

**FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH  
INTO LOCAL ATTITUDES TO  
PROPOSED SUPERSTORE  
DEVELOPMENTS IN  
NEW BARNET**

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## RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

### Background

The research was commissioned by Save New Barnet Campaign and conducted by The Research Practice. The Research Practice is a British market research company established in 1990 that works for a wide range of blue chip private sector clients in the UK and internationally, as well as various public bodies.

The aim of the study was to investigate and establish the nature of local opinion in relation to proposed new Superstore developments by Asda and Tesco in the New Barnet area. The brief allowed The Research Practice to investigate whatever related issues local people felt were relevant to the proposed Superstore developments and to the future of New Barnet.

The research revealed widespread awareness of the proposed Asda and Tesco developments in terms of vague outline, though not in terms of their proposed scale and details, amongst the people of New Barnet. This awareness resulted from leafleting, exhibitions organised by Asda and Tesco, coverage in the local press, meetings organised by Save New Barnet Campaign and word-of-mouth within the local community.

### Methodology

To ensure a truly representative sample door-to door interviews were conducted in a variety of locations in New Barnet. Within each area, attempts were made to speak to representatives from each household. At properties where initially there was no answer, call-back visits were conducted to help ensure that the sample was as representative as possible and that no section of the population was overlooked.

The door-to-door interviews were all based on questionnaires that took a minimum of 8 to 10 minutes to administer. However the door-to-door questionnaires contained open-ended questions that enabled respondents to express themselves in their own terms and this was encouraged by the style of interviewing. Hence some of the door-to-door interviews lasted for over an hour! Respondents' willingness to be interviewed for lengthy periods of time and even to invite interviewers into their homes reflected deep concerns about the proposed new superstore developments and the future of the local area in general.

Hence the door-to-door interviews not only yielded robust quantitative information but also a rich seam of qualitative data based on local residents' spontaneous concerns.

The door-to-door interviews have been augmented by self-completion questionnaires. These gave people more time to consider their responses to

more detailed questions about the proposed new superstore developments and to the type of development they would like to see in New Barnet. These self-completion questionnaires also contained open-ended questions that encouraged respondents to express their own spontaneous views rather than simply confining participants' responses to the detailed set questions.

Randomised question ordering was employed to reduce any bias created by order effects.

Throughout we ensured that people were broadly aware of the nature and scale of the proposed developments before eliciting their opinions on whether or not they should go ahead. This is of vital importance. Many people imagined that the developments were much smaller in scale than what is proposed (i.e., akin to a Tesco or Asda Express). Residents seem to be less opposed to relatively small developments. It is therefore vital that respondents have a reasonably accurate idea about the scale, nature and location of the proposed developments in order to express an informed and meaningful opinion about them. In order to avoid accusations of bias, we have employed maps, descriptions based on the developers' own publicity materials, and visualizations produced by Asda and Tesco to help respondents understand what was proposed. On balance these visualizations probably show the developments in an overly-favourable light.

Qualitative depth interviews have also been conducted. These have allowed people to express their views in much greater depth, and help to provide a diagnostic framework through which people's ideas, and the relationships between their various opinions, can be more readily understood.

While research of this kind provides robust statistics, much of the value of such a study rests in the exploration of respondents' own spontaneous feelings and in understanding their thought processes. Hence this report contains a wide range of quotes that give a flavour of responses as a whole and which add colour to the statistical findings.

In total **over 500 people have been interviewed** in the New Barnet area over the period 17<sup>th</sup> July to 20<sup>th</sup> September 2008. Door-to-door interviews have been conducted with 137 people, while another 374 people have completed self-completion questionnaires. 12 qualitative depth interviews have also been completed. This report is based on all of this evidence to date. However the process of interviewing continues.

Further information on methodology is available on request.

## RESULTS SUPPORTED BY OTHER RESEARCH

The results are striking in terms of the level of opposition to the proposed superstore developments and the intensity of people's feelings on this subject. **Of those who were asked whether they would like to see the Tesco scheme developed, only 7% supported it while a staggering 86% firmly opposed it** (base of 499 respondents answering this question, with 6% having no clear opinion). **Of those who were asked whether they would like to see the Asda scheme developed, 11% supported it while a staggering 74% firmly opposed it** (base of 501 respondents answering this question, with 14% having no clear opinion). These results are supported by other independent surveys.

In autumn 2007 an earlier research project undertaken by The Research Practice found that a majority of locals opposed the development of a new supermarket on the old gasworks site on the grounds of its likely impact on traffic.

An independent survey conducted by the Chipping Barnet Liberal Democrats in January 2008 revealed a majority of local people did not feel that the old gasworks site was a good location for a new superstore. This survey revealed that the majority felt that there was already sufficient grocery shopping within the area. It revealed that the vast majority were concerned that an additional superstore would cause more traffic congestion. It also revealed widespread concern about other consequences of another superstore such as more litter and rubbish and anti-social behaviour.

A survey conducted by The Barnet Times also revealed majority opposition to the proposed development of new superstores in New Barnet.

Our findings are also supported by quantitative research commissioned by the superstore developers. In one such study Barnet residents were asked over 25 questions about how they travelled to various types of shops to buy a very wide range of goods, before being asked whether they believed New Barnet would benefit from 'improved retail facilities'. After such a lengthy series of questions reminding people of how far they travelled to buy various types of goods, this can be viewed as a leading question, and particularly as it employed the word 'improved' rather than 'more' or 'additional' retail facilities. Yet only 28% agreed that New Barnet would benefit from 'improved retail facilities'. So in spite of a highly leading approach, over 70% seemingly rejected the idea of New Barnet becoming more of a retail centre!

## A CHALLENGE TO THE DEVELOPERS

Asda and Tesco are probably aware that the vast majority of locals are opposed to each of the proposed developments. Hence they are likely to circumvent the core question of whether the local community actually wants these proposed developments.

Instead they are likely to claim that there is a need for their proposed developments based on figures showing that people buy various types of goods outside the immediate New Barnet area. However such figures need to be interpreted with caution. New Barnet is essentially a residential area, and the vast majority of residents want it to stay that way. The vast majority of local residents are content with the range of shops available to them in the immediate and neighbouring areas.

**Our research authoritatively shows that 90% of local people do not want New Barnet to have another superstore that is larger than the local Sainsbury's and that 79% of local people do not want New Barnet to become a bigger shopping centre.**

The developers may also attempt to show that many people in New Barnet want 'regeneration' of the area. Again this needs to be treated with caution. Regeneration broadly means 'making things better' and so most people are likely to concur with this vague and positive sentiment. Exploration of what people in New Barnet actually mean by 'regeneration' soon shows that this does not include additional superstores.

**A challenge for Asda and Tesco would be to expose an accurate picture of their proposed schemes to the people of New Barnet in terms of scale and traffic projections and to ask a representative sample of local people whether or not they want these developments.**

## MAJORITY OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED SUPERSTORE DEVELOPMENTS

In face-to-face interviews many respondents were initially unaware of the scale of each of the two proposed schemes, and perhaps particularly the scale of the Tesco development.

*“Oh my god, I’d no idea it (Tesco scheme) is that huge (on seeing size of Tesco development on map). There is no need for another large supermarket and all the extra traffic. A small Tesco would not be too bad but if everyone else is against it I’d not miss it. I don’t like the idea of them destroying small shops.” (Male resident, Margaret Court)*

*“I’m staggered. I thought it was something like a Tesco Express. I never imagined they would be thinking of knocking the whole area down. That’s outrageous.” (Male resident, Brookside)*

*“I wasn’t aware of the scale of this. It’s ridiculous. I wouldn’t be able to walk up to a Post Office with the kids any more. I’d have to travel miles.” (Young mother with young children)*

*“I’m shocked at the scale of what is proposed. I thought Asda and Tesco were fighting over the same site.” (Female resident, Cromer Road)*

When considered in its own individual right, **86% of local people opposed the proposed Tesco development**, only 7% supported it, and 6% had no clear opinion (base of 499 respondents). When considered in its own individual right, **74% of local people opposed the proposed Asda development**, only 11% supported it and 14% had no clear opinion (base of 501 respondents).

The widespread popular rejection of each of the two proposed schemes should not be imagined to result from the compound effect of considering two potential developments at the same time. Many respondents assumed that only one of the schemes would ever obtain planning permission. The findings show some significant differences in popular responses to each of the two schemes, which demonstrates that people were more than capable of considering each proposed development on its own specific merits.

There was widespread consistency in the initial reasons given for rejection of the two proposed superstore proposals. Those who opposed the developments often initially explained their rejection in terms of the likely traffic problems they would create and by saying that one supermarket in the immediate area is enough. There was also concern about the impact on existing and useful small businesses.

