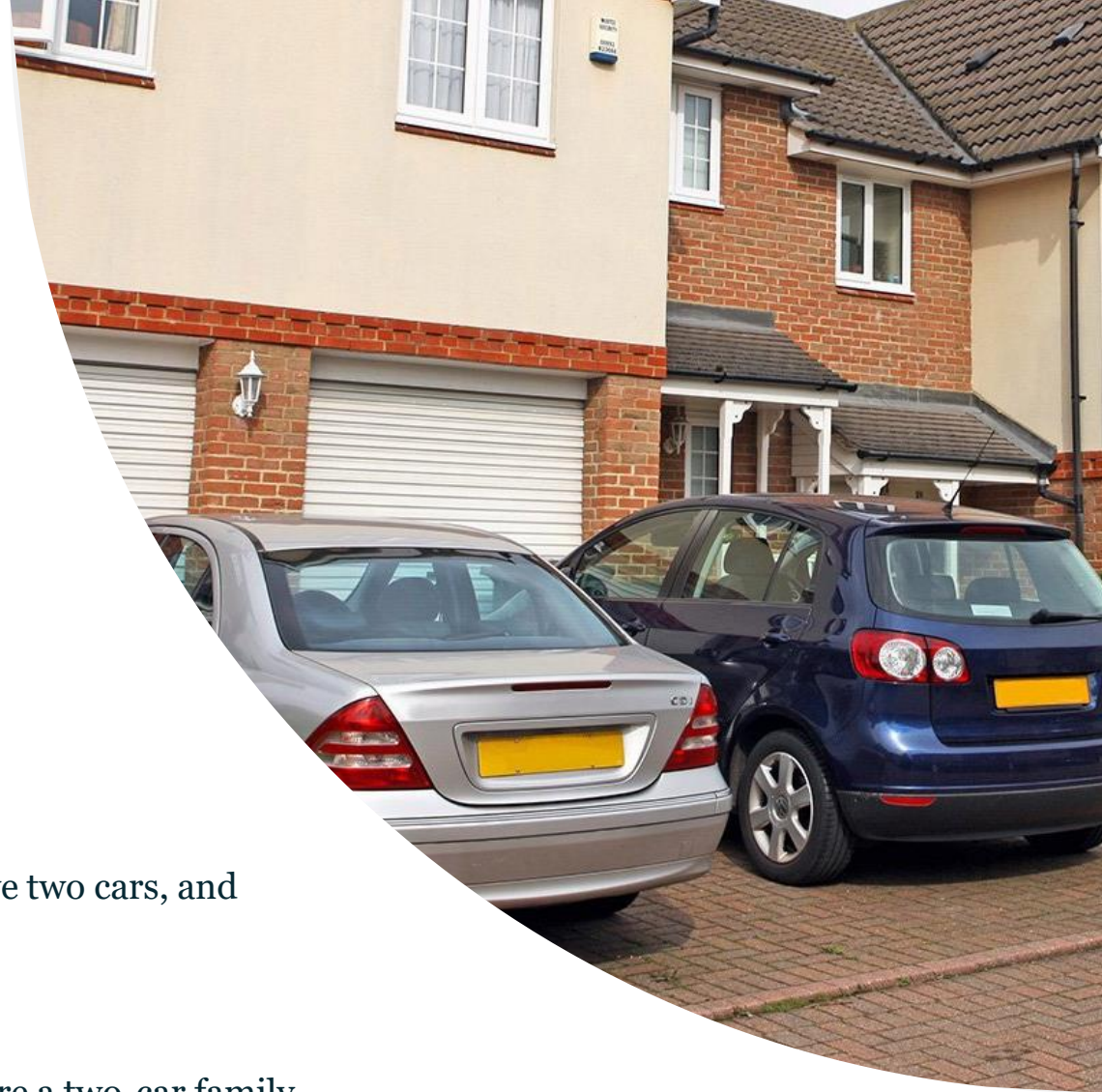
*"Lots of parking provision is important because we already have two cars, and then if anybody else comes over where do you put their car?"
Rural group*

Participants in the rural group agreed that with modern families owning multiple cars, a house would likely require at least two spaces. They would prefer this to be off road, and not in the form of a car park as in Kings Barton. There was a sense that developers should accept the fact that commuters in the Winchester area will need to drive.

