

# ***Voices of the Blean:***

**The social impacts of a proposed large-scale housing development  
on local communities**

**Rachael Reilly, July 2025**



**View across the land proposed for development from the south, Jeremy Kendall (Chaucer Fielder), July 2024**



**The countryside charity**  
**Kent**



**Kent**  
**Wildlife Trust**

## Acknowledgements

This report was researched and written by Rachael Reilly, an independent researcher affiliated with UCL Anthropology. The research was supervised by Dr Emily Woodhouse, Associate Professor in Interdisciplinary Environmental Anthropology at UCL, and approved by the UCL Anthropology Department Research Ethics Committee Project ID Number: **SHSAnth-2425-017-1**. Limited funding for this research was provided by UCL Anthropology Department and CPRE Kent. The report is co-published by CPRE Kent, the countryside charity; the Community Planning Alliance (CPA); Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT); and UCL Anthropology Department. Dr Emily Woodhouse, UCL Anthropology; Andrea Griffiths, Richard Thompson and David Mairs, CPRE Kent; Nicky Carter (Neé Britton-Williams), Lawrence Ball and Jack Stubbins, KWT; and Rosie Pearson, Community Planning Alliance, all provided editorial input and support during the research and publication of the report.

I am extremely grateful to UCL Anthropology Department, CPRE Kent, Kent Wildlife Trust and the Community Planning Alliance for their assistance and support during the research, writing and publication of this report. I am grateful to Save The Blean Action Group, Hackington Parish Council and St Cosmus and St Damian Church for their support in disseminating information about the research and advertising it on their respective social media platforms, websites, newsletters and noticeboards. Special thanks to Save The Blean Action Group and Hackington Parish Council for their assistance in facilitating the research and providing local contacts. I am very grateful to Tyler Hill and Blean Village Hall Committees for allowing me to use their premises to carry out the field research and for their support during the research. Thank you to the Save Brooklands Farm campaign, Conserve Adisham's Rural Environment (CARE) campaign, CPRE Kent, KWT and the University of Kent for agreeing to meet me as part of this research.

Finally, a special thank-you to all the individuals who gave up their time to participate in the research through focus group discussions, community walks, individual interviews and oral histories. This report could not have been written without your time, thoughtful reflections and input. Thank you to everyone in the local community who agreed for their photos to be used to illustrate the report.

This report is dedicated to my parents – John and Penelope Reilly, who live in Tyler Hill. To my mother for teaching us about the countryside from a very young age and inculcating in us a love of nature and to both my parents for fighting to protect their local environment. Thank you.

Rachael Reilly, July 2025



## Forewords

### **CPRE Kent, the countryside charity**

When CPRE Kent were first approached about supporting this project, it struck a powerful chord with us. We have long felt a growing frustration at how legitimate local concerns are routinely being written off as ‘nimby’ by default and how toxic and polarised the public debate around development has become. Dismissing this kind of concern as nimbyism is not only wrong, it also risks silencing the very voices we most need in the planning process.

Here at CPRE, we campaign for housing that genuinely meets local needs and respects the character of the countryside. We know that the countryside must play a part in solving the housing crisis and we support truly affordable homes for local people. But the pursuit of arbitrary targets at all costs, paired with a system that sidelines local knowledge and democratic scrutiny, leads to poor outcomes for people and the environment alike. What this report makes clear is that communities are not calling for no planning at all. They want planning done well. People are not saying no to housing. They are asking for homes that are genuinely needed, that fit their surroundings and that respect the natural environment. This is not opposition for its own sake. It is a call for something better.

Too often councils are expected to produce plans at speed with insufficient resources while also taking on levels of growth their landscapes, environment and infrastructure cannot sustain. The community is left out of the conversation. With the government’s current direction of travel on planning reforms, such as proposals to weaken planning committees and centralise planning policies even further, the few chances left for communities to have a say are at risk. What this report shows is that people are not just worried about losing land. They are worried about losing their voice, their connection to place and their sense of belonging.

Yet as this report also shows, communities are far from powerless. What comes through clearly is a deep sense of care, knowledge and quiet determination. People are stepping up with solutions. They are offering ideas, sharing local insight and setting out a more thoughtful and grounded vision for how we plan. It is that spirit we need to support if we are serious about creating the kind of balanced and sustainable development that CPRE stands for.

This report is a warning but also a call for change. It shows why local voices matter and why they cannot be ignored. It pushes back against the idea that we must choose between homes or nature, between progress or protection. Instead, it calls for honest conversation about what good planning really means. Not just for Blean, but for Kent and for communities everywhere

**Richard Thompson**  
Planner, CPRE Kent



**The countryside charity**  
**Kent**

## Community Planning Alliance

As Chairman of the Community Planning Alliance, I am honoured to write a foreword to this report, which documents the profound and often painful experiences of local people faced with the threat of a large-scale development proposal. There is a deeply-felt sense of loss and grief, which is not unique to the Blean. The threat to the community's local countryside and natural environment is not abstract – it is intensely personal. The potential destruction of fields, woodlands and habitats brings with it a feeling of mourning for places that are cherished and formative, places that hold memories, meaning and identity.

What also emerges clearly is the depth of people's attachment to their landscape – not just as a scenic backdrop but as a lived space that shapes daily life, well-being and social connection. This is a countryside that is walked, worked, observed and loved. It is deeply concerning that the extensive local knowledge and insight offered by these communities is so often overlooked during the planning process. People know their local area with a richness that no desktop study or remote consultant could replicate. They see the subtle shifts in land, season and species. That this knowledge is so rarely invited into planning decisions is not just a missed opportunity – it is a democratic failing.

The concerns raised in this report reflect many of the issues we at the Community Planning Alliance hear about across the UK: the loss of green space, the fragmentation of nature and habitats, threats to sites of cultural and historic importance and the encroachment on valuable agricultural land. And yet these are not voices opposed to all change. Many people express a willingness to embrace positive development – particularly when it serves genuine local needs, enhances the area and aligns with ecological and social values.

What the report also highlights is the emotional and social cost of being excluded from meaningful participation. The stress, uncertainty and sense of powerlessness caused by opaque planning processes have a real impact on mental and physical health. For many, it affects not only how they feel now but how they plan – or can't plan – for the future.

Despite these challenges, what shines through is the energy and resolve of local people to stand up for what they value. Communities are coming together with remarkable courage and creativity: organising, sharing skills and speaking out. They are putting forward alternative visions – community-led, sustainable and hopeful – that reimagine how land can be used for the benefit of people and nature alike.

Too often, those who speak out are dismissed with labels like 'nimby'. But what this report reveals is something far more nuanced and principled: a desire to protect the unique character, ecology and culture of a place – not just for themselves but for generations to come.

This report is a testament to the strength and wisdom of communities who care deeply about the places they live. It should serve as a wake-up call to decision-makers: we need a planning system that values local voices, respects lived knowledge and truly considers the long-term health of our landscapes and the people who inhabit them.

**Rosie Pearson**

Chairman, Community Planning Alliance



## **Kent Wildlife Trust**

The UK is at a pivotal moment in how it balances the need for new housing and infrastructure with the need to protect and restore nature. The national planning framework is undergoing some of its most significant reforms in decades, which should present opportunity for infrastructure planning to be truly aligned with the urgent need to tackle the nature and climate crisis. Instead, a troubling narrative has emerged that casts nature as a barrier to progress and dismisses anyone raising environmental concerns as nimbys (not in my back yard) or as mere naysayers. In our experience this couldn't be further from the truth. Every week we are contacted by our members who are worried about the destruction of nature and are seeking advice on what action they can take.

