



Is Birmingham booming for everybody?

Attitudes to development in the second city

Foreword

It has been interesting and stimulating for us to work with Copper Consultancy and bring together a wide range of leaders and decision makers to consider whether Birmingham is booming for everybody, and if not what collectively we can do to address this.

The survey results and the round table discussion highlighted that although levels of investment are high and property and infrastructure developments are bringing significant benefits, such as creating jobs and enhancing transport links, there is more that can be done to ensure that these developments have a positive impact for everyone – including those in Birmingham’s diverse community hubs.

There was consensus during our discussions that leaders and decision makers can collaborate more effectively to ensure that the benefits of investments are seen and understood by the whole of the city, not just those in the thriving centre. More needs to be done to reach into the inner city wards, as well to the wider metropolitan area.

We were struck by the genuine enthusiasm to discuss and debate these issues, but more importantly to address them. The group unanimously agreed that we should meet again to turn words into actions, and work to find tangible ways to collaborate across projects and to communicate the benefits in a joined up way with a coherent message.

Birmingham is a great city, but do we promote it well enough and does it have a clear brand to promote? Could all of our ambitions be more successfully achieved if we collaborate and communicate about them together in a more co-ordinated way? The survey results and the round table discussion suggest that there is work to do in both of these areas.

We look forward to working with leaders and influencers across the city to continue this discussion and agree how we address these questions.

Gareth Poole,
Birmingham Strategic Lead, Turner & Townsend

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Introduction: The changing face of the city

Birmingham is booming. The city has the fastest growing economy outside of the South East¹, with the promise of numerous high-profile projects such as HS2, Paradise and the 2022 Commonwealth Games all combining to form a time of unparalleled excitement for the city region.

In theory, there has scarcely been a better time to live in Birmingham. Yet, the interim phase of development in which the city finds itself – set between concept and delivery – can be a tricky one to navigate. Birmingham’s residents face a growing level of daily disruption, with much to look forward to but little to show for their patience so far.

In this context, how do those who live, work and study in the city feel about the changes taking place? What are they excited about and what concerns do they have?

To begin to address these questions, Copper carried out opinion polling of 1,000 people in Birmingham to gauge public attitudes towards development. The survey asked people from across the city ten questions about its changing landscape².

Armed with this information, we teamed up with global consultancy, Turner & Townsend, to gather industry leaders from the city’s public and private sectors. We asked them what they were doing to involve people from Birmingham in development - and what more can be done.

In the pages that follow, we will attempt to identify the challenges facing Birmingham; highlight the thoughts and ideas of those already working to resolve these challenges; and analyse how we can collectively deliver the greatest benefit to those who live, work and study in one of Europe’s fastest-growing cities.

“Andy Street was asked at the start of his mayorship how Birmingham was going to compete with other UK cities such as Manchester and Leeds. His answer was that he was more interested in how Birmingham is competing with places like Amsterdam and Toronto. I think combining this global perspective with local sensitivity is essential to securing a much brighter and more robust future for the city.”

Martin Prince-Parrott, Gensler

¹ UK Powerhouse report by Irwin Mitchell and the Centre for Economic & Business Research (CEBR)

² Survey conducted by Censuswide in April 2019

Development in action

One look at Birmingham's changing skyline is enough to see the level of investment being made in development and infrastructure across the city.

It is therefore encouraging for people inside and outside of the development industry to see those investments paying off in the form of enthusiasm among residents.

When given a selection of development projects happening in the city, three-quarters of respondents were excited about at least one project. The Commonwealth Games was the clear favourite in this regard. As well as being the most popular development in the survey (at 31%), the Commonwealth Games was either the first or second choice for all age groups.

Birmingham Airport's planned expansion was the second most popular development overall, with one-quarter of all respondents choosing this option. It was also the most popular choice for respondents within the 16-24 age bracket.

West Midlands Metro expansion was the third most popular development. This gives us a mixture of practical infrastructure-based developments, alongside more leisure-focused projects such as the Commonwealth Games and the Birmingham Airport expansion.



Commonwealth Games



West Midlands Metro expansion



Birmingham Airport expansion

Room for improvement

However, there remained a contingent of respondents who were not so enthusiastic. Over one-quarter of respondents said there was no development happening in Birmingham that they were excited about. Older respondents and those from lower household incomes were particularly unenthused: this option was the first choice for respondents over 45, as well as for those in a lower income household (32%).

This perhaps demonstrates that there's much more to do as an industry to ensure residents feel involved with what is happening around the city.

“The Commonwealth Games is a date which can't be changed. Immovable deadlines are scary, but they're also a chance to prove we can deliver when we said we would and set a precedent for other development projects to follow. People will remember we pulled out the stops to be on time for the Games, so why not other projects too?”