“Accept the fact that people are going to use cars. Don't have one parking space per house, have at least three, because you've if you've got a family home, you've got to think long term.”
Rural group

“Lots of parking provision is important because we already have two cars, and then if anybody else comes over, where do you put the car?”
Rural group

“I just dislike the parking situation on that. We're a two-car family at the moment, but I've got one learning and one who should have learnt. So, we could potentially be a four-car family, and we just couldn't cope with that.”
Rural group – On Great Kneighton



Those in the urban group were more optimistic about the potential for an effective public transport network. They generally agreed that if a development was designed to negate the need to own a private car, this would result in an improved quality of life.

“I don't drive. So, it's important to me.”
Urban group – On public transport links

“How lovely if you didn't have to own cars, they're expensive and they're messy and how wonderful if you could go anywhere you wanted.”
Urban group

“I was in London and it was more hassle to own a car. I didn't need to and my quality of life and my enjoyment was just as good or better.”
Urban group



Key themes

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Key themes

- A settlement is appealing if there is a sense that the **design has been well thought through**, with local people in mind.

“That looks as though somebody's thought about it. That's not 'Let's stick something there without thinking’.”

Rural group

- Participants were in agreement that it is **much nicer to live in a place with variety**, both in terms of aesthetics and facilities.

It's a variety of shape, size. I don't necessarily like all of the details, but the overall effect is easy on the eye, and there's a lot of greenery.”

Urban group

- For many, it was important that **the place they call home has an organic sense of community**, and can bring residents together

“Where's the centre? Where's the soul? Where's the community? Where are people going to come together and find each other?”

Urban group



Appendix

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Positive impressions of Poundbury, Dorchester

Repetitive but very attractive housing

Green space and an open feel

Captured the old style

A sense of community, design has been well thought through



Room for parking

Negative Impressions of Poundbury, Dorchester

**Not very much
variety**



**Housing doesn't
look affordable**

Positive impressions of Great Kneighton, Cambridge

Contemporary design

**Greenery and access
to woodland**

**Variety of colours
and shapes**

**Small street brings a
village like feel, a
sense of community**



**Dropped kerb is
liked by some**

Negative impressions of Great Kneighton, Cambridge

**Dropped kerb
could be unsafe
for children**



**Parking would an issue
with multiple cars**

Positive impressions of The Square, Winchester

Pleasant view out of window, or from the bench

Green space

Full of life



Beautiful architecture and variety of design

Space is considered, not forced

Negative impressions of The Square, Winchester

**Unrealistic to
assume a new
development can be
designed like this**



**Would look worse
with lots of cars
parked**

Positive impressions of Kings Barton, Winchester

Shared ownership allowing young mother to get on the property ladder

Reaction to national need for housing



Car parking has its uses

Negative impressions of Kings Barton, Winchester

**No centre, no soulless,
no character**

**Imposing buildings,
not inviting**

Houses described an eyesore



**Not built with
local people in
mind**

**Car park would be
unpleasant to live near**

Priorities in a new settlement

Type of housing

- Private rented housing
- Social rented housing
- Homes suitable for large families
- Smaller housing for individuals/young couples
- Shared ownership
- Retirement homes
- Care homes
- Plots for self-build

- Individuals from both groups expressed that a variety of housing types are needed to suit the diverse needs of those moving in, including homes for larger families, homes for young couples and both private and social rented housing.
- Shared ownership was not popular in the rural group, however one individual from the urban group who had bought a house through shared ownership was more positive.
- Plots for self-build were seen as a nice to have, not an essential.

Priorities in a new settlement

Design and construction standards

- Modern design
- Traditional design
- Adaptable homes
- Energy efficient homes
- Homes with outdoor space

- As with the type of house, a desire for variety in design and construction was the clear consensus from each group. There was a concern that many new builds lacked beauty and character.
- They don't care what the style is, as long as there is a feeling that someone has put real thought into the design.
- Energy efficient homes were expected as standard for a modern dwelling.

Priorities in a new settlement

Key infrastructure requirements

- Fibre to the home broadband
- A primary school
- A secondary school
- Healthcare facilities
- Supermarket and local shops
- Jobs within the development
- Community centre

- Schools, healthcare facilities and practical shops stood out as the most important infrastructure requirements, as there was an agreement that the current provision in the area is at capacity.
- There was a consensus in both groups that jobs within the development are necessary.
- While a physical community centre was not seen as essential, some space such as a village green or sports ground which allowed a community spirit to grow was appealing, in particular to those in the urban group.