*“I’m strongly against both these schemes. We already have adequate supermarkets in the general vicinity. There is Waitrose and M&S in Whetstone and Budgens in East Barnet and Asda at Southgate. It’s like our*

*little village is being taken over by supermarkets.” (Female resident, Margaret Court)*

*“We do not need another big supermarket. There would be traffic and lorries and on this road (Margaret Road) too and we have a school just across here so there is a safety issue as well. (Male resident, Margaret Court)*

*“One supermarket is quite adequate and it is already congested with traffic on East Barnet Road and Station Road. It is difficult getting out at the bottom of York Road. Another supermarket would make it all much worse.” (Couple, York Road)*

*“It would bring too much traffic. Also we’ve already got a Sainsbury’s and a small Tesco.” (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*“It would make the area too crowded. We have traffic problems enough.” (Male resident, Park Road)*

*“The traffic alone would concern me and it would take away business from the local shops.” (Female resident, Well Road)*

*“I don’t see the need for another supermarket in such close proximity. I’d be concerned about the traffic and the impact on property values and on small businesses. I want to retain the community feel.” (Female resident, Victoria Road)*

*“We don’t need it. We already have Sainsbury’s and it would be no good for small businesses.” (Shop keeper, East Barnet Road)*

Concern about traffic problems, which was shared even by those who favoured the proposed developments, is easily explained. There is already very widespread concern about traffic congestion and parking problems in the area.

*“Traffic is getting worse and so is parking. Why charge for the car park on East Barnet Road when it just means that they started parking around here?” (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*“We need less congestion in the area, and also something to stop people driving down this straight section of Park Road so fast. I’m appalled by the idea of these huge trucks coming into the supermarkets as the roads around here are completely unsuitable.” (Couple, Park Road)*

*“There’s lots of congestion on this road. With the parking on either side buses get stuck if there is oncoming traffic. God knows what happen if an ambulance needs to get through in an emergency.” (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

*“I have big problems with the traffic and can’t turn into my drive. I don’t want extra people on our roads. Yellow lines aren’t the answer and I don’t want to pay to park outside my house.” (Male resident, Park Road)*

*“The roads are too narrow, especially Victoria Road. We can’t take more traffic. (Female resident, Crescent Road)*

Many felt that the area's traffic and congestion problems would be compounded by the arrival of a new superstore with some assuming that this would attract more traffic from outside the immediate area. However few were aware of the developers' own estimates of the amount of extra traffic their stores would generate.

*"By having two large supermarkets in one area we are setting ourselves up to be a kind of supermarket city and we are going to have people driving here from all over to shop. It would completely destroy the character of the area and any sense of community. It's hard to think of a place with a less suitable road network. (Male resident, York Road)*

*"Victoria and Park Roads are used as 'rat runs' already so what is going to happen when people from five miles away are coming in to the area to go to these supermarkets?" (Couple, Crescent Road)*

Some expressed concern about the traffic that would also be generated by the new flats that were part of the proposed new developments. Some questioned the need for more flats, and some expressed concern about the type of people who would be attracted to live in them.

*"All those new flats in the centre of New Barnet. What is it going to be like trying to get out of the place at about 8.30 in the morning? (Male resident, Station Road)*

*"The demand round here is for houses and there seem to be so many empty flats. Building more tiny flats is just cheapening the area and bringing in people from elsewhere." (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

*"It's difficult enough to sell a flat round here. ... There's been lots of new flats put up and houses knocked down. ... And now flats sell much more slowly than houses so these schemes (Asda and Tesco) aren't going to help." (Male resident, Victoria Close)*

*"The people who would be attracted to the area by these new flats would be detrimental to the area." (Couple, Park Road)*

A few spontaneously mentioned the fact that any extra traffic resulting from a superstore development would be on top of extra traffic that will be generated by the Jcross school once it was built and fully operational.

*"There is no need for two supermarkets and the traffic would be especially bad on this road (Park Road), which is a 'rat run'. We have schools at each end and the new Jewish school will make it worse. Even the Jewish school is predicting a 40% increase in traffic. They'll come in from Enfield and down here. We've been onto the police about traffic calming because they are coming down this road so fast. We are trying to get traffic calming measures, maybe a mini roundabout or a speed camera." (Male resident, Park Road)*

Some were concerned by the more general impact of either of the proposed schemes on local infrastructure. Here there was a perception that this infrastructure was already in a poor state of repair or at capacity.

*"We don't need another superstore. Also I'm opposed because of the traffic. What would it be - 1000 cars in an hour? Local services can't cope as it is, and all the flats would put another 300 cars in the area. We have already had Lyonsdown Road closed for 3 months with water problems." (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

*"Both the developments will mean increased traffic and there are not enough schools as it is." (Female resident, Longmore Avenue)*

*"The local shops provide a friendly service and I would not like to see this change. Also I've worries about the impact of all this on the local infrastructure like the roads and buses and schools and sewerage and rubbish" (Female resident, Victoria Road).*

*"There are issues about the sewerage and drains. That was a right mess near the War memorial recently where they were pumping the sewage. I wouldn't be surprised if the infrastructure is still basically Victorian in places. In warm weather there is an awful smell on Victoria Road near the junction with Margaret. The problem has been there for years and I don't know whether it is the drains or the sewerage. (Male resident, Station Road)*

*"250 new flats but is there going to be an extra post office to cope? Where is the sewerage going to go? We have poor roads and no off-street parking." (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

Many were concerned that the new developments would destroy the character of the area and its village and community feel. Here it was interesting that many spontaneously spoke of New Barnet as a **'village'** and referred to the local area as having a **'community'** feel. A strong sense of local community may reflect the fact that many of the residents of New Barnet appear to have lived in the area for a long time.

*"Having more supermarkets will destroy the area. The impact on the life of local people will be drastic. There will be more people just driving through. ... Because we have a lovely little community and very little yob culture and I hope we avoid that in the future. But if big supermarkets come in it will kill the local community because it will just be 4-by-4s coming here to shop." (Female resident, Margaret Court)*

*"I like New Barnet as it is. That is why we stayed here! ... I like the local atmosphere and I don't want more development changing the nature of the area. ... It has a village feel and I don't want to see the local area disrupted." (Female resident, Longmore Avenue)*

*"New Barnet is like a village and it has a strong sense of community. And the shops are locally-owned and friendly. These developments would completely destroy that." (Male resident, Leicester Road)*

*"Building one of these things would be like putting a motorway through a village. .... And we don't have the space for a motorway!" (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

*“The community would suffer through these developments. I’m concerned about the environment of the whole area. East Barnet is a nice village and it would be threatened by these developments. I don’t want the area’s architectural style lost. It should stay as it is.” (Couple, Park Road)*

*“The nice thing about the area is that there is nothing huge and overpowering. But these developments would be overpowering. There are nice houses in this area and we should keep it that way.” (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

Some saw a link between big supermarkets and de-personalisation of the area, alienation, anti-social behaviour and crime.

*“This used to be a nice area. There is too much rubbish now and outside Sainsbury’s. Imagine what it would be like with another big supermarket opposite.” (Female resident, Margaret Court)*

*“I’d be concerned about crime. We’ve had our car broken into here on Margaret Road and we have had the community police come round and now I see them more. And there are not as many teenagers hanging around as there used to be which is good. So I’d be worried at the impact of more supermarkets.” (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*“One concern is the increase in opportunities for teenagers to get into trouble if the proposals go through. At Harrow when a shopping centre was built the High Street became a ‘no go’ area at night because of teenagers congregating there.” (Resident, Longmore Avenue)*

*“I want the shopping area to stay small. It’s a part of a community that way, and you meet people you know.” (Female resident, Park Road)*

*“I don’t want this so called ‘public square’ (mentioned in Tesco proposal) for kids to cause damage in and definitely no 24 hour stores.” (Female resident, Crescent Road)*

*“Has anyone thought about how much crime all of this will lead to?” (Female resident, Cromer Road)*

*“Thinking about it they will make the centre of New Barnet more chaotic and lead to more crime and break-ins.” (Female resident, Park Road)*

It was suggested that there was a direct link between being able to exercise some control over one’s environment, the personal dimension, and positive community spirit.

*“If people feel they have no control over their local environment, their local area, then how can they take any pride in it? That’s what has happened in this country. Big organizations have taken all the power away from ordinary people and everything is de-personalised. So people just live inside their homes and there is so much anti-social behaviour and gloom.” (Female resident, Park Road)*

## MORE DETAILED REACTIONS TO THE TESCO AND ASDA SCHEMES

### The Tesco Scheme

The research revealed that **86% of local people opposed the proposed Tesco development**, only 7% claimed to want to see it developed (base of 499 respondents, with 6% having no clear opinion). As this report has already made clear, the most commonly expressed reason for opposition to the Tesco and Asda schemes is concern over traffic issues including congestion, noise, and pollution.

The proposed Tesco scheme evoked a higher level of opposition than the Asda scheme, which is easily explained. Opposition to the Tesco scheme was intensified because it involved knocking down a significant portion of the centre of New Barnet. Many resented this together with the loss of local shops and services.