Kent Wildlife Trust have a long history of giving nature a voice in the planning system. But with Kent under exceptional development pressure, it is not possible for us to be involved with every planning application that will have a negative impact on the environment. That is why it is vitally important that local communities feel equipped and empowered to speak up for nature and to feel that their voice will be heard.

This research shows the real sense of disconnect and disempowerment felt by communities local to the proposed University of Kent development, and we know that this is not an isolated issue.

The knowledge and expertise of local people, their deep connection to the land and wildlife that inhabits it, should not be dismissed or belittled in the planning system. Instead of reducing opportunities for community consultation, better outcomes for people and wildlife would be achieved through more effectively engaging communities at the earliest possible stages of strategic planning. Ensuring that the right development is delivered in the right place is key to ensuring that development and nature recovery can be delivered side by side, providing sustainable homes and thriving ecosystems to support generations to come.

**Nicky Carter (née Britton-Williams)**

Planning and Policy Manager, Kent Wildlife Trust



**Kent**  
Wildlife Trust

# ***Voices of the Blean:***

## **The social impacts of a mass proposed housing development on local communities**

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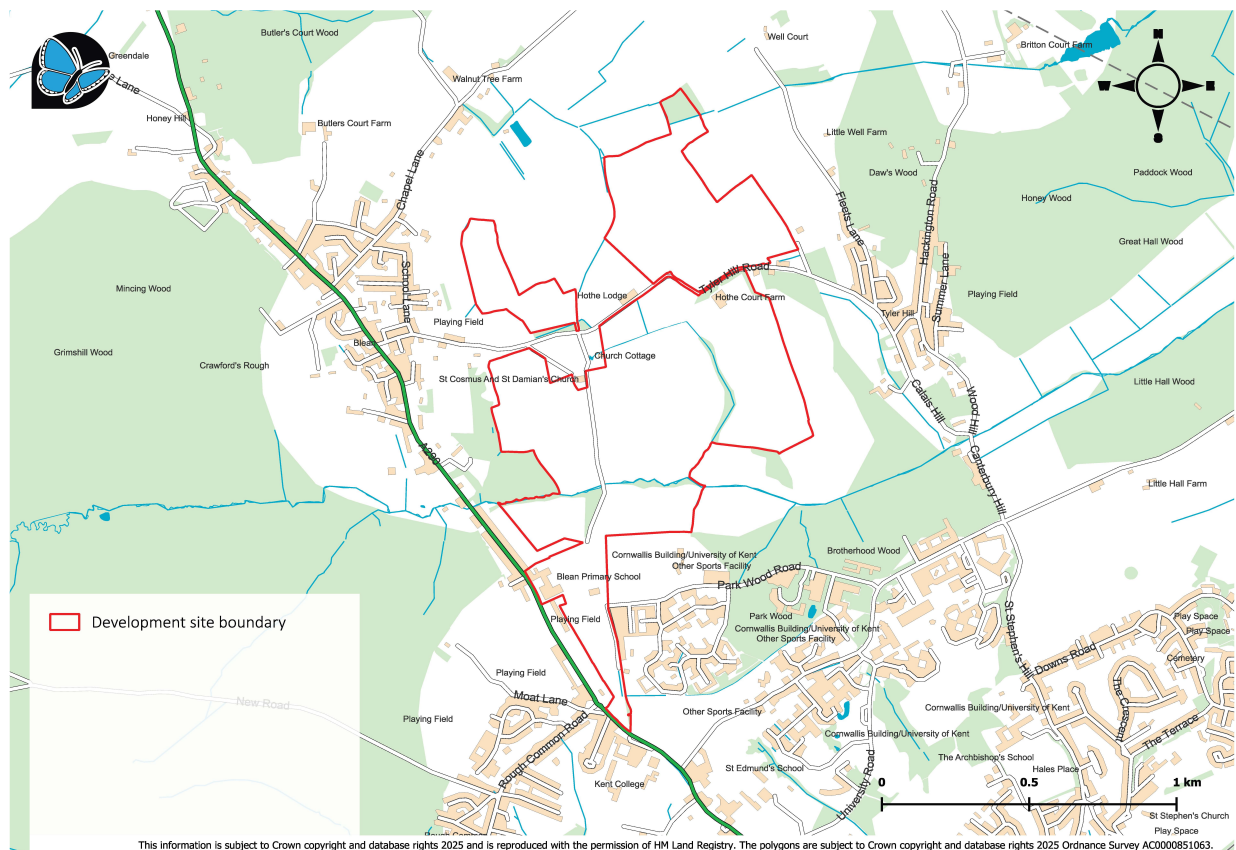
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## ***“When it’s gone, it’s gone!”***

### **OVERVIEW**

In March 2024, local communities in the villages of Blean, Tyler Hill and Rough Common, near Canterbury, Kent, learned that 100 hectares of greenfield land between their villages had been included as a site for a large “free-standing” “rural settlement” of 2,000 houses in the draft [Canterbury District Local Plan 2040](#) (site C12).<sup>1</sup> A public consultation on the draft Local Plan was held from March to June 2024. Canterbury City Council is reviewing almost [4,000 public responses](#) to the consultation and has [postponed a final decision](#) on the Local Plan until spring 2026 to take into account [new planning regulations](#) that came into effect in December 2024.<sup>2</sup> An additional Regulation 18 consultation will be held on the draft Local Plan in September 2025 (the fifth public consultation on the new Local Plan) and a final Regulation 19 consultation will take place in spring 2026. The final Plan is due to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in autumn 2026.

The site, which is owned by the University of Kent, contains ancient woodland, streams, ponds and productive agricultural land. It is rich in biodiversity, providing a habitat for several endangered and protected species, including Skylarks, Yellowhammers, Common Swifts, Brown Long-eared Bats, Pipistrelle bats and Great Crested Newts (which are being studied in internationally-recognised research pools at the University of Kent). The land is an important wildlife corridor between the East and West Blean woodland complexes and has been designated an area of potential rewilding and biodiversity enhancement by [Kent Wildlife Trust \(KWT\)](#).



Site Map: Courtesy of Kent Wildlife Trust

<sup>1</sup> See p. 51 [Draft Canterbury district Local Plan \(2040\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> The new [National Planning Policy Framework](#) was published in December 2004

Using participatory research methodologies, the aim of this study is to examine how the planning and consultation phases of a large-scale development proposal impact the social well-being, physical and mental health of affected local communities, with a particular focus on the threatened loss of green space, nature and wildlife. The research is rooted in an understanding that the social impacts of development projects are best evaluated in terms of holistic well-being that captures what people value and the impact on their quality of life.<sup>i</sup> The study examines how local communities relate to and engage with their local environment and landscape and whether the threat of losing it changes how they use the land. The research will explore how development plans impact communities' sense of place and identity and how residents articulate feelings around the potential loss of nature and wildlife. It explores the organics of a local campaign group, Save The Blean, set up to fight the development, and the different ways in which the local community has engaged in protest and participated in the public consultation processes. It seeks to understand what motivates affected communities to protest and whether these drivers are primarily self-interested or come from a deeper sense of attachment to the land and nature around them.