Priorities in a new settlement

Energy & Environmental

- Solar panels and battery storage
- Charging points for electric cars
- Water conservation fittings
- Rainwater harvesting for garden irrigation
- Utilises natural lighting / heating / ventilation to minimise energy use

- Individuals in both of the groups felt that many of the environmental measures were, while important, not essential.
- Utilising natural light, heating and ventilation was the most appealing aspect.
- While an attractive prospect, there was a feeling that solar panels and electric cars are not yet advanced enough to be a priority for new builds.

Priorities in a new settlement

Sustainable mobility

- Walkable neighbourhoods
- Cycle paths
- Rail station within walking distance of every home
- Bus links to neighbouring towns
- Car clubs
- 2 parking spaces per house

- Rural participants, in particular, were in agreement that parking provision for at least two vehicles is a must. They did however acknowledge that in an ideal world they would like public transport to be good enough for them to not have to rely on a car.
- Poorly serviced bus routes were mentioned by multiple individuals in the rural group.
- Those in the urban group liked the idea of walkable neighbourhoods, with easily accessible facilities. They felt that this would enhance the community spirit.

Priorities in a new settlement

Recreation

- Village green focal points
- Play areas
- Outdoor sports facilities
- Easy access to public open space
- Clubs and events to encourage people to be active

- A village green or other focal point was considered important by the majority in both groups.
- Outdoor sports facilities and clubs within the settlement were considered a nice to have rather than an essential. As long as residents could access these without having to travel too far, this would suffice.
- Participants were in agreement that a new development needed to feel open rather than enclosed, and that use of the space needed to be well thought through.

Priorities in a new settlement

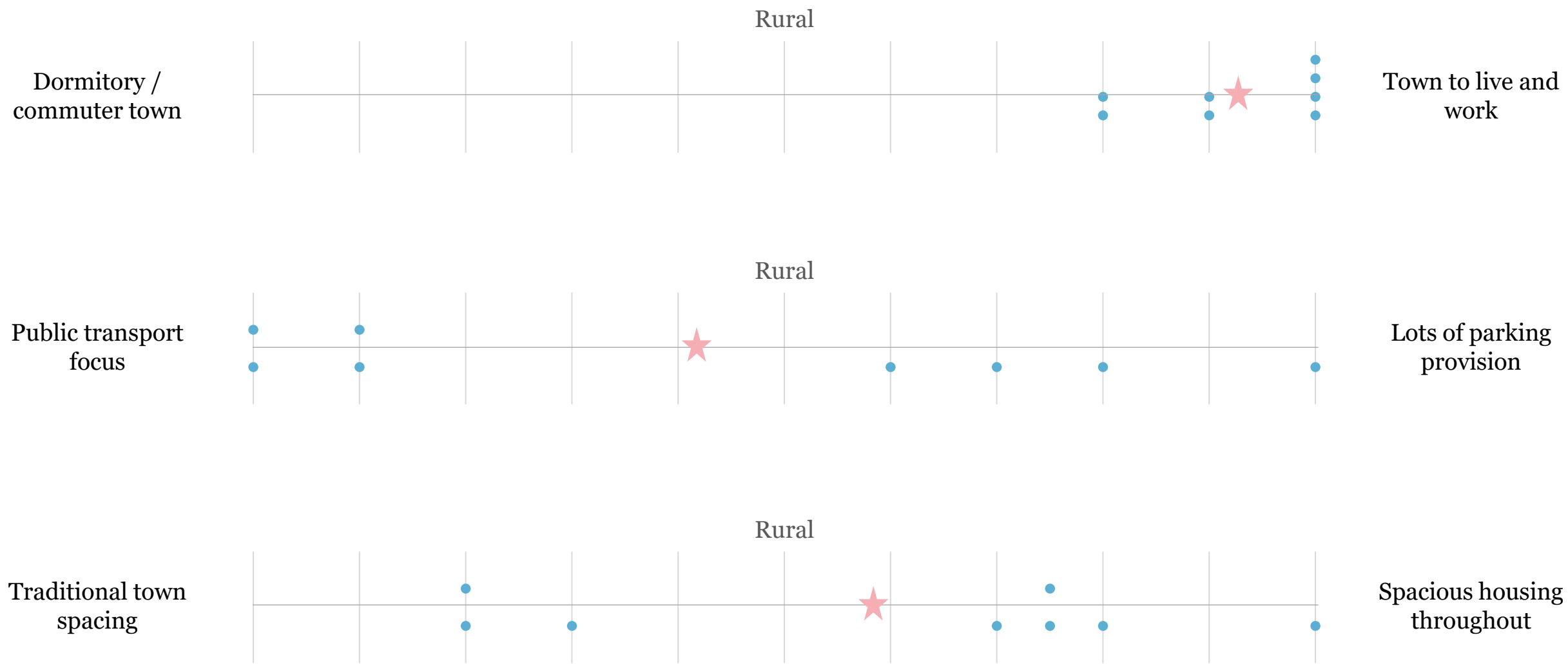
Green infrastructure

- Allotments
- Nature reserve
- Country park
- Waterside walks
- Green spaces in the town centre
- Woodland areas