*“We’d lose the character of the area and the small shops. We’d lose New Barnet and it’s it our town centre.” (Male resident, Pymmes Brook Drive)*

*“It will totally ruin the area.” (Female resident, Brunswick Court)*

*“I don’t like the fact they are getting rid of existing houses and shops. We don’t want more flats in the area. There is no need for them” (Female Resident, Brownlow Close)*

*“It rips out the heart and soul of New Barnet and shops that I use. And it replaces it with something anonymous and bland.” (Female resident, Leicester Road)*

*“It will bring traffic and hooligans and noise and kill off all the small business locally.” (Female resident, Longmore Avenue)*

What Tesco proposed to put in the place of the current buildings was perceived to be out of scale and out of architectural character with the area. Many felt that the area would entirely lose its traditional community feel and be turned into a characterless supermarket retail park.

*“It would make the area too busy and ruin the community spirit.” (Male resident, Denewood)*

*“It’s the sort of scheme you’d imagine in a high-density high-rise area like Hackney. And they have just come along and want to knock down our village and plonk it here.” (Female resident, Westbrook Crescent)*

*“It is completely out of character with the Victorian and low-rise character of the area. It’s far too big and obtrusive.” (Female resident, Fordham Close)*

*“It is too big. It will reduce diversity in Barnet” (Male Resident, Queen Elizabeth Court)*

*“I’m concerned about the traffic and safety for pedestrians. And it’s the size of the development, making us another Tesco Town.” (Male resident, Pymmes Brook Drive)*

*“It reminds me of Broadwater Farm. The slum of tomorrow.” (Male resident, Station Road)*

*“They want to knock everything down and replace it with the cheapest blandest architecture. It’s presumably some standard design of theirs and there is no attempt to fit in with the character or style of the area.” (Female resident, Edward Road)*

*“It would make the area too busy and too overcrowded. The proposal is too big and it would block out the light.” (Female resident, Longmore Avenue)*

*“The flats development is out of scale with the area. Also I’m against it because of traffic problems.” (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*“The Tesco design is crass and I’m an architect!” (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

The location of the proposed Tesco scheme in the centre of New Barnet meant that the perceived negative consequences of such a development would be all the more visible. A location directly opposite Sainsbury’s did not help.

*“It will rip the heart out of New Barnet village. It will be just horrible. It will put too much pressure on local facilities ... bring pollution and road safety problems.” (Female resident, Henry Road)*

*“It will kill New Barnet.” (Male resident, Longmore Avenue)*

*“It would be too near Sainsbury’s. I’d be concerned about congestion and accidents” (Female resident, Wilton Road)*

*“The Tesco would be worse because it is right in your face. You won’t be able to miss it.” (Male resident, Cedar Avenue)*

*“It’s bad enough as it is with Sainsbury’s because to me that side of the road always looks a bit dirty with litter and the kids hanging about. So I dread to think what it would be like with that enormous Tesco scheme looming over us on the opposite side.” (Female resident, Edward Road)*

Some expressed concern about the disruption that would be caused in the course of building such a large construction scheme on a busy road in a village or town centre.

*“Imagine the disruption on East Barnet Road with all these buildings coming down and heavy plant and lorries turning in and blocking the buses.” (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

*“Think of the noise we would have to endure during the demolition and then building all that. It’s all so unnecessary. And its not as if its on the edge of a town. It’s right in the heart of things.” (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

*“I heard it could take a couple of years to build. And what would it be like during that time. The noise and loss of shops and the post office and the dentist.” (Male resident, Park Road)*

*“It would make the area too built up. Just think of the disruption while building it and afterwards. Also I’d be worried by the type of people who’s be living in those flats up above it.” (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

It seemed that there was also hostility to Tesco on the basis of its tactics and approach to the local public. A number of people spontaneously claimed to dislike ‘Tesco’s ethics’. Here there was specific resentment of the way that Tesco had tried to use the idea of regeneration to sell a scheme that was perceived to be entirely driven by profit. Some found this arrogant and patronising.

*“We don’t need two big supermarkets in the area. ... It’s driven by commercial motives not a desire for regeneration.” (Female resident, Victoria Close)*

*“Tesco have played the regeneration card and some people will believe them but in the end they are just interested in their profits. They just want to build that store, increase their empire, and maybe put Sainsbury’s out of business.” (Male resident, Station Road)*

*“I was at the meeting in the Church and it seemed wrong that Tesco were trying to pose as town planners out to improve the area. It was the same at the exhibitions too. They were saying that there is something wrong with our area, our community and we’d all be better off with Tesco in charge.” (Female resident, York Road)*

Other aspects of Tesco’s behaviour were also spontaneously criticised, including their consultation exercise, which is covered in a later section of this report.

*“Tesco are letting the area go to dereliction and I don’t agree with that. They want to give the impression that people don’t care about the area.” (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*“What angers me is what Tesco has done in letting buildings go derelict to give a bad impression of the area.” (Female resident, Park Road)*

*“Tesco have actually told people that the area is blighted because they are moving in and have been trying to get people to sell to them on the cheap.” (Female resident, Cromer Road)*

*“I went to that meeting in the church and then to their exhibition and I think Tesco came over very arrogant. Their consultation is a sham. They frame their questions in a way that you appear to be supporting their proposals even when you are opposed.” (Female resident, Victoria Close)*

All of this helps explain why amongst those quizzed on the details of the Tesco scheme, **89% were of the opinion that the Tesco scheme would be out of scale with the area and would destroy local shops businesses and amenities** (i.e., 325 out of a total of 366 people). It also helps to explain why **81% rejected Tesco's claim that 'investment by Tesco can provide the boost that New Barnet resident's want'** and only 7% agreed with this statement (out of total base of 363 people). **94% thought the Tesco scheme would produce much greater traffic and congestion** (out of total base of 366 people).

### The Asda Scheme

The research revealed that **74% of local people oppose the proposed Asda development**, while only 11% support it (base of 501 respondents, with 14% having no clear opinion). As already reported, the main objection to the proposed Asda development is over the resulting additional traffic and congestion. Respondents also said that if they really were wanted to visit an Asda, there was one very conveniently located at Southgate.

*"It's too large a development and too near the Asda at Southgate." (Male resident, Doggett's Close)*

*"It's too big and will close local shops and lead to chain stores moving in." (Male resident, Queen Elizabeth Court)*

*"I'm against it because of traffic and congestion." (Male resident, Margaret Road)*

*"It is far too big and not needed. We already have an Asda very close. The site needs some development but not this. I'd like to see a youth centre and some 3-4 bedroom housing." (Female resident, Henry Road)*

*"New Barnet is a village and there is no need for two supermarkets. We can use Asda in Southgate if we really want Asda." (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*"I'm against it on account of the scale. Station Road can't take that much traffic." (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

*"It's not just the cars going into the Asda and the flats. I'd be concerned about all the trucks delivering goods and the noise and congestion." (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

*"I've lived here 40 years and I don't want yet more traffic. It will be unsafe. It's madness." (Female resident, Park Road)*

*"It is too massive and overbearing and we don't need high rise flats." (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*"I'm concerned by the traffic flow and the density of domestic development. Where is the infrastructure for this? We are already going to lose our school*

*up the back there (East Barnet at Westbrook Terrace).” (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

However many felt that this scheme was less objectionable than the Tesco one. This reflected the fact that the Asda scheme would be tucked away on the old gasworks site which meant that it would be less visible. Hence people felt that they would be more able to ignore some aspects of the Asda development. For many the Asda development was also less objectionable because it did not knock down a significant section of the current centre of New Barnet including existing shops and services.

*“If we have to have one I’d prefer the Asda because it won’t be taking away existing shops.” (Male resident, Margaret Court)*

*“If it has got to be one or the other then I prefer Asda because it is more tucked away.” (Male resident, Margaret Road)*

*“I’m opposed because of the traffic and we don’t need another supermarket. The fact that it is tucked away a bit down the back of Albert Road means it is less of a problem. But the traffic is still a major concern.” (Female resident, Victoria Close)*

*You feel you could ignore it a bit more because I would not go there. ... Though I’m not sure I could ignore the traffic.” (Male resident, Bulwer Road)*

*“I’m not keen because I’m still worried by the traffic implications but at least it’s tucked away so it’s the lesser of two evils.” (Female resident, Crescent Road)*

Amongst those quizzed on the details of the Asda scheme, **a 75% majority believed that the Asda scheme would be out of scale with the area and that it would destroy local shops, businesses and amenities** (out of base or 364 respondents), though these criticisms were not as marked as in the case of the Tesco proposals. However concern about the traffic congestion that would be caused by Asda was almost as overwhelming as in the case of Tesco. **Over 88% felt that the Asda scheme would cause much greater traffic and congestion** (324 out of a base of 366 respondents).