At a time when the new [Planning and Infrastructure Bill](#)<sup>ii</sup> threatens further restrictions on involvement of local communities in the planning system, it is hoped that the research can offer insights into how participatory methodologies can be used to more meaningfully engage communities during the planning and consultation stages of large-scale development plans and how social impact indicators could be used to measure the impacts of losing access to nature, wildlife and green spaces on communities' health and social well-being.

## REPORT STRUCTURE

The report starts with an overview of the research methodology and participant profile before providing an introduction to the Blean site, the Canterbury district Local Plan and the role of the University of Kent. Using data from the community mapping exercises, community walks, focus group discussions, individual interviews, oral histories and the social survey, the report outlines 10 key findings with the voices of participants at the centre of the narrative. These include:

1. **Attachment to local landscape and environment:** how participants engage with and use the land around them and how their use of the land has changed since finding out about the development.
2. **What people appreciate most about this land:** including the overall landscape, specific features and wildlife, its history and cultural heritage.
3. **Local knowledge and expertise** about the local landscape, history and wildlife and how this has been overlooked during the planning process.
4. **Principal concerns about the proposed development:** including loss of green space, nature and farmland; threats to sites of historic importance and cultural heritage; and impacts on daily lives
5. **Possible benefits** the development could bring to the local area.
6. **Impacts on health and social well-being of local communities:** how the development plans have impacted the health and well-being of local communities and participants' plans for the future.
7. **The public consultation process:** how do local communities view the Local Plan consultation – do they believe they will be listened to or what they say will make a difference.
8. **Local protest and organisation:** how the local community has organised to protest the development proposals.
9. **An alternative land-use vision:** an overview of the alternative vision for community-owned, sustainable management of the land that the local community has put forward through its plans for Blean Biopark.
10. **Blockers or protectors – what motivates people to protest?** A discussion of whether the local community perceive themselves to be nimbys and what motivates them to protest.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Field research for this study was carried out in the villages of Tyler Hill, Blean and Rough Common from 18-29 November 2024. The research used a range of participatory social research methodologies to consult with members of the local community and key local stakeholders. The objective was not only to use these methods to gather views and insights from impacted local communities but also to explore how participatory social research methods can be used to consult with local communities on the social impacts of large-scale development plans and the concomitant threat of losing access to green space and nature. All the participatory research was recorded and participants gave their consent to participate in the study and for their anonymized information<sup>3</sup> to be used in the final report.<sup>4</sup> Transcripts of all the interviews were kept and quotes from these have been included throughout this report.<sup>5</sup>

An online social survey provided quantitative data to support the qualitative findings. A desk review of the background documentation for the development of Canterbury City Council's draft Local Plan, as well as relevant University of Kent documentation, formed part of the research. In addition, the researcher reviewed the public responses to the Regulation 18 public consultation on both drafts of the District Local Plan (in 2022 and 2024) and online social media content from the local campaign group, Save The Blean, as well as local community residents' Facebook groups. Information from the participatory research, online social survey, desk review and social media review has been included throughout the final report.

### Participatory Research Methodologies

**Community Mapping Exercises:** using colour-coded stickers, these exercises used large-scale maps of the proposed development area to stimulate interactive discussion among participants about how they use the land proposed for development, their favourite parts of the land and places associated with special memories, which parts of the land they think are most important to protect, as well as what they identify as the greatest risks. Five groups of three to seven people participated in the community mapping exercises held in the village halls of both Blean and Tyler Hill.



Community mapping exercise, November 2024: Rachael Reilly

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms are used for people who participated in individual interviews and gave oral histories. Participants in the focus group discussions, community mapping exercises and community walks are given anonymous letters. All social survey responses are anonymous. Two participants gave permission for their names/titles to be used in the report.

<sup>4</sup> This study was approved by the UCL Anthropology Department Research Ethics Committee Project ID Number: **SHSAnth-2425-017-1**. All participants were given a Participant Information Sheet and signed UCL Anthropology approved consent forms.

<sup>5</sup> Exact quotes from the interview transcripts have been included in the report; however, repetitive filler words and phrases such as 'like', 'so' and 'you know' have been removed from the quotes to make them easier to read.



**Focus Group Discussions:** immediately following the mapping exercise, the same groups of people participated in a focus group discussion with guided questions aimed to stimulate discussion. The discussion picked up on themes from the interactive community mapping exercise and provided an opportunity for all members of the group to discuss how they felt about the proposed development and how it had impacted on their lives and well-being, their views on the consultation process, their involvement (if any) in the local campaign and what motivated them to protest, their hopes and fears for the future and a general discussion around the use of the term 'nimby' to describe their actions.

**Community Walks (transect walks):** three community walks were organised for groups of three to eight people. The aims of the walk were to replicate the community mapping exercise on the actual land proposed for development. Participants led the walk and guided the researcher, showing her the parts of the land of most importance and value to them. Participants agreed on a route to take and were free at any time to stop and point out special features, favourite parts of the land and places associated with special memories, parts of the land they were particularly concerned about losing and parts they felt were most important to protect.



Community walks, November 2024: Rachael Reilly

**Semi-structured Key Stakeholder Interviews:** Twelve semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with key local community stakeholders. These included interviews with members and organisers of the local campaign group, Save The Blean; local parish councillors; the Vicar of St Cosmus and St Damian Church; present and former employees of the University of Kent; Canterbury Biodiversity Network; local City Councillors (all off-the-record interviews); and the former Director of Commercial Services and Estates at the University of Kent.

**Semi-structured Group Meetings:** in addition to the individual interviews, four group meetings were held: two with local campaign groups – [Conserve Adisham's Rural Environment \(CARE\)](#) (seven people) and the [Save Brooklands Farm](#) campaign (two people); and two with local organisations campaigning for nature conservation and appropriate planning – the [Campaign to Protect Rural England \(CPRE\) Kent](#) (four people) and [Kent Wildlife Trust \(KWT\)](#) (two people).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Information from these meetings was used as background material for the report, but quotes from these meetings have not been included in the final report.

**Oral Histories:** as well as individual interviews, the researcher met three members of the community who had lived in the local area for much, or all, of their lives. During unstructured conversations, either while walking the land (two individuals), or in their home, the researcher recorded their oral narratives of memories of the land proposed for development. The conversations focused on memories of how the land had changed over the years, how participants had interacted and engaged with the land, and their hopes and fears for the future.

**Social Survey:** 230 people responded to an online survey of residents from the impacted local communities and the surrounding area about their use of the land, their participation in the public consultation, their concerns about the proposed development and its benefits, the impact of the planning proposals on their health and social well-being and their plans for the future. Data from the social survey has been used to illustrate and support the qualitative findings. For full results from the social survey please see Annexes [B](#), [C](#), [D](#), [E](#) and [F](#).

**Sampling Methods**

Information about the research was disseminated using local social media sites – including the Facebook pages of the Save The Blean campaign and local residents’ Facebook groups.<sup>7</sup> The Save The Blean campaign included information about the research on its website and in its monthly newsletter sent to all its supporters. Hackington and Tyler Hill Parish Council posted information about the research in its newsletter sent to all parishioners and physical notices were put up on Parish Council noticeboards and at the village halls and other public venues in Tyler Hill, Blean and Rough Common. Individual interviews were set up in advance of the research with key informants and local stakeholders. Information about the research was also shared through word-of-mouth networks.