- Green space in the town centre was a popular concept for the majority of participants. They felt that this would help to break up the view and add variety, as well as something that can be a shared space for the community.
- As with sports facilities, as long as countryside walks and woodland areas were accessible with private or public transport, participants did not need this to be incorporated into the development.

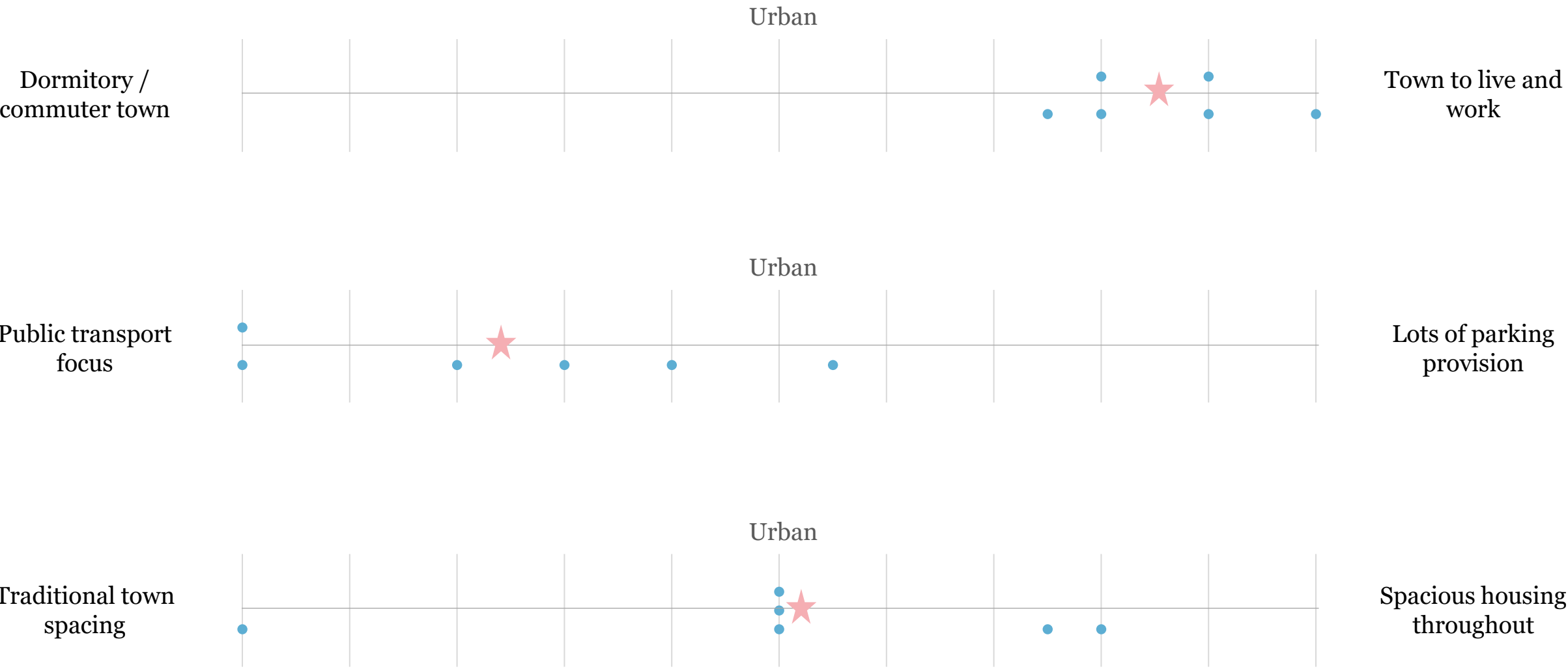
Opposing design concepts

• Individual responses ★ Crude average

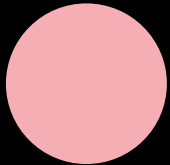


Opposing design concepts

• Individual responses ★ Crude average



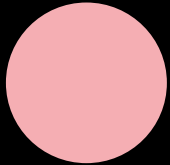
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