## VIEWS OF MINORITY WHO DO NOT OPPOSE PROPOSED ASDA OR TESCO DEVELOPMENTS

Only **11% of local people claimed to support the proposed Asda development, while 74% opposed it** and 14% had no clear opinion (base of 501 respondents). Only **7% claimed to want the Tesco scheme, while 86% opposed it**, and 6% had no clear opinion (base of 499 respondents). Hardly anyone favoured the development of both schemes.

In allowing people to express themselves in their own terms and in probing people's opinions in an open-ended way, the door-to-door interviews were highly informative about the thought processes of the minority who favoured one of the two proposed developments or claimed not to be sure whether they wanted them or not. These interviews revealed some surprising findings.

Some of those who claimed to favour one of the new developments justified this mainly in terms of the desirability of competition. A few also mentioned that a new superstore would provide more jobs.

*"Sainsbury's needs competition." (Male resident, Park Road)*

*"It will be good for jobs and will provide better competition." (Female resident, Fordham Road)*

*"It would be competition for Sainsbury's whose prices are too high. I'm not bothered about development or an increase in traffic. I just want cheaper prices all round." (Male resident, Trevor Close)*

This 'competition' argument was acknowledged by many who did not favour the proposed developments. Many of these people concluded that the environmental cost of a new superstore in New Barnet, and in particular its impact on traffic, far outweighed the supposed benefits of competition or shopper choice. Some felt that the argument for competition and more choice was not that strong as there was already plenty of choice readily available in the immediate and neighbouring areas, and that the choice between two mainstream supermarket chains was not that meaningful.

*"I can't say that the choice between Sainsbury or Tesco excites me much. It's not the choice I would favour. They are too similar. But I'm not against the schemes. I'm neutral." (Male resident, Margaret Road)*

Perhaps surprisingly, amongst supporters of the proposed schemes the supposed benefits of competition and consumer choice did not seem to be the main motivation. Instead **they tended to favour one or other of the developments mainly because they think it will help smarten up the centre of New Barnet**, which at present they consider to be somewhat scruffy. So a general desire for local regeneration, rather than a positive desire for a large Asda or Tesco in New Barnet, seemed to be the main reason for favouring one of the proposed developments.

*"I'm a yes with reservations on the Tesco proposal. I think the area needs regeneration and Tesco can afford it and to smarten the area up. But although I don't disagree with it, it is too high. Also I have concerns about the traffic." (Female resident, Park Road)*

*"Yes I'm for the Tesco because it will brighten up the area and get rid of the dirty old small shops" (Resident, Lyonsdown Avenue)*

*"Yes I suppose I'm for the Asda scheme because I feel it is progress but why does it have to be so big?" (Female resident, Park Road)*

*"The area needs redevelopment." (Male resident, Fordham Road)*

*"I'm for it (Tesco) because something has to be done because the area looks rundown. ... The area needs improvement, anything, and you can't stop progress". (Resident, Longmore Avenue)*

*"The traffic is a problem but I want a more modern look to the area. Though not as large as Tally Ho. We can't stay in a rut." (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

This desire for general regeneration also seemed to weigh heavily amongst many who claimed not to know or to be sure whether they favoured or opposed the proposed schemes.

*"The area needs development because it looks run down but not by Tesco because we already have got Sainsbury's and I'm not keen on Tesco's ethics. The area just needs to be spruced up a bit. (Female resident, Park Road, who claimed not to be sure whether she wanted the Tesco development)*

Some who claimed to favour one of the two proposed new developments were unclear as to why they did so. Some simply claimed that one cannot resist 'progress' which may signify a sense of powerlessness.

Amongst those who favoured one of the proposed new superstore developments, most had some reservations about them and **placed caveats or conditions upon their acceptance of these schemes**. Similar conditions were mentioned by those who claimed not to know or not to be sure whether they favoured or opposed the proposed developments. Hence those who favoured one of the proposed schemes, or were not sure about this, can be seen to share many of the concerns of the majority who opposed the developments, e.g., about traffic.

*"I'm for the Asda development but I don't think both schemes should go ahead. It's not a bad thing to regenerate sites and it will create jobs for people but then I wonder is the infrastructure there to support 200 flats? (Female resident, Park Road)*

*"There has to be development but the traffic is a worry. Unless the Council can sort out the traffic they should put everything on hold. There is that big new Jewish school coming up and that will cause more traffic. The number of children will go up from 300 to 1300 and so there will be another 1000 descending on us and most will be driven here." (Male resident, Margaret*

*Road, who claimed not to be sure whether he wanted the Tesco development)*

*“I have no inherent objection to a Tesco on that site so long as there is a robust traffic management scheme because the local residents need to be able to get out. You could have a system of barriers that only local residents can open with an electronic device. That would effectively insulate people living on roads like Victoria and Crescent Road from the worst effects of the traffic. It would also stop those roads being used as ‘rat runs’ because only the local residents would be able to get out at either end of the road. And also the emergency services because they would also have the electronic device. Other traffic would have to go the same end it came in. ... I have no objection to Tesco or Asda so long as all the traffic goes back out on East Barnet Road and is not coming in and around these streets.” (surveyor/traffic management professional who was interviewed in the course of the door-to-door interviews amongst local residents)*

*“I like the idea of a Tesco but I’m against more traffic and maybe we have enough supermarkets round here. There is so much traffic on this road it needs a speed camera up. A permanent camera, not the occasional speed gun.” (Male resident, Park Road)*

*“I think expansion would be a good thing. What else can we do with all that light industrial back land. But I would expect community facilities to come with it. And I wouldn’t want difficulty getting out of the area or queues on local roads in order to have stores we don’t need. Have you seen the chaos at Colney Hatch Tesco. It’s absolute chaos there at about 5 o’clock in the evening.” (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

*“Another superstore would be good for competition. But really in New Barnet what we need is a better developed shopping centre rather than a bigger one. I still want to keep the village atmosphere.” (Male resident, Margaret Road, who claimed not to be sure whether he wanted the Tesco development)*

*“I tend to be pro-development. ... But traffic is a big issue, especially if people from miles away are trying to get into these damned places. I don’t want to be inconvenienced by something in which I have no interest, to which I’m indifferent. I mean do you want your bread at 1p cheaper at the price of being a prisoner in one’s home and not being able to get out of the area?” (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

The door-to-door interviews yielded insights about those who tended to favour the new developments. Some appear not to have lived in the area for so long and to have **less historical involvement in the local community and perhaps less appreciation of it**. For example, some are young couples who have moved in from other trendier areas and want to see the area have smarter bars, restaurants and shops rather than another supermarket.

*“I have not lived here all my life. I’ve been here about 12 years and I don’t have the same attachment to the village feeling that a lot of people round here have – they know each other and want to keep the village feel. So I think the Tesco could be progress and the positive is more jobs. But the negatives are more traffic and it being more crowded with more cars.” (Female*

*resident, Park Road, who claimed not to be sure whether she wanted the Tesco development)*

*“Tesco is better than the status quo. East Barnet Road needs something to regenerate it. A lot of young couples live around here but there is nothing to go to locally. Where we lived before (inner London) there were better shops and bars and cafes. So when we go out socialising we go back there. Chez Tonton is the only good thing here and people actually come into the area to go there. ... I have no complaint with Sainsbury’s and I probably wouldn’t even shop at the Tesco but the advantage of the Tesco scheme is that it would bring us things other than the Tesco. Like some better quality smaller shops, some nice one off shops.” (Young couple, Margaret Road)*

*“We moved in a short time ago. ... I didn’t even know there was a development planned for the high street. I don’t know whether I’m for it or not. It wouldn’t bother me much. ... I think New Barnet needs cleaning up. The current shops look scruffy. If the whole area is cleaned up it could increase property prices.” (Young adult male, Crescent Road, who had moved to the area with his partner within the last year)*

A few of those who claimed to favour one of the proposed schemes had an almost hostile attitude to the area.

*“It’s a nothing area so it needs developing and Tesco would bring jobs.” (Male resident, Trevor Close)*

Overall those who favoured one of the proposed developments were often more motivated by the idea of general regeneration of the area than by the promise of a Tesco or Asda on their doorstep. This indicates that the developers’ emphasis on general regeneration of the area is a clever strategy.

Overall the minority who favoured, or were not necessarily opposed, to one of the proposed developments can be seen to be somewhat less sure about their opinions than the majority who were firmly against the schemes. Hence several respondents who at first claimed to favour, or not to object to, one of the proposed schemes had changed their minds by the end of the interview. In terms of compiling statistics it is people’s initial opinions we have counted. However it seems that prompting them to think about the issues caused them to change their opinion. None of those who opposed the schemes changed their minds in this way.