**PARTICIPANT PROFILE**

**Participatory Research**

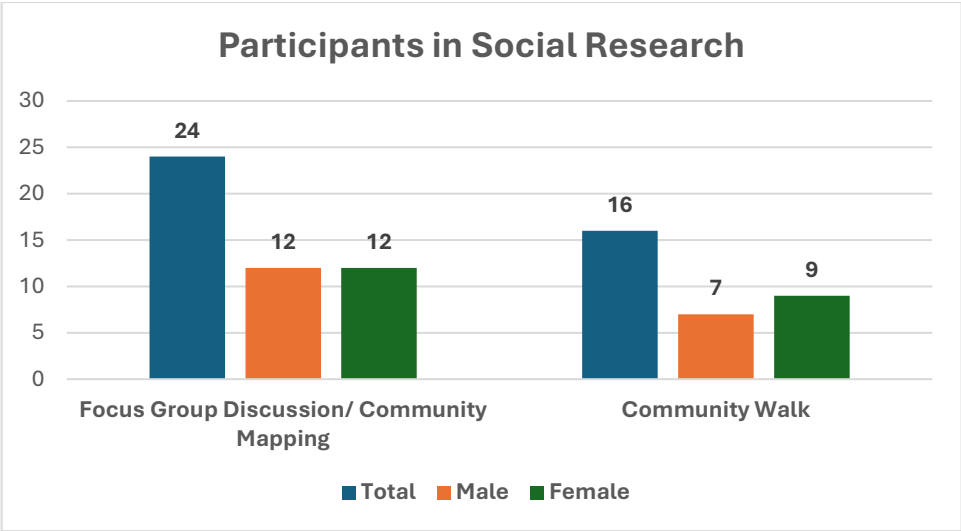


Figure 1: Participants in Social Research

<sup>7</sup> Tyler Hill, Blean, Rough Common and the wider Canterbury and Whitstable area local residents’ Facebook groups were used to inform people about the research and invite their participation.