David Blackadder-Weinstein, Midland Connect

“The Commonwealth Games has accelerated projects we've wanted to deliver for 15-20 years.”

Dan Griffiths, Peter Brett Associates (now part of Stantec)

“Birmingham is booming. Paradise, Arena Central, West Midlands Metro, HS2, Commonwealth Games Village and stadium. It is a positive time for the city, but there are challenges – not least coordinating the delivery of all these different projects to tight timescales.”

Ashley Innis, Birmingham City Council (Commonwealth Games)

Perceptions and positivity

The generally positive attitudes we have seen towards the developments within Birmingham appear to translate to a positive view of the city overall.

More than half of people we spoke to (52%) said they would describe Birmingham's economy as growing or growing rapidly.

This confidence tends to increase with household income. A total of 48% of those from household incomes under £25,000 shared this view, compared with 67% from households earning over £55,000. Those within the income range £65,001-£75,000 showed a particular spike, with 40% of people from this subset believing Birmingham's economy was 'growing rapidly'.

Likewise, younger people were more positive than older people - 55% of 16-34 year-olds expressed a positive view of Birmingham's economy, compared with 45% for those over 45.

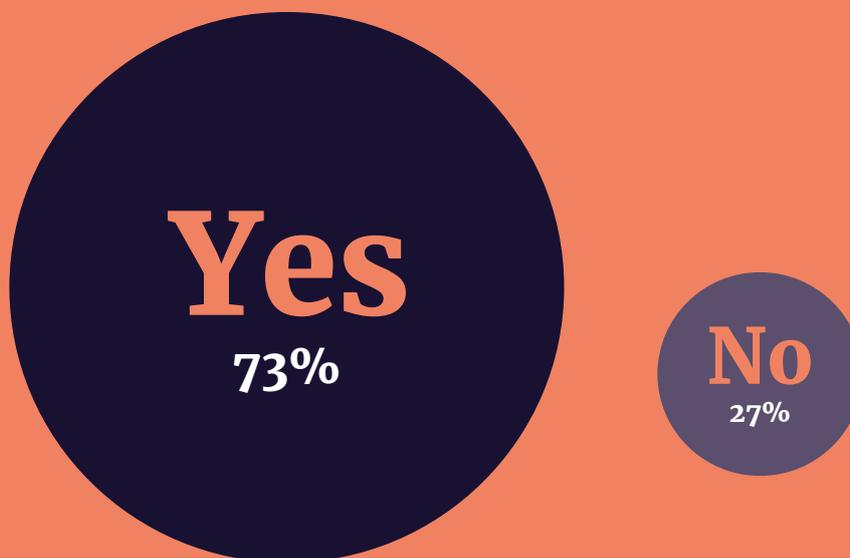
Building the link between economy and development

Members of the public who are affected by development projects may be more likely to see them as beneficial for the local economy if they were better aware of how the two are linked. If developers can demonstrate the link between developments and investment – and that investment, in turn, drives growth, creates jobs and increases income – would people be even more positive?



Future prospects

Are residents optimistic about Birmingham's future?



When it comes to the prospect of Birmingham's future, the results are similarly upbeat.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents were very or somewhat optimistic about Birmingham's future in general. Again, younger respondents were more optimistic than older respondents, whilst higher earners were more optimistic than lower earners.

It may not always have been the case, but the statistics paint the picture of a city that is both conscious of and enjoying the period of growth it finds itself in. That said, whilst the numerous developments and improvements taking place in Birmingham may have built a sense of confidence among those who live here, but this potential must be turned into tangible benefits in order for the optimism to last.

Optimism in the city

- Most common answer across all respondents was 'yes somewhat' (57%)
- Older respondents were less optimistic than younger respondents
- Over 79% of people from ethnic minority backgrounds were optimistic about Birmingham's future, with 25% saying they were very optimistic

“There has been a tangible uptick in confidence since the arrival of New Street Station and Grand Central. You can feel a sense of pride in the city; it's a place where things are happening.”

Ashley Hancox, CBRE

Concerns around construction

We have seen a great deal of excitement around specific developments, but we still wanted to know whether this excitement translates to a positive attitude toward development overall. In short: are the changes happening in the city really working for those who live here?

Do people feel they are benefitting from development?

The answers to this question were mixed. Less than half of respondents (47%) said that they were possibly or definitely reaping the rewards of development, while 40% said they definitely weren't feeling the benefit.

- Less than half of respondents (47%) said they were benefitting from Birmingham's development
- 'Yes possibly' was the most common answer (34%)
- The number of people who felt they were benefitting drops fairly sharply after the age of 45 (53% for 16-24 compared with 33% for 45-54)
- Over 40% said no, they weren't benefitting from development

So, despite the clear optimism about the city's future, it is apparent that not everybody within Birmingham feels that prosperity extends to them. To find out why that is, we set about getting a clearer picture of the issues surrounding development.