## COMMON GROUND

There is much common ground between the majority who oppose each of the proposed new superstore developments and the minority who claim to favour one of them or not to have a clear opinion. Both the majority and the minority have grave concerns about traffic and related issues. There seems to be surprisingly little enthusiasm for a new Asda or Tesco superstore in New Barnet even amongst those who claim to favour one of the new developments or to have no clear opinion on the issue. This is because many in this minority are more attracted by what they hope may accompany a new superstore rather than by the superstore itself.

*“Personally I don’t see myself using the Asda. But maybe some development could improve the area.” (Male resident, Park Road)*

*“I know someone who is for the new supermarket schemes because they think it will smarten up the area. He thinks it will result in an All Bar One and a specialist deli, that sort of thing. Well I’ve nothing against some smarter places. But I think we could end up with something soulless and lots of litter ... just a supermarket park that people drive to from elsewhere. There’s a danger New Barnet would lose all its character. ... And I don’t think the infrastructure is up to it. The road system especially and where I live it would lead to more difficulties, especially using Station Road but maybe even the Meadway too.” (Male resident, Leicester Road)*

So perhaps the most important difference between the majority who oppose the developments and the minority who think they might be able to tolerate one of them is in their assessment of how such a scheme would impact on the area. For the majority concerns about traffic, congestion, pollution, and noise rule out the building of a new superstore or any significant expansion of New Barnet’s retail amenities. For many of these people there is also more of a concern about the area losing its traditional character and sense of community and being turned into a soulless, traffic-ridden shopping area. Amongst the minority who favour or do not oppose one of these developments there is perhaps less belief in a local community and a vague hope that such a scheme would act as a catalyst for smartening the area.

Interestingly most locals do not oppose, and even favour, some development in the local area. There even appears to be some agreement in terms of the type of development favoured by the majority who oppose the current superstore proposals and by the minority who support one of them because of the supposed accompanying spin-off benefits. There is more about the sort of developments that are broadly favoured by all in the next section of this report. Significantly, these were of a sort that would improve the quality of life of local people rather than attract large numbers of outsiders to come into the area to shop.

## DESIRED DEVELOPMENT THAT MAINTAINS SCALE AND CHARACTER OF AREA

The vast majority of local people wished to maintain the scale and character of the area, and so desirable developments needed to fit within this framework. Hence **the vast majority (90%) do not want New Barnet to have another superstore that is larger than their local Sainsbury's** (422 out of base of 469 respondents), and **79% do not want New Barnet to become a bigger shopping centre** (395 out of base of 498 respondents).

When asked why they did not want New Barnet to become a bigger shopping centre, local people made it very clear that they wanted New Barnet to retain its village and community feel. Many felt that they already had easy access to adequate shopping facilities, including those without a car and who relied on public transport. Many claimed that there wasn't the space or infrastructure for the area to host a bigger shopping centre. Some wanted the area to remain much as it is.

*"We have enough local provision here already" (Male resident, Henry Road)*

*"I want to keep the village feel." (Female resident, Fordham Road)*

*"I'm happy the way it is. We don't want too much build up of traffic and people." (Female resident, Pendall Close)*

*"The area is a nice village and I want it to stay that way." (Couple, Fordham Road)*

*"It's a village and should remain so. Families with children would have concerns about an increase in traffic." (Female resident, Victoria Road)*

*"This is a small community with a village atmosphere and I don't want more noise, pollution, devaluation of property, parking problems and people coming and going day and night in a predominantly residential area." (Female resident, Victoria Road)*

*"We've got everything in the area already" (Male resident, Pymmes Brook Drive)*

*"I just don't see the need for it. It is a short bus ride to Enfield, or the Spires, and the bus to Brent Cross is really easy. And there is the West End. ... I mean apart from groceries, how often do you need to go shopping?" (Female resident, Victoria Close)*

*"We already have everything we need in easy reach." (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

*"There's not enough parking places round here to have a bigger shopping centre." (Male resident, Pymmes Brook Drive)*

*"New Barnet is like a village and its not big enough to be a bigger shopping centre." (Female resident, Wilton Road)*

*The area is okay as it is. I'd be worried by the effect on East Barnet and shops closing in the village. (Resident, Longmore Avenue)*

*"Keep the area as it is. There is no need for more shops." (Male resident, Longmore Avenue)*

*"It's a village-like place and I'd like it to stay that way." (Male resident, Park Road)*

The vast majority felt that only developments that preserved the character and scale of the area were desirable or acceptable. Hence many spontaneously suggested that existing shops should be smartened up and some spontaneously claimed to favour new independently-owned small specialist food shops or premises.

*"Definitely not bigger. Just improve it and tart it up a bit." (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*"More specialist shops and bistros would make the High Street better. More small business outlets are what is required." (Male resident, Cat Hill)*

*"I think New Barnet is in need of a face lift but not at the expense of having a giant Asda or Tesco store." (Female resident, Victoria Road)*

*"Maybe some better shops, but not a bigger shopping area. A nice independent food store, a more specialist place, and a nicer café, that sort of thing." (Female resident, Westbrook Crescent)*

*"Not a bigger shopping area but a better one with more small businesses and more amenities and activity centres for the community." (Shop owner, East Barnet Road)*

*"Another supermarket wouldn't be useful but a bank would. We used to have NatWest and a Barclays." (Male resident, Park Road)*

*"I don't think a huge Tesco opposite Sainsbury's is the choice I want. They are too similar. ... We use Sainsbury's and then the shop in the village (Salina Food Market). You know the one beside Budgen's. I can walk down there and it is much cheaper than the supermarket and a good range. ... Sugar and Spice is good. ... And the cafes seem to do a roaring trade with the building trade and workmen. ... But it would be nice if there was a smarter café and maybe a shop selling really nice bread and cheese. A deli sort of thing." (Male resident, Park Road)*

*"I'd love to see little small shops come back to our community. I like individuality and I don't want branded chain stores everywhere so New Barnet is like everywhere else. I hope East Barnet village manages to maintain its small shops." (Female resident, Margaret Court)*

*"If there were some more shops it would improve the area. But not another supermarket. We already have enough supermarkets in the area." (Female resident, Longmore Avenue)*

*“We don’t need a bigger shopping centre just a nicer one. The pavement is dirty outside Sainsbury’s. They should use the existing units and just improve them.” (Female resident, Crescent Road)*

These spontaneous views are supported by quantitative data. When exposed to various development options **92% favoured independently-owned small shops and specialist food stores** (335 out of a base of 365 respondents), and **80% favoured a traditional or farmers’ market** (289 out of 362 respondents). Interestingly only 14% favoured national chain stores and 76% opposed such development, which seems to signal a boredom with such shops and a fear of bland or identikit high streets (base of 341 respondents).

*“Independent shops are more friendly. They are more receptive to your wants. With chain stores you just hope what you want fits with their stocking policy. They don’t have the same flexibility. ... Also independent shops are more interesting and individual, and that’s what makes an area attractive.” (Male resident, Park Road)*

Overall respondents envisaged improvements that would serve the local community and improve their quality of life rather than changes that would attract lots more people from elsewhere to come to the area to shop. The vast majority want the area to retain its residential character rather than become a retail centre for the benefit of shoppers who live elsewhere.

*“There is no need (for New Barnet to become a bigger retail centre). The infrastructure won’t cope. It is a residential area and it shouldn’t become a retail park.” (Female resident, Henry Road)*

*“The shopping area is big enough as it is. We do not need a retail park.” (Female resident, Grove Road)*

*“Another store larger than Sainsbury’s is not necessary. There are plenty of other shops a short drive or bus ride away. ... I don’t want the area to lose its residential feel and be turned into a big shopping area.” (Female resident, Longmore Avenue)*

*“If these schemes go ahead or New Barnet becomes a bigger shopping area it will bring more traffic into the area and they will be parking in my road.” (Female resident, Park Road near to junction with Crescent Road)*

*“It’s a family area and a settled area and that is the way it should stay. A place where families can live happily, not just some place people come to go shopping. ... We want a decent environment and with safe roads, not somewhere even more crammed with traffic.” (Male resident, Victoria Road)*

Many spontaneously claimed to want to see more community facilities within the immediate area. This can be seen to reflect New Barnet’s strong sense of community. Hence there was spontaneous support for facilities for youth and the elderly, and also strong support for leisure facilities such as a swimming pool or leisure centre. When specifically asked about development options for the area, **90% favoured community facilities and particularly for youth and the elderly** (324 out of a base of 361 respondents), and **75% favoured**

**leisure facilities** such as a swimming pool or leisure center (270 out of a base of 360 respondents).

*“I like it as it is. If it needs developing then something for the community like youth facilities.” (Female resident, Silvercliffe Gardens)*

*“New Barnet needs youth and community facilities because there is a large number of kids roaming the streets with nothing to do. “ (Female resident, Victoria Road)*

It has been seen that many who opposed the superstore schemes favoured small-scale retail improvements within the area, independently-owned shops and businesses, and more community facilities. Interestingly these were also the sort of changes most wanted by those who hoped the superstore schemes would regenerate the area.