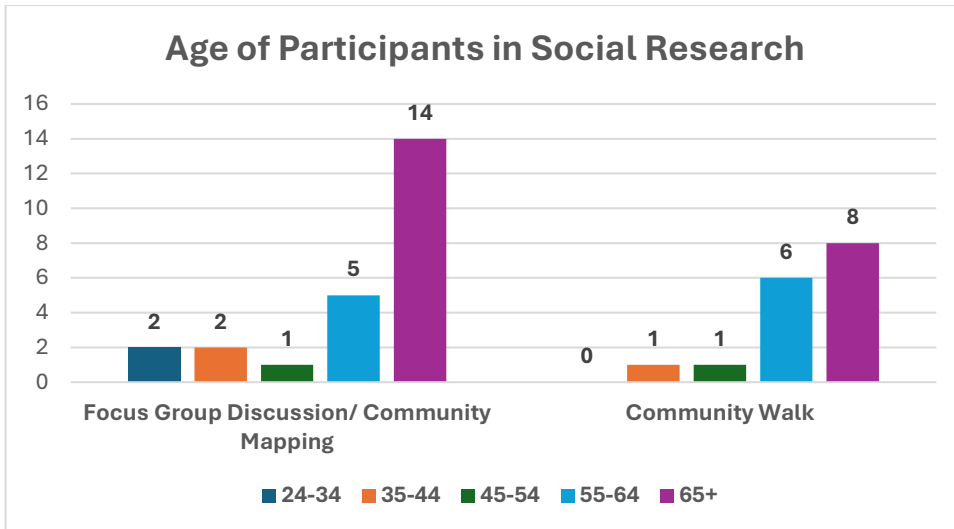


Figure 2: Age of Participants in Social Research

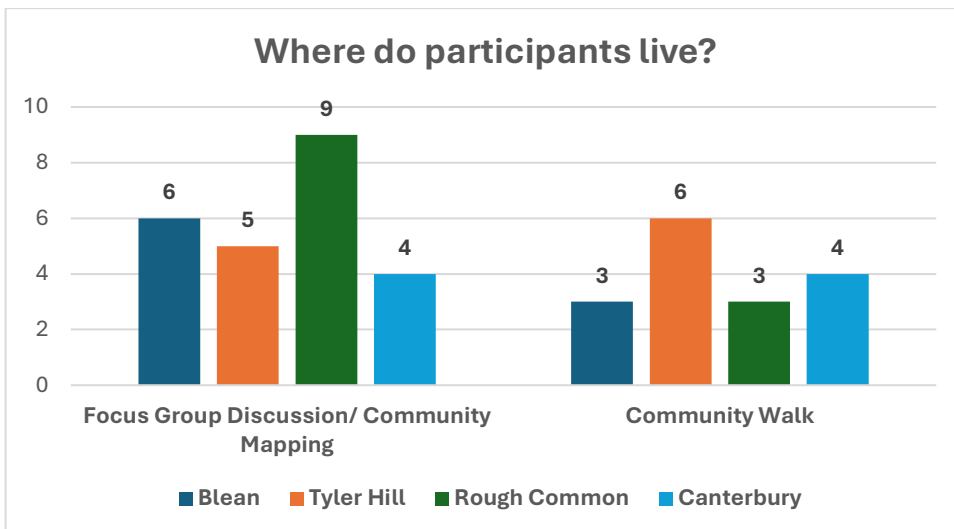


Figure 3: Where Participants in Social Research live

## Social Survey

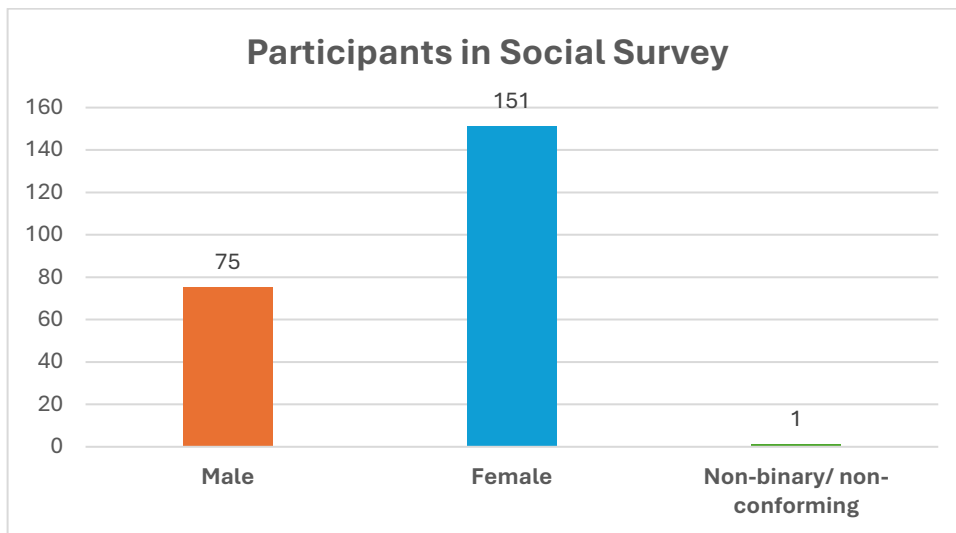


Figure 4: Social Survey Q.3: Answered: 227; Skipped: 3

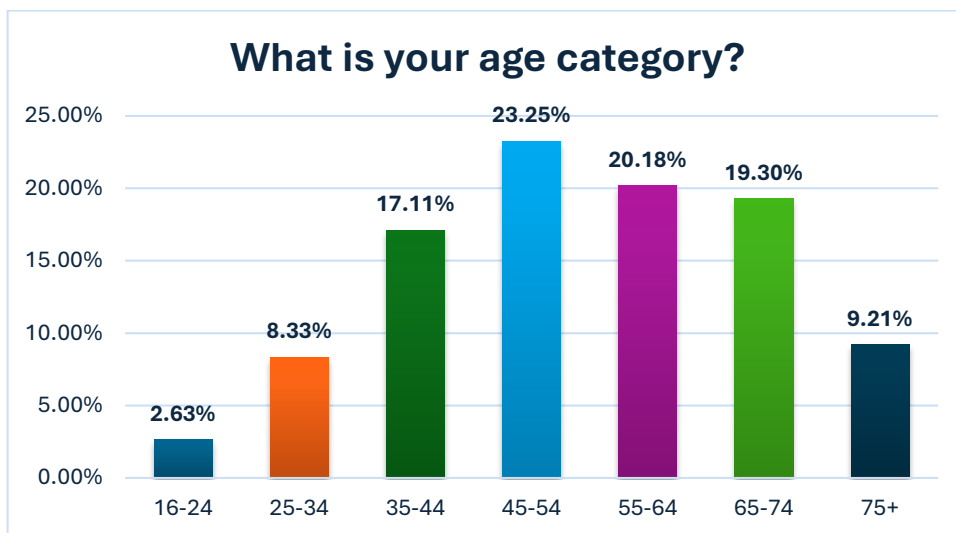


Figure 5: Social Survey Q.4: Answered: 228; Skipped: 2



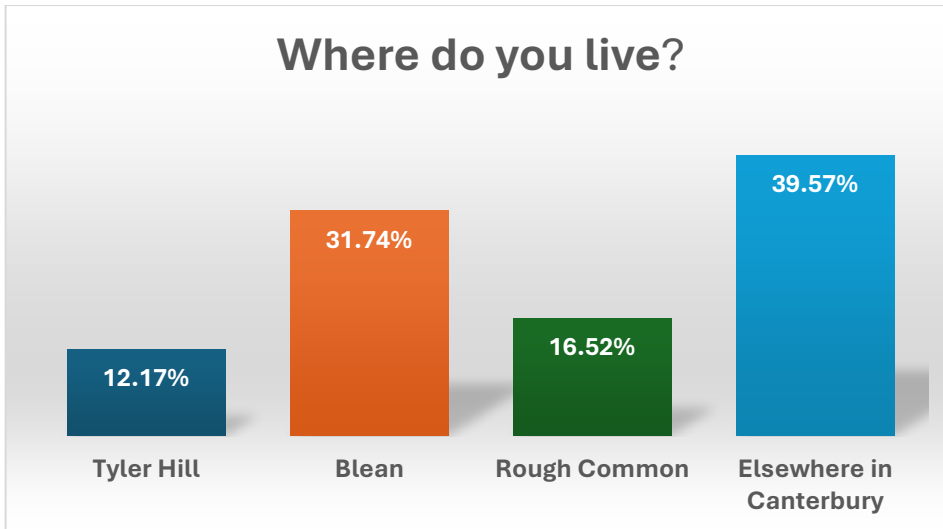


Figure 6: Social Survey Q.1: Answered: 230; Skipped: 0

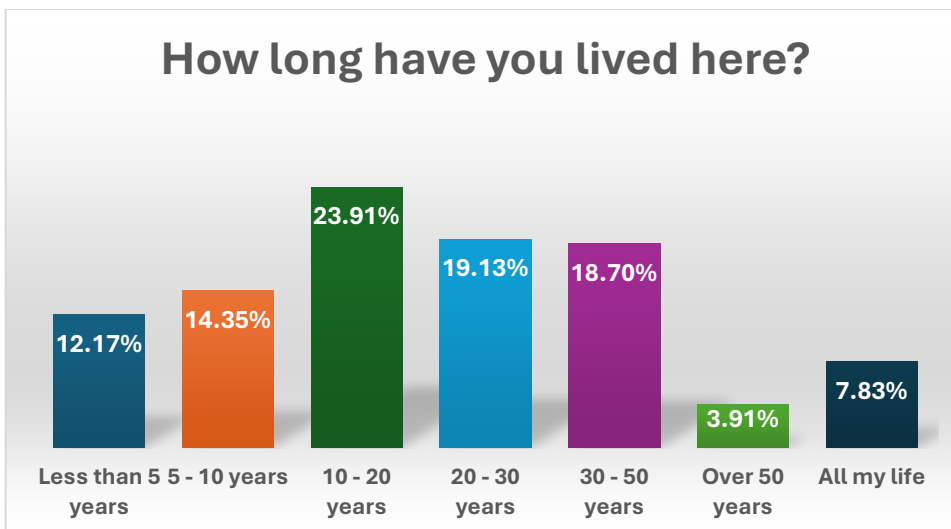


Figure 7: Social Survey Q.2: Answered: 230; Skipped: 0

## LIMITATIONS

The research focused on how the development plans impacted the three communities of Blean, Tyler Hill and Rough Common that surround the development site and people from nearby areas who regularly use the land. By design, it captured the views of those people most negatively affected by the proposed development and most likely to be opposed to it. The intention was not to present a balanced narrative of those in favour and those opposed to the proposed housing development but rather to explore how the proposals impact on the health and social well-being of communities closest to the site. Although the research didn't actively seek to find people in favour of the development, the findings reflect that there are people in the local communities and nearby area who support the development. Using the same participatory methodologies, future research could be expanded to capture the views of people who might be more likely to benefit from the proposed housing development.

The lack of participation of key stakeholders – including the Parish Councils of Blean and Rough Common; Canterbury City Council and key City Councillors, including those on the Planning Committee and the Local Plan

Working Group; and representatives from Blean Primary School – was also a limitation in the research, as the views of these institutions is not represented in the final report.<sup>8</sup>

Participants in the community research were largely older (aged 55 and older, with most aged 65 and older) and there was an apparent lack of ethnic diversity. The lack of age diversity can be partly explained by the timings of the focus group discussions and community walks. Four of the focus group discussions were held during daytime working hours when working adults and students were less likely to be able to attend; of the two focus group discussions held in the evening, one was quite poorly attended and the other cancelled due to lack of participants. The community walks were held at 8am, which also made it harder for working adults, students and parents with young children to attend. Unfortunately, the weekend community walks were cancelled due to bad weather ([Storm Bert](#)).<sup>9</sup> Although data on ethnic background was not collected as part of the research, from observation there did not appear to be significant ethnic diversity among the participants. It is possible that the sampling methods, outreach and dissemination of information about the research did not adequately reach a representative age, social and ethnic cross-section of the impacted communities.

Finally, it should be noted that as the principal researcher for this study, I have a close association with one of the impacted communities, Tyler Hill, where I grew up and my parents still live. I was motivated to carry out this research partly because of my own close attachment to the land proposed for development and my childhood memories of growing up in this area. Despite not having lived in Tyler Hill for over 30 years, I was interested to explore why local communities are so attached to their local landscape and countryside and how the threat of losing it impacts their health and well-being. While I am not a local resident, nor have I been involved in protesting against the proposed development, I do sympathise with the local communities and share their sense of grief that this beautiful countryside could be lost.