Less than half of respondents (47%) said they were benefitting from Birmingham's development.

How significantly do works affect residents' daily lives?

- 65% of respondents said their life was affected to some extent
- 'Somewhat significantly' was the most common answer (46%)
- Lower earners were less likely to be affected than higher earners
- The figure was higher (75%) for ethnic minority groups

It is clear that development is a cause for concern for many in the city.

Specifically, respondents identified a number of potential problems surrounding development. Almost half of the people we asked said they were worried about the effect of development on traffic conditions.

We also saw an awareness of the potential environmental impact of development. One-third of respondents (33%) cited decreasing air quality as a concern, which not only shows the importance of promoters making a genuine effort to limit this impact, but also provides a mandate for 'green' projects such as the Clean Air Zone and other public transport related schemes.

“The Clean Air Zone is an opportunity for Birmingham to be a catalyst for the future, but it is a tough sell; it hits people in the pockets. We need to get engagement right if people are going to get on board.”

Kathryn Bates, Turner & Townsend

Worries around development

It was interesting to see that one in five people were also worried about less tangible aspects of our changing city, such as loss of heritage. Older respondents showed most concern in this area, with both the 45-54 and 55+ subgroups demonstrating a higher level of worry regarding loss of heritage than any other age group. This was also true of higher earners.

The picture of development is thus not quite as rosy as it first appears. Issues such as roadworks and congestion are daily inconveniences for residents of a city undergoing such heavy development, leading to lost time and costs, but there are other concerns that must be met too. What this demonstrates is the need for promoters to communicate through disruption, about the issues most important to people in the city.



Traffic

Nearly half of respondents (48%) were worried about the effect of development on traffic



Transport costs

32% of people said they were worried about rising transport costs



Housing costs

Increasing housing costs were a concern for more than one-third of people (34%)



Air quality

33% of people said they were worried about the effect of development on air quality



Loss of heritage

20% of people were worried about loss of heritage

“We have to be able to communicate the benefits for the individual, but also recognise that there is going to be some short-term pain before the long-term gain.”

Ashley Innis, Birmingham City Council (Commonwealth Games)

Priorities for change

We have seen that not all aspects of Birmingham's development are positive and that we must navigate short-term inconveniences if everybody is to benefit in the long term.

But what do those benefits look like for the people who live in the city? While residents have enthusiastically received developments such as the Commonwealth Games, there remain areas where there is clear demand for improvement.

Investment in infrastructure

When it comes to investment in infrastructure, housing was the clear priority. Nearly half of respondents (48%) said they wanted to see new or improved housing in the city. Transport was the second most popular choice, reflecting the excitement we have seen around developments like the West Midland Metro. The third most popular option was green space, which again showed the need for a blend of both practical infrastructure and other, 'softer' areas of enhancement.



Housing
48%



Transport
42%



Green space
38%

In terms of the wider benefits that residents would like to see come from development, the priorities varied greatly depending on who we asked.

- Over 60% of respondents said they wanted more or better job opportunities as a result of development
- 49% of respondents said they wanted better transport
- 48% of respondents said they wanted to see more or better housing as a result of development

There were, however, a number of notable exceptions. People at the younger end of the spectrum were more interested in jobs, while 34% of respondents aged 55+ cited better transport and connections. Likewise, earnings had a strong influence on results seen. Better transport and connections was the most common response given by those earning £55,001-£65,000 per annum (37%), compared with those earning less than £15,000, who were more interested in jobs (34%) and housing (31%).

Changing times

For development to work for everybody, there must be direct and tangible benefits that outweigh the short-term disruption.

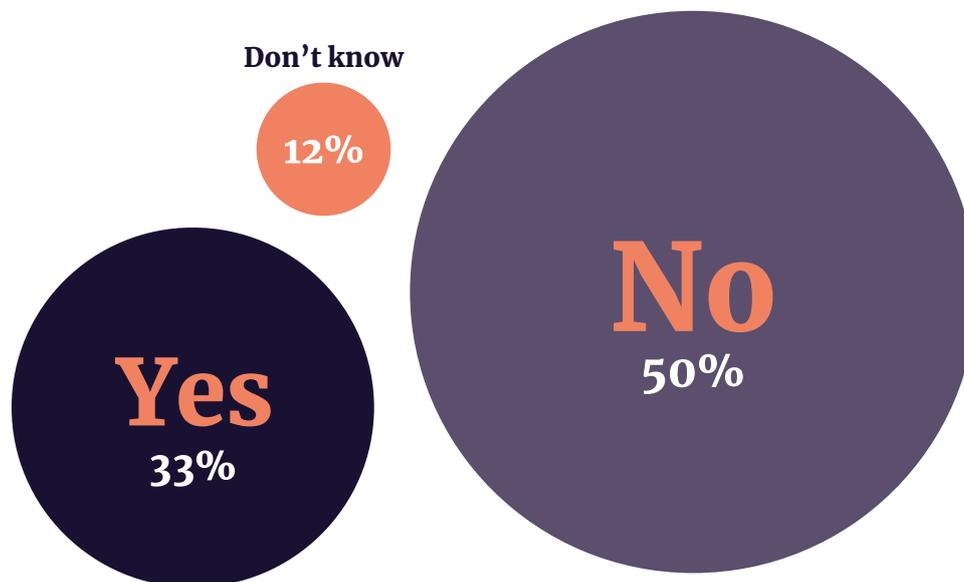
However, when it comes to what those benefits might be, our research not only shows that there are a number of priorities for those living in the city, but that those priorities are different for different groups.