The fact that a majority (63%) were happy to see the area's workshops and light industrial units maintained or restored again seems to demonstrate a desire for the area to retain its traditional character and for a real and living community rather than a bland retail centre. The widespread desire to maintain the existing and historical character of the area is evident also in the strong support for more family houses (60%) rather than more 1-2 bedroom flats (supported by only 23%). The desire for houses rather than more flats may also be driven by demand and environmental issues.

*“I'm a flat owner and I don't want more flats. It's already difficult selling flats round here. There are flats that have been vacant for ages.” (Male resident Station Road)*

*“They have stuck too many flats in and that is part of the reason we have so many parking problems.” (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

*“This is a settled area. A family area. And I associate flats with a more transitory population which I wouldn't want because such people have less connection with the area.” (Male resident, Park Road).*

## ATTITUDES TO THE DEVELOPERS' COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

The door-to-door interviews revealed that the vast majority of locals had some knowledge of the proposed developments and also the range of sources whereby this information had been imparted.

Some respondents had attended the meeting in St James Church organised by New Barnet Community Association back in April 2008 at which Tesco and Asda's development intentions were discussed. Many local people were aware of, and some had attended, the exhibitions mounted by Tesco and Asda. Information about the developments had also been imparted through the local press and the New Barnet community website.

Respondents were sometimes unclear whether they had learned of the exhibitions mounted by the Supermarkets via Asda and Tesco's publicity efforts or via leaflets distributed via New Barnet Community Association or the 'Save New Barnet' campaign. The local community organisation was praised for its efforts in communicating information about the proposed developments.

However it was not until the research interviews that some respondents realised the scale of the two proposed developments and considered their likely implications. At this point some expressed surprise or even shock, and some felt that there had been insufficient communication about the details of the plans.

*"I don't think there has been sufficient consultation. I received leaflets but I didn't know the scale because they didn't show it on the maps." (Male resident, Margaret Court)*

*"An Asda development on the gasworks has been on the cards for ages. It was in the press a year ago I'm sure. But I had no idea these plans were so big. They would completely change the character of the area and how are the local roads going to cope?" (Female resident, Edward Road)*

Many were sceptical about the 'community consultations' conducted by the developers. Respondents felt that the developers were keen to press ahead with their developments irrespective of the views of the local community. Hence there was a feeling that the developers would take little notice of the views of local people.

*"You can't get any satisfactory answers from Tesco or Asda. There has been this consultation but nobody is taking any notice of you. You are just speaking to kids and its 'spin'." (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

*"The supermarkets put on exhibition events but I don't think they were that interested in what local people had to say." (Female resident, Richmond Road)*

*“On the face of it, they (the supermarkets) appear to have consulted, but whether they take any notice is another matter.” (Female resident, Crescent Road)*

*“The consultations are window dressing. Wasn’t there a poll in the press showing that people are against their plans and they aren’t going to take any notice of that, are they?” (Male resident, York Road)*

Some claimed that consultations organised by the developers were inevitably going to be rather one-sided.

*“I went to one of the exhibitions and it was a sales job. But naturally supermarkets are going to show everything in the best possible light. What is missing is a more balanced assessment of what the broad effects of this would be on the local area.” (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

*“The ‘consultation with the local community’ business is to go through the motions of planning law. But it is not much of a consultation because they have their agenda which is to build their store and increase their profits. For a real consultation you need something more balanced, not someone with a vested interest.” (Female resident, York Road)*

Tesco’s community consultation was quite widely felt to be particularly disingenuous. Some felt patronised by what they perceived as a manipulative bias in Tesco’s approach and many complained about ‘Tesco’s ethics’. There was resentment of the way Tesco had posed as altruistic planners concerned to improve the New Barnet area and community. In addition there was resentment of the questionnaires that Tesco had encouraged people to complete. These were felt to force people to answer in a way that appeared to be supportive of the Tesco scheme. There were other criticisms of Tesco’s tactics and behaviour, some of which were reported earlier and some of which cannot be reported because it could personally identify the sources.

*“I really dislike the way Tesco come along and say they are going to improve the area as if there is something wrong with the existing community.” (Male respondent, East Barnet Road)*

*“The Tesco questionnaires were written in a way where you could not disagree. You could not disagree with their overall proposal – only to preferences within their proposal.” (Female respondent, Cromer Road)*

*“I have real issues with Tesco. At their exhibitions they asked you to fill in these biased questionnaires. They were constructed in a way to make it look like you supported their scheme. You couldn’t say what you really thought. ... And they had this bird’s-eye view and the picture was really deceptive. It made it look like it was smaller than Sainsbury’s. ... I think they came over as very arrogant.” (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

*Tesco asked you things like whether you supported the principle of regeneration in New Barnet, or whether you wanted more public space or facilities. They were loaded questions. You were bound to say ‘yes’ so they could twist it to make it seem you approved of what they were up to. (Male resident, Victoria Close)*

## ATTITUDES TO BARNET COUNCIL'S PERCEIVED ROLE IN RELATION TO DEVELOPMENT

Many who were interviewed on the doorstep felt that majority of local opinion was against the proposed developments. This perception seems to have been generated via discussion with local neighbours and friends and indicates a high degree of concern about the proposed developments.

Yet some appeared to be resigned to the probability that at least one of the proposed superstore developments would go ahead irrespective of whether local people approved or not. Such people often seemed to feel that ordinary people's opinions counted for little and that we live in a society where big organisations and the power of money rule the roost.

*"The supermarkets have a lot of clout and money talks. They don't really consult." (Female resident, Margaret Court)*

*"There never is sufficient consultation. Ordinary people's opinions don't count for much." (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*"There's no real democracy" (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

*"You can protest all you like but big business and the Council will get their way." (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

### **Initial criticisms of Barnet Council**

In the majority of interviews the role of the Council was not specifically probed. However from the beginning of the research process some spontaneously criticised Barnet Council.

Some of these initial criticisms reflected concern or unhappiness that the Council had not been more pro-active in informing local people about the proposed developments and the Council's vision for the area.

*"I'm concerned the Council haven't communicated with me as a resident. I read that there is a new duty to consult with the community on matters that effect them, and both these initiatives will distinctly impact on the day-to-day lives of local people and so I'm concerned there has been no consultation." (Female resident, Victoria Close)*

*"The Council should be canvassing the views of residents, and acting on it. It's their duty." (Male resident, Doggetts Close)*

*"I can't see how the Council can allow this (proposed developments by Asda and Tesco)" (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*"Where has the Council been in all this. Nowhere to be seen." (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

*“The Council seem to have left the consultation to the supermarkets (i.e., the potential developers) and that isn’t right.” (Male resident, York Road)*

For some criticism was compounded by the perception that the Council had been in close consultation with Asda (and perhaps Tesco) over a long period of time. This gave rise to a perception that the Council had more interest in prospective corporate developers than in the local people. It also gave rise to a suspicion of ‘done deals’ between the Council and developers, particularly as some understood that Asda was currently undertaking an expensive clearing and cleaning up of the gas works site.

*“I went to that meeting in the church and I was horrified that Asda had been in discussion with the Council for ages and all of this happens behind our backs and we are not consulted about what is being planned for our area.” (Female resident, York Road)*

*“Whatever you are trying to achieve the Council will ignore it. It’s too far down the road on that Asda site at the gasworks because they are already cleaning it up. No-one will be spending that kind of money without the reassurance that they will get planning permission.” (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

*“People seem to be making decisions behind closed doors which I resent and by the time we get to hear about it, it is too late. The deals have been done.” (Male resident, Park Road)*

It seemed from the early interviews that most people believed overall town planning to be the responsibility of the Council and/or central Government. Some believed that such bodies should have clear development strategies or guidelines for different areas. Here some were critical of the Council on the grounds that they appeared to be shying away from this responsibility and leaving the overall development of the area in the hands of corporations that were concerned only to enhance their profits. This perception was compounded because of the way in which the developers had posed as town planners with the authority to regenerate and reorganise New Barnet. This not only seems to cause resentment of the developers but also rebounds badly on perceptions of the Council.

*“Ordinary people seem to be out of the loop regarding decision making. ... The Council haven’t consulted at all ... and it’s the Council that should be the overall planning and development authority, not supermarkets.” (Female resident, Margaret Road)*

*“These schemes from Asda and Tesco appear to be a cheap way of doing what the Council should be doing in terms of town planning. ... We need the Council to explain to us why they believe we need these developments when there is not sufficient infrastructure in place for them.” (Female resident, Crescent Road)*

*“The Council seem to have abandoned their role of overseeing development and to be leaving it all to the private sector. That can’t be right because companies like Asda and Tesco are just interested in profits and share of the market. They have no real interest in the area other than getting their store built so that they can make money.” (Male resident, York Road)*

*“You can’t hand over town planning to supermarkets or you will just end up with supermarkets everywhere which is unfortunately what is happening.” (Female resident, East Barnet Road)*

*“The supermarkets seem to be able to exploit the planning process for their own ends and that’s why they are popping up everywhere. ... But you would think that the Council would have some framework for development that alerted the supermarkets which areas were suitable and which were not. Because it doesn’t make sense to have two big supermarkets in one place and to be knocking everything else down. (Male resident, Brookside)*

In the initial interviews a minority spontaneously criticised the Council more forcefully and across a wider range of issues.