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Description of the Land

#### 1) Wildlife and Biodiversity

The land proposed for development is an area of open fields and hedgerows, ancient woodland, streams, ponds and productive agricultural land. It forms an important wildlife corridor between the East and West parts of the wider Blean woodland complex – the largest area of uninterrupted ancient woodland in southern England – and was designated an area of potential rewilding and biodiversity enhancement by Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT) in the [2030 Wilder Kent Strategy](#).<sup>iii</sup> The Sarre Penn stream, a tributary of the Great Stour River, runs through the valley (hence its name the ‘Sarre Penn valley’). The land includes 100 hectares of agricultural land and has been used for cattle-grazing and arable production (wheat, barley, rapeseed, beans and maize). It is classified as Grade 2 and 3 agricultural land under the [agricultural land classification \(ALC\)](#), which is some of the best and most versatile agricultural land in the country. There are three areas of ancient woodland on the site: ‘West Triangle Wood’, ‘Long Thin Wood’ (as local residents refer to it) and a third piece of woodland, ‘Foxborough Shaw’.<sup>10</sup> The University of Kent’s [2014 Woodland Management Plan](#) defined these areas as ‘ancient woodland’ due to the

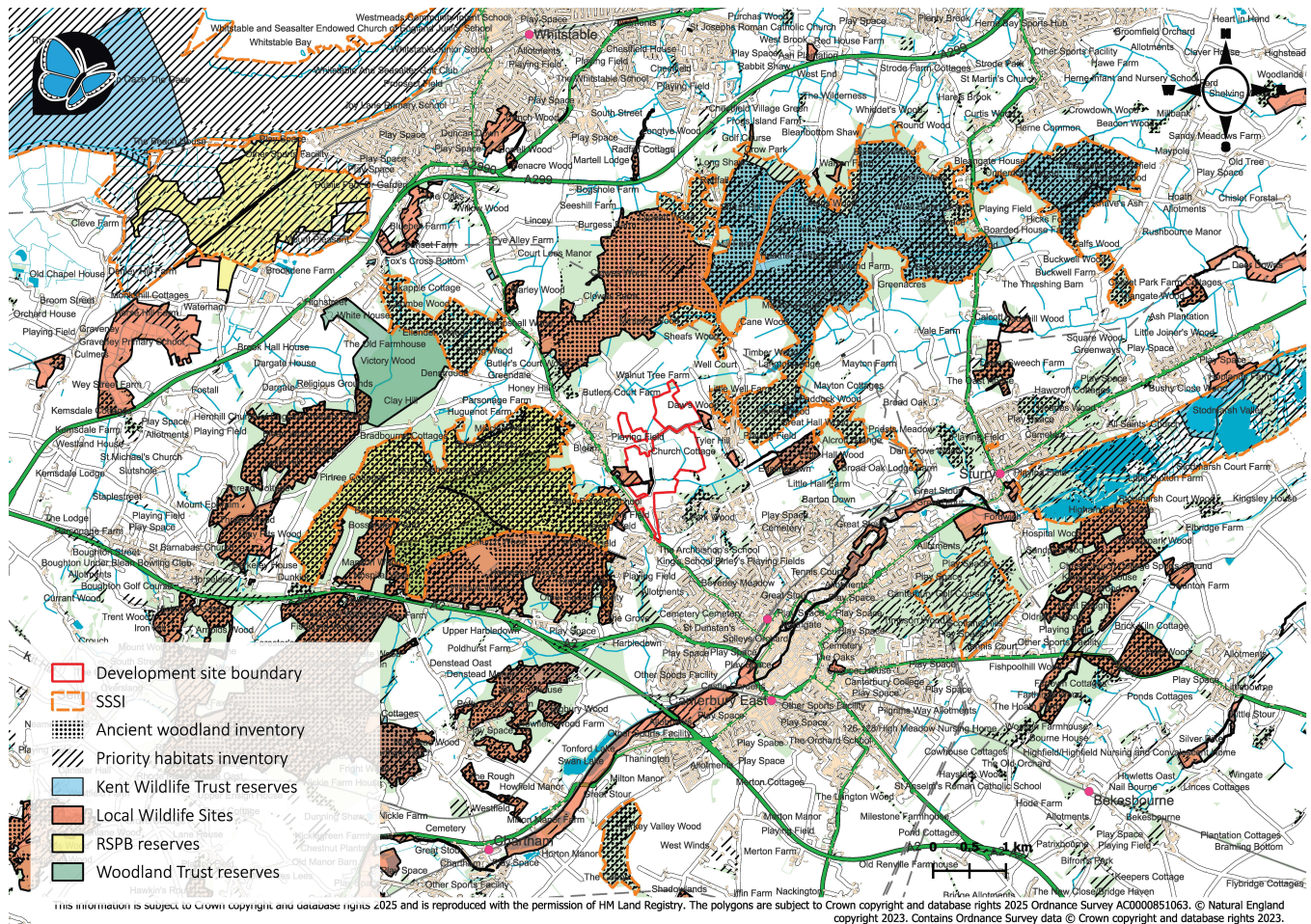
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<sup>8</sup> These stakeholders were all invited to participate in the research but declined for various reasons.

<sup>9</sup> Ten people signed up for research activities but did not come or sent excuses that they were unable to attend (these included four people aged 55-64; three people aged 45-54; one person aged 35-44; one aged 25-34 and one aged 18-24). Two people tried to attend events that had been cancelled.

<sup>10</sup> See p. 118 of the University of Kent Framework Masterplan, April 2019, for a description of the ancient woodland <https://media.www.kent.ac.uk/se/23966/draft-framework-masterplan-2019.pdf>

presence of *Anemone nemorosa* (Wood Anemone),<sup>11</sup> which, according to the [Woodland Trust](#), is an ancient woodland indicator species.



Blean Woodland Complex Map: Courtesy of Kent Wildlife Trust

The ancient woodland, hedgerows, ponds and streams throughout the site provide a habitat for several endangered and protected species, including Skylarks, Yellowhammers and Common Swifts; Brown Long-eared and Pipistrelle bats roost around St Cosmus and St Damian Church; and Great Crested Newts are found in ponds across the site, including in internationally-recognised research ponds on the University of Kent campus. Local residents have recorded more than 70 species of bird on the land over the past year, including sightings of Black Kite and Honey Buzzard (both rare or scarce), Firecrest, Goldcrest, Linnet, Tawny Owl, Kestrel, Common Buzzard, Kingfisher (on the Sarre Penn stream), Sparrowhawk, Stonechat, Nightingale, Siskin and Redwing.<sup>12</sup> Heath Fritillary butterflies, Hedgehogs, Badgers, Foxes, Field Mice, Bank Voles, Weasels, Slow-worms and Grass Snakes can all be found in the Sarre Penn valley; Smooth and Palmate Newts, frogs and toads thrive in ponds and wetlands across the site, while the Sarre Penn stream provides habitat for several varieties of fish and invertebrates, including Tench, Brown Trout, European Eel and freshwater shrimp.

<sup>11</sup> See p. 28, Fig 1, 6.2.4 University of Kent, Estates, Landscape and Biodiversity Strategy 2021-2025

<sup>12</sup> See [Save The Blean](#) for more information. All sightings of birds have been recorded by local residents on citizen science sites such as [iRecord](#) and [BirdTrack](#).