This provides a clear idea of the benefits promoters should be thinking about if they are to secure buy-in from people across the city.

	Overall	Young people	Older people	Higher earners (above £25,001)	Lower earners (below £25,000)
Priority 1	Jobs 	Jobs 	Transport 	Jobs 	Jobs 
Priority 2	Transport 	Housing 	Jobs 	Housing 	Housing 
Priority 3	Housing 	Transport 	Housing 	Transport 	Transport 

The need for engagement

Are we engaging with local people about development enough?



We have established that there is concern around development and have even identified some of those concerns. This raises further questions about whether the industry is doing enough to communicate with those affected by development and promote the wealth of opportunities that are available.

Do people in Birmingham feel engaged with?

When asked whether residents felt they were being engaged with enough, the responses were surprising.

Only a third of respondents felt those bringing forward developments are doing enough to engage with local people, with dissatisfaction highest among older respondents and those from middle income households.

- Half of respondents (50%) said that developers were not doing enough to engage with local people about development
- Only 32% felt that developers were doing enough
- Some groups felt less engaged than others. Older respondents were more unhappy than younger respondents – 62% of over 45s said developers weren't doing enough
- Middle income households (£35k-£65K) felt least engaged with – 57% said developers weren't doing enough

What becomes apparent is that, in order for people to feel they are reaping the rewards of development, it is vital that the long-term advantages of construction outweigh the short-term inconveniences. Not only that, but promoters must be able to communicate these benefits effectively to those who are most affected by development.



What does good engagement look like?

“Good engagement is as much about regular, small interactions as it is major milestones. We need to create opportunities to engage with younger, more diverse audiences to be able to communicate the benefits on offer.”

Mark Hipwell, LM JV

“One thing that’s missing is the cumulative piece: what’s the combined benefit to the city of all this development? The challenge for the industry is to communicate the benefits of development in a way that people care about.”

Dan Griffiths, Peter Brett Associates (now part of Stantec)



Conclusions

Birmingham has transformed over recent years. It is undoubtedly a thriving place to live, work and study for a range of people from a variety of backgrounds.

There is a great deal of exciting change still to come. Projects such as HS2, Birmingham Smithfield, and the Commonwealth Games – each of which could be considered a once-in-a-generation development – are combining to make a special time for the city.

The fact that nearly three-quarters of Birmingham’s residents are optimistic about the city’s future – and their place in it – speaks volumes about the exciting work taking place. However, there is clearly still work to be done to ensure that people in the city feel that development is happening with them, rather than to them.

We have established a series of recommendations for how we can communicate the benefits of Birmingham’s developments to its residents.

However, communication is only part of the story. What also arose from our discussions was a need for a more cohesive approach to planning; one that brings together players from local communities and the public and private sectors to create sustainable development that is delivered in accordance with public expectations and timescales.

“There is a big opportunity for Birmingham, but we need to communicate with the people around us. We have a great story here, but perhaps we need to tell it slightly better. It’s not just about showcasing how the city is progressing on a broader scale, but also showcasing the benefits and opportunities on a local level and with those who will be affected by development.”

Richard Cowell, Birmingham City Council



Recommendations



Managing disruption:

People in Birmingham not only feel disrupted by development, but most residents do not necessarily feel that development is benefitting them. Promoters must demonstrate that there is a direct link between developments and investment – making it clear that investment drives tangible benefits such as jobs and income – in order to demonstrate that the benefits outweigh the inconveniences.



Language of development:

Our research has found a strong need to communicate with communities in Birmingham about what's most important to them, in language they understand. This means conveying the benefits not only of the practical aspects of development, but on the more nuanced aspects of their changing city, too. The key is to help the community to connect emotionally to change, rather than just comply with it.



Engaging engagement:

People in Birmingham do not feel they are being engaged with enough. Clearly, far from being a 'nice to have', consultation and engagement is a critical stage in the development process. By involving the residents of Birmingham through meaningful, proactive consultation, we not only mitigate potential risks, but can ultimately ensure that development works both for and with the people of the second city.



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