### **Investigating the Council’s perceived role regarding development**

In response to these spontaneously expressed concerns and criticisms in relation to the Council, recent interviews have sought to explore local people’s expectations of the role of the Council in relation to development issues in a more thorough way.

This confirms that people believe that the ultimate responsibility for urban planning and development should rest with government rather than developers. Moreover these recent interviews reveal a widespread belief that the Council should be exercising this authority in consultation with the community. Indeed most people seem to believe that it is the role of the Council to proactively consult with local people and to represent the wishes of local residents and businesses. Here it was interesting that many seem to believe that the Council ought to be the servant of the local population, and ought to be working with local people to improve the area and even to strengthen community.

*“The Council should be representing the wishes of local residents and businesses. (Male resident, Collingwood Court, Station Road)*

*“The Council should be acting on people’s views as revealed by this research and not their own view.” (Male resident, Denewood)*

*“The Council should be representing the desires of the people.” (Male resident, Queen Elizabeth Court)*

*“They (Barnet Council) should have a regeneration programme and be proactive in consulting local people and in enhancing and developing the community.” (Male resident, Margaret Road)*

*“They (Barnet Council) should be putting forward their own ideas and plans based on what residents want. They should take a more proactive role on behalf of residents.” (Male resident, Victoria Close)*

*“They (Barnet Council) need to find out what the residents and local businesses want and then provide it.” (Male resident, Victoria Close)*

*“The role of the Council should be to support local residents.” (Female resident, Grove Road)*

*“The role of the Council is to recognise and act on the views of local residents.” (Female resident, Bosworth Road)*

*“We pay Council tax so the Council should find out what the local residents and small businesses want.” (Female resident, Well Road, High Barnet)*

*“The Council’s role should be to care for the interests of local residents and businesses.” (Shop keeper, East Barnet Road)*

*“The Council need to find out what the residents want before they turn us into an identikit High Street with no character.” (Male resident, Victoria Close)*

*“The Council should be consulting every household and small business with a survey in which they can have their say on what the community needs ... and I’m sure the result would be a ‘no’ to Tesco and Asda.” (Female resident, Victoria Road)*

*“Barnet Council should refuse major developments that will destroy the character of the area, which contains many properties with individual character. The Council should have conducted a house-to-house consultation with the people of New Barnet.” (Female resident, Victoria Road)*

The recent interviews also indicate concern that these high expectations of the Council’s role were not being met. Many felt dismayed that the Council had not conducted a widespread consultation with local people about the future of the New Barnet area. Some thought that this was symptomatic of a general tendency for the Council to shy away from proactive consultation with the public. Some were cynical about a Council that they perceived as remote, anti-democratic, dismissive of ordinary residents, and which was suspected of being too intimately involved with developers.

*“Local government is supposed to be democratic and to represent local people, but this no longer seems to be the case. Organisations just seem to work for their own interests.” (Female resident, Park Road)*

*“It is good that you are doing this research, but really it should be the Council providing more information and canvassing local opinion. The Council should be finding out what we, the people who pay the Council tax, actually want.” (Female resident, Leicester Road)*

*“The Council is too soft on developments. They don’t do enough to represent local people.” (Female resident, Margaret Court)*

*“I’m concerned the Council might be seduced by the supermarket’s promises to ‘regenerate’ the area. Really it is the Council that should be working to regenerate the area for the benefit of the local community.” (Female resident, Victoria Road)*

*“At the meeting in St James the Council chap said they were about to release their town centre plan for New Barnet, but where is it? They have been talking*

*to Asda for ages, but have they talked to the people round here about what we want? I don't trust the Council at all." (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

Because people seem to feel that the Council should exercise the ultimate responsibility for area planning, and should work in consultation with the community, Barnet Council faces a potential problem. The widespread local concern over the proposed superstore developments in New Barnet could easily grow into increasing criticism of Barnet Council for not having developed a more robust framework for local development in consultation with the community. The Council is in danger of being seen to have handed responsibility for area planning, development and regeneration over to supermarket chains. Perhaps worst of all, the Council is in danger of being perceived to be complicit in what local residents fear is the destruction of the New Barnet environment and of a living community.

### **Informed critics**

Throughout the course of the research it was notable that the more people seemed familiar with the workings of Barnet Council in relation to planning issues such as major developments and traffic management, the more critical they tended to be.

Some doubted the basic competence of Council officers.

*"These supermarkets are in consultation with Barnet's Planning Department and Planning is not telling us anything. ... And how do you deal with the Highways department? Does Planning really consider these traffic issues? ... I've been unimpressed in dealing with them. The response has not been adequate... And just look at the mess the planners made at Southgate." (Male resident, Park Road)*

*"Do any of these planners actually come down here and see the roads in the evening?" (Male resident, Crescent Road)*

*"I followed the thing about the initial assessment conducted by the Council on the environmental impact of a Tesco. I'm amazed at the basic mistakes made by the Council. It was all over the place and it felt that they did not know the local area at all." (Male resident, Park Road)*

*"The Council is short of staff, and I'm concerned the developers run rings round them." (Female resident, Victoria Road)*

*"The Council have presided over far too much destruction in this area. They have knocked down buildings that should have been preserved. They have allowed people to squeeze in too many flats. ... We seem to be in a downward spiral. I can't think of one positive thing they have done for the area. It is just an endless process of knocking down nice buildings to shove in more flats. The Planning people are very remote and when I have dealt with them, very defensive. They have no imagination or positive vision for the area." (Female resident, Westbrook Crescent)*

Those who seemed more knowledgeable about the Council were often particularly critical of the Council's remoteness and unwillingness to liaise with the community in an open and democratic way. It was suggested that this resulted in poor decisions and an unimaginative approach to the area.

*"The Borough is just too big and I think we'd be better off if we weren't ruled from Hendon. None of the desirable projects come over this way. ... There is nothing by way of community facilities or developments that would be desirable." (Male respondent, East Barnet Road)*

*"Barnet Council never seem to be interested in anything social. I read about the money for young persons activities that was available and they didn't use it. Well there is plenty that could be done round here." (Female respondent, Crescent Road)*

*"My experience is that the Council is very defensive. They don't want to involve the public. ... And the more decisions are made by a small clique and without proper consultation, the more likely it is that they will be bad decisions." (Male respondent, Park Road)*

*"About a year ago I attended those Community Forums organised by the Council and I was appalled. They try and sell it as some sort of consultation with the community or democracy. But what came across was a Council that is secretive and untrustworthy. They seemed to tie themselves in knots." (Female resident, Crescent Road)*

*"Barnet Council is run from the top down and they do not want to involve the public. That's a problem because there are a lot of very bright and talented people living in Barnet, but in my experience not working at the Council." (Male resident, Station Road)*

*"I think Barnet Council has quite a good record with environmental things like recycling . But I would like to see them being more proactive and involved with the community on things like planning. I think most people drive to supermarkets because they buy so much. That's what we do every couple of weeks, but then we walk if it is just a top-up shop. But if they spread the supermarkets around the borough then surely that gives more people the chance to walk to a supermarket and will cut down all these car journeys." (Female resident, Edward Road)*

*"What do these the planners actually do? They just sit in some office block miles away and are trying to turn us into some high-density slum that is overrun with traffic." (Male respondent, Park Road)*

*"I'm not very happy about the way East Barnet School and the Jcross school has been handled. There was no consultation about East Barnet school and the new building looks very uninspired. ... The Jewish school is just in the wrong place. The traffic is going to be bad for us and the kids who go there are going to have a problem getting to it. Barnet should have found them a better site, more in the West of the borough and with better traffic links. Maybe somewhere on the Edgware and Golders Green line." (Male resident, Station Road)*

Some felt that the Council needed to adopt a much more imaginative approach to area development. It was suggested that there was scope for more innovative development ideas and that these might emerge through cooperation between the Council and local people.