Wildlife seen on Blean land by local residents: Firecrest, September 2024: Kieron McDonnell; Heath Fritillary butterfly, June 2024: Kieron McDonnell; Yellowhammer, April 2024: Job Dexters; Common Trout in the Sarre Penn, June 2025: Job Dexters

## 2) Cultural Heritage and History

The site is rich in cultural heritage, with archaeological evidence of Mesolithic, Bronze and Iron Age, Roman and Medieval settlements in the area. It contains a Scheduled Ancient Monument, several Grade II-listed buildings and sits within the wider area of a World Heritage Site (Canterbury Cathedral).<sup>13</sup>

### a) *St Cosmus and St Damian Church*

At the centre of the site, surrounded by fields, sits the picturesque [St Cosmus and St Damian Church](#), which dates to before 1233, with references to a church recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 and suggestions that an early pre-Conquest church may have existed even earlier. One theory is that the present church dates from 598 when the monks accompanying St Augustine from Rome set up a shrine to St Cosmus and St Damian along the Roman Salt Road that ran from Canterbury to Seasalter. Old maps of the area show a spring behind the church also dedicated to St Cosmus and St Damian, suggesting that St Augustine's monks might have built a Christian church on the site of a pre-Christian shrine. Churches dedicated to the [saints of Cosmus and Damian](#) were rare in Britain (there are only four in the whole country) but were common in Rome, including the Basilica of Saints Cosmus and Damian built in the Forum in 530.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The site is partially within the Blean Conservation Area, Amery Court (Blean) Conservation Area, the Hothe Court Conservation Area and the Crab and Winkle Railway Conservation Area.

<sup>14</sup> For further information about the history of St Cosmus and St Damian Church, see [www.bleanchurch.net/history/](http://www.bleanchurch.net/history/)





St Cosmus and St Damian Church, Blean, May 2024: Stephen Burke

### **b) Archaeological Evidence**

[Archaeological explorations](#) around the church carried out by the University of Kent in 2020 found evidence of settlements in the area dating back to the Mesolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages.<sup>iv</sup> In the 1980s, an extensive [local archaeological survey](#) established evidence of a Roman villa in the field to the south-west of the church, believed to be inhabited between the 1st and 3rd centuries. Roman bricks found in the west wall of the church and the old Roman Salt Road running along the east of the church, which brought salt from the saltpans in Seasalter to Whitstable, are further evidence of significant Roman settlement in this area. The local archaeological survey also revealed evidence of a large fortified manor house built in the 13th century on the same site as the Roman villa (now classified as a 'scheduled monument' site). The Domesday Book notes 12 farmsteads or holdings surrounding the manor, suggesting that St Cosmus and St Damian Church served the manor and its surrounding farmsteads, which would explain its remote location. The whole area was heavily fortified with a wall and moat built around the church and the manor, some of it still visible today. An old drovers' route that connected the villages of Tyler Hill and Blean is still in use (Tyler Hill Road).<sup>15</sup>

### **c) The Crab and Winkle Railway**

The land is also an important heritage site in [Britain's national transport history](#). The old Crab and Winkle railway line runs through the site and was the first passenger railway in the world, taking daytrippers from Canterbury to the seaside in Whitstable, and the first to issue season tickets. It is now a designated Conservation Area. Built in 1830, some of the great 19th-century industrialists were involved in designing and building the Crab and Winkle railway – George Stephenson and his son Robert built the line and the Invicta locomotive that pulled the carriages out of Whitstable; Thomas Telford built the harbour in Whitstable where the railway ends; and Isambard Kingdom Brunel inspected the railway tunnel in Tyler Hill (the first passenger tunnel in the world and an engineering feat of its time).<sup>16</sup> The line was in use for more than 120 years – the last passengers travelled in 1931 and it continued to bring goods from Whitstable harbour to Canterbury until 1952.<sup>17</sup> Today parts of the railway line run through private properties and some is on University of Kent land. It is largely derelict and overgrown, although some of the old railway sleepers and track have been repurposed as bridges and steps.

<sup>15</sup> For more information about the history of the area, see <https://bleanchurch.net/history/> and [www.savetheblean.org/heritage-under-threat/](http://www.savetheblean.org/heritage-under-threat/)

<sup>16</sup> For more information about the history of the Crab and Winkle Railway, see <https://crabandwinkle.org/past/>

<sup>17</sup> It was temporarily reopened in 1953 after the great floods to bring emergency relief to the people of Whitstable.



The Invicta locomotive, Whitstable Museum & Gallery; Steps made from old railway sleepers leading down to the disused Crab & Winkle line: Jonathan Baker, April 2024

### 3) Recreation and Rights of Way

Several public footpaths and public rights of way run through the land, including an ancient footpath linking the village of Tyler Hill and St Cosmus and St Damian Church, footpaths to Blean village and Blean Primary School and footpaths that run along the Sarre Penn stream. The Crab and Winkle Way (along the Roman Salt Road) is a popular 7.6-mile cycle route from Canterbury to Whitstable that is part of the [National Cycle Network](#) and used regularly by cyclists, runners and walkers for recreation and commuting, as well as by [Canterbury Park Run](#) for its weekly 5km-run. The [Kent Community Oasis Garden](#), a collaborative initiative between the University of Kent and East Kent Mind (a charity promoting better mental health and well-being across east Kent), is located exactly where the access route to the development site is planned.

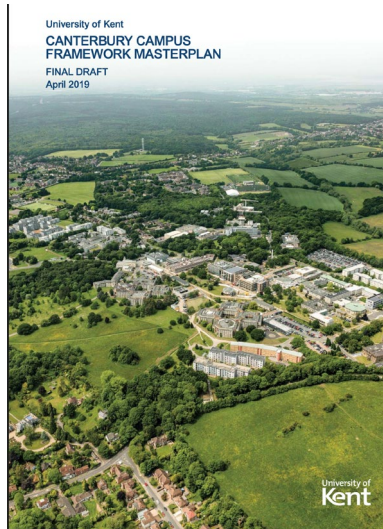


Public footpaths: Canterbury Outer Ring Walk, May 2024: Ania Bobrowicz and Crab and Winkle Way, April 2024: Wendy Stennett



## B. University of Kent

The University of Kent bought the Sarre Penn valley land from the Eastbridge Hospital of St Thomas the Martyr in 2005 and rents the land to tenant farmers for arable crops and cattle-grazing.<sup>18</sup> The university's vision for management of this land was laid out in its [2019 Framework Masterplan](#) (the Masterplan). Led by the nationally-renowned architect and planner Sir Terry Farrell, the Masterplan provided a planning strategy for the university and Canterbury City Council as part of the 2031 Canterbury District Local Plan and was the product of a lengthy consultative process not only with statutory bodies such as Kent County Council, Canterbury City Council and Highways Kent but also with local stakeholders, residents' associations, community groups, Parish Councils, businesses and the wider public.<sup>19</sup>



University of Kent, Canterbury Campus Framework Masterplan, April 2019

As part of the development of the Masterplan, the University of Kent developed a Strategic Spatial Vision for the development of its campus in consultation with neighbouring local communities which states that: *“The campus and nearby University-owned land will be developed in ways that support its special natural and semi-natural environment, the setting of the Canterbury’s World Heritage Site and local heritage assets. **Future development will respect the quality of life and day-to-day activities of people living and working in the surrounding villages and residential neighbourhoods and seek to mitigate any change to the wider surrounding area in terms of traffic, car parking, air quality or demand for recreation.** The campus and development on nearby University-owned land will be outward facing and seek to improve the lives of local people as well as being an exemplar for environmental sustainability.”*<sup>20</sup> [Emphasis added]

The Masterplan describes the Sarre Penn valley as *“a great asset to the campus in providing a green setting to the north of the University as well as a more rural landscape character, which is a major part of the University’s attractiveness to students, academic staff and visitors to the University”* and highlights its value providing *“a punctuation in the landscape between the campus and the outlying villages of Blean and Tyler Hill”*. It proposes maintaining *“the overall agricultural landscape”* of this area *“whilst developing and improving the natural, built*

<sup>18</sup> A few university buildings are also located on the land purchased from the Eastbridge Hospital; these include the sports pavilion buildings, the Oaks Nursery and the Kent Community Oasis Garden.