*“The point is that we don’t need anymore supermarkets. We want new directives for New Barnet but not with the supermarkets. Ordinary people can’t afford premises around here for independent businesses. Chains can afford the rent and charity shops get special treatment on rent.” (Female resident, Somerset Road)*

*“There’s been a lot of publicity about how the supermarkets are cementing over the country. Basically they seem to have mastered the planning process. I’m concerned that alternative development ideas and types of developer are being frozen out.” (Male resident, Eton Avenue)*

*“The planning people live in isolation from the community. They are governed by legislation and get lent on by those at the top of the Council. ... But if there was engagement with the community ... and there are plenty of talented people in Barnet ... then I think we could see more interesting initiatives and better solutions.” (Female resident, Crescent Road)*

*“The Council can compulsorily purchase land and put it up for tender to small scale developers who could improve the area’s small scale business and retail outlet appeal along with some residential development.” (Male resident, Cat Hill)*

Some were less optimistic and positive. For some the controversy over the Jcross development has left a legacy of deep distrust in relation to the operation of the Council. Some saw the Jcross development as the thin end of a development wedge that signalled the decline of the area.

*“The whole area is under pressure. I see this Jewish school being delivered at the cost of the peace and tranquillity of Baker Hill. I know people who plan to send their children there and when I say ‘how will you get them there?’ they say oh we’ll just drive down Hadley Common and let them walk through by the woods. Well they are not going to be trying to get up through all the little roads around here, are they? It will just be a short time before there is more pressure to improve access to the school at the expense of the local environment and Hadley Woods will suffer.” (Couple, Park Road)*

*“When all the business went on about building the Jewish school there were strong environmental arguments put forward. But the Council never really addressed them. Instead they branded the people here anti-semitic.” (Male resident, East Barnet Road)*

*“We already have Sainsbury’s and I know lots of people come down from High Barnet and other places to shop there. And now this new school is going to bring more traffic. ... If they build another superstore in New Barnet we are just being dumped on. ... People high up in the Council don’t want these things on their own patch.” (Male respondent, Victoria Close)*

Some even felt that the Council was involved in a conspiracy, in which New Barnet was a victim.

*“The Council is run for the benefit of the political careers of its leaders and at the expense of local people’s quality of life. They want to hit their targets to advance their careers. ... They are building more new homes than they need to and we are suffering as a result. ... I’d like to see how many new homes have been built over the last few years on a ward-by-ward basis.” (Female resident, Park Road)*

*“We were promised a New Barnet development plan ages ago. But the Council seem to want to delay it because that gives them carte blanche to do what they like. By the time there is such a framework the area will have been destroyed.” (Male respondent, Victoria Close)*

*“There are people who want to put developments here rather than in the areas where they live.” (Female resident, East Barnet Road)*

All of this would seem to be feeding scepticism about the role of local Councillors.

*“Barnet Council is thoroughly undemocratic which begs the question what is the role of Councillors? I don’t feel that they represent us. They just seem to be there to try and sell the policies of the Council. That is certainly what came across with the Jcross school.” (Female resident, Crescent Road)*

*It was different when we had Chopra living here ... and Olwyn Evans. They were local. Now the Councillors don’t live in the Ward and we don’t have a voice. “(Couple, Margaret Road)*

## ENHANCING THE COUNCIL'S REPUTATION

The findings indicate that there is a gap between people's expectations of the Council and its perceived performance. This is because the Council can be seen to have handed over responsibility for area planning to supermarket chains whose proposed developments threaten to destroy what local people value about the area. These concerns have been compounded by the fact that the developers have posed as town planners, altruistically concerned to 'redevelop' or 'regenerate' the local area, and that in recent months the Council appears to have played no role to calm local fears. This is leaving many disappointed and even critical of Barnet Council, while a minority seem to have become distrustful and even hostile.

Some of these concerns may be seen to reflect popular misunderstanding of the constraints on local government and how the development and planning process operates. Barnet Council could deflect some of this criticism by doing more to explain to local people the constraints under which it operates in relation to development and planning issues.

However this seems to be only part of the solution. People feel that the ultimate responsibility for area planning and development rests with the Council, which should be exercising this authority in consultation with the community. Most seem to believe that the Council should be serving the tax-paying community by proactively consulting with local people and representing their wishes. Ultimately it is felt that the Council should be working with local people to improve the area and even to strengthen community. However there is a distinct danger of the Council being seen to do the exact opposite – of conspiring to foist unwanted developments on the people of New Barnet and to be undermining the area's sense of community. Some already suspect this is the case.

In analysing the research results it seems that **there may a remedy to this situation that could not only counter the Council's critics, but hugely enhance the Council's reputation.**

There appears to be an opportunity for Barnet Council to establish, at very little cost, an imaginative and genuinely democratic way of engaging with local people throughout the Borough on development issues and on ways of making Barnet a more pleasant place. Analysis of the research findings indicates that this could achieve much more than simply restoring the Council's reputation by fulfilling people's existing expectations of it. The right approach to engaging with local people could place Barnet Council in the forefront of positive innovation by

- **Helping to restore people's belief in democracy.** Increasingly people believe large organisations and politics are self-serving and have little interest in the views of ordinary people. This is one of the root causes of disillusionment with conventional party politics. A process of genuine engagement between local government and local people could help restore faith in our supposed democracy.

- **Positively encouraging community.** Engaging local people in the future of their environment and community would appear to be a way of building attachment and pride in one's local area as well as more sense of community.
- **Creating a better match between development and local people's aspirations for their environment.** An imaginative approach to facilitating development can work to the advantage of local people as well as developers. This holds out the possibility of communities or the Council actively looking for developers to fulfil specific roles. It also holds out the possibility of generating more imaginative development briefs that are better suited to a borough with a highly sophisticated population. There is clear evidence that those interviewed in this survey are distinctly underwhelmed by the offerings of many retailers and similar businesses, whether independents or national chains. By fostering a creative approach to honing development briefs, based on the unmet aspirations of local people, Barnet Council could win recognition as an innovator that is assisting both the local community as well as business development.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Roughly three-quarters of New Barnet residents are firmly opposed to the Asda scheme and significantly more oppose the Tesco development. The level of opposition to the proposed superstore developments amongst the residents of New Barnet, and the intensity of this opposition, may be regarded as dramatic and perhaps surprising. However it is easily explained.

For the vast majority of New Barnet residents, the benefits provided by another large superstore are felt to be very limited and far outweighed by the perceived increase in traffic, congestion, pollution, and noise that would accompany another large superstore complex. Hence 90% of local people do not want New Barnet to have another superstore that is larger than the current local Sainsbury's. Residents' concerns reflect a feeling that the area has a poor infrastructure and is already suffering from traffic congestion, parking problems and too many recently-constructed blocks of flats. The majority also feel that another superstore in the immediate area is unnecessary because the immediate and neighbouring area is already well served in terms of such shops.

All of this helps explain why the vast majority of local residents do not want New Barnet to become a bigger shopping centre that would be likely to attract yet more traffic from people living outside the area.

The people of New Barnet are also concerned that the proposed developments would change the essentially residential and suburban character of the area. In particular there is a worry that it would destroy New Barnet's traditional and 'village' character and its sense of community. There is a fear that the proposed developments could turn the area into a bland, soulless shopping area that would be busy, noisy, polluted, traffic-ridden, and which would see a rise in anti-social behaviour.

Hence the strength of opposition to the proposed Tesco and Asda developments in New Barnet is easily explained. Local people feel that what they most value about their area --- namely low-rise suburbia, a village atmosphere and sense of community, a good place to settle and raise families --- is under threat. In this context the benefits of competition between supermarket chains could be seen to count for little.

Across the entire sample there was concern that the proposed developments would undermine and destroy small useful independently-owned businesses and shops in New Barnet and nearby, e.g., in East Barnet Village.

The minority who claim to support one or other of the two proposed developments share many of the concerns of the majority who oppose the superstore schemes. This minority also tends to be concerned about traffic and related issues, which is why they tend to place caveats on their support for the schemes. This explains why those who claim to support one of the

proposed schemes seem prone to change their minds and oppose the developments as they reflect on their potential consequences.

Interestingly some of those who claim to support one of the proposed developments showed very little enthusiasm for a new superstore within the local area. Instead their support for one of the schemes owed more to the belief that it would regenerate the area in terms of smartening it up and encouraging more attractive small shops. Many who opposed the schemes also wanted to see the New Barnet area smartened up and perhaps some new or improved small shops that would serve the local community.

For many the only additional shops and related businesses they wish to see in the immediate area are of a small, aspirational, and largely independently-owned nature – i.e., specialist food shop deli, farmers market, smart café/wine bar. Again this is perhaps unsurprising. It is natural for people to want to see their area improved and perhaps gentrified, and when basic needs are so well met, arguably only these small independent and specialist businesses can add value. Here it is notable that people seem to be distinctly out of love with chain stores and bland identikit high streets and shopping areas.

For the vast majority of local people neither an Asda nor Tesco superstore are felt to give New Barnet anything that it really wants or does not already have within the vicinity. Instead these superstores threaten to take away much of what local people value about the area. Any planning decision in relation to these proposed developments can thus be seen in terms of a simple conflict between the profits and brand shares of supermarket chains versus the rights of communities.