<sup>19</sup> University of Kent, Canterbury Campus Framework Masterplan, Final Draft, April 2019, <https://media.www.kent.ac.uk/se/23966/draft-framework-masterplan-2019.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> p.62-63, paragraph 4.1, University of Kent, Canterbury Campus Framework Masterplan, Final Draft, April 2019, <https://media.www.kent.ac.uk/se/23966/draft-framework-masterplan-2019.pdf>

and cultural dimensions”, using the land to give the university “a more open outward looking aspect” and to “create strong connections with its neighbouring communities”.<sup>21</sup>

The Masterplan proposed enhancing the historical landscape character of the Sarre Penn valley, promoting biodiversity, diversifying the wetland environment and creating new wildlife habitats through restoring the hedgerows to create wildlife corridors from the Blean woodlands to Tyler Hill. It recommended managing existing woodland areas, preserving the bankside vegetation along the Sarre Penn as an “eco-highway for fauna” and creating connected ponds and wetlands to “reconnect the stream to its floodplain” and “attenuate flood water along the stream”.<sup>22</sup> Recognising the “high value of this character area as predominantly open amenity space and agricultural land”, the Masterplan recommended only very limited development of small-scale buildings for quiet academic studies, seminars and retreats and spaces for nature and agricultural studies and wildlife observation, while footpaths and cycle paths across the Sarre Penn valley, including the length of the Sarre Penn stream and along the old Crab and Winkle railway line, would be improved and upgraded.<sup>23</sup> It concluded that “Many opportunities exist to ecologically enhance this land in terms of biodiversity and showcase the principles of sustainable farming. In keeping with local strategies, the ambition is for Skylarks and Yellowhammers to be singing from every field and hedgerow respectively. Perhaps even the Turtle Dove and Brown Hare, two of the England’s rarest farmland species, could be attracted to the campus”.<sup>24</sup>

Facing serious financial challenges, like other higher-education institutions across the country, the University of Kent has departed from its vision for sustainable environmental management of the Sarre Penn valley to promote biodiversity and improve the lives of neighbouring communities. Far from maintaining the rural landscape character and green space north of its campus, it proposes selling the land for intensive residential development in a move that local communities feel directly contradicts its commitment to respect their “quality of life and day-to-day activities”.<sup>25</sup>

### C. Canterbury District Draft Local Plan 2040

On 12 March 2024, Canterbury City Council published its draft [District Local Plan 2040](#) and opened a three-month public consultation including public information meetings with the City Council officers and the opportunity for members of the public to submit comments on the Plan through an online platform, or in writing. This was the second version of the draft Local Plan following a public consultation on an earlier draft between October 2022 and January 2023. A major change to the second draft of the Local Plan was the addition of 100 hectares of land owned by the University of Kent between the villages of Tyler Hill, Blean and Rough Common (referred to as Site C12). The University of Kent site was included in the earlier 2022 draft of the Local Plan as an ‘opportunity area’ that Canterbury City Council said was “not needed to meet identified housing needs at present” but would be kept under review while the council worked with the university “to further understand the potential of this area for development”.<sup>26</sup> A full proposal for a “freestanding” “new rural settlement” of 2,000 new houses, a community hub of shops, businesses and services, a transport hub providing bus services

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<sup>21</sup> p.160-161, paragraph 7.5, University of Kent, Canterbury Campus Framework Masterplan, Final Draft, April 2019, <https://media.www.kent.ac.uk/se/23966/draft-framework-masterplan-2019.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> p. 161, paragraph 7.5.1, University of Kent, Canterbury Campus Framework Masterplan, Final Draft, April 2019, <https://media.www.kent.ac.uk/se/23966/draft-framework-masterplan-2019.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> p. 168, paragraph 7.5.3, University of Kent, Canterbury Campus Framework Masterplan, Final Draft, April 2019, <https://media.www.kent.ac.uk/se/23966/draft-framework-masterplan-2019.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> p. 161, paragraph 7.5.1, University of Kent, Canterbury Campus Framework Masterplan, Final Draft, April 2019, <https://media.www.kent.ac.uk/se/23966/draft-framework-masterplan-2019.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> p.62-63, paragraph 4.1, University of Kent, Canterbury Campus Framework Masterplan, Final Draft, April 2019, <https://media.www.kent.ac.uk/se/23966/draft-framework-masterplan-2019.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> p.79 Canterbury District Draft Local Plan to 2045

into Canterbury, two new primary schools and a wastewater treatment plant was included in the 2040 draft Local Plan.<sup>27</sup>



Canterbury District Local Plan 2040

Previous assessments of the same land by Canterbury City Council over the past five years have found it to be “technically unsuitable”<sup>28</sup> for development, with recommendations that its “strong rural character”<sup>29</sup> be preserved. The 2020 [Landscape Character Assessment and Biodiversity Appraisal](#) commissioned by the council in preparation for the new Local Plan identified key characteristics and value of the land including its productive farmland, the Sarre Penn stream, the Medieval landscape patterns, important archaeological sites, including St Cosmus and St Damian Church and the Crab and Winkle Railway, wide open gaps and views, an extensive network of public rights of way and its “strong rural character” that forms “an integral part of the wider Blean landscape between Canterbury City and the coast”.<sup>30</sup> It recommended that the land should be managed to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the Sarre Penn stream and wetland habitats; enhance connection with the wider Blean woodland area; conserve and improve historical sites and buildings and the Medieval landscape pattern; manage the farmland with nature-friendly farming; minimise road access and protect existing recreational opportunities. Notably, the report recommended to “maintain the essentially linear pattern of Blean and Tyler Hill villages **avoiding further infilling or extensions that would create a greater urban extent. Maintain the open rural gaps along the main north south road routes allowing views into the wider rural landscape and woodland, maintaining separation between built areas**” and to “conserve the rural character of the landscape ensuring that it continues to play a role in the separation of Blean and Tyler Hill with Rough Common and the University of Kent to the south, and particularly the role of the Sarre Penn Valley in defining the southern edge of development in relation to the Stour Valley slopes”.<sup>31</sup> [emphasis added]

A [Strategic Land Availability Assessment](#) (SLAA) carried out in July 2022 to assess the suitability of all the sites put forward in the ‘call for sites’ for the draft Local Plan determined that the land proposed by the University of Kent between the villages of Tyler Hill and Blean was “technically unsuitable” for development and identified “significant and minor negative impacts” that “cannot be suitably addressed”.<sup>32</sup> It concluded that the sites proposed by the university on this land had inadequate access and limited public transport options, meaning “future occupiers would be dependent on private car to access day to day services”.<sup>33</sup> Two of the proposed sites were in a conservation area and all five sites were found to have a landscape impact and heritage and ecology

<sup>27</sup> See p. 51 [Draft Canterbury district Local Plan \(2040\)](#)

<sup>28</sup> p. 34, Canterbury City Council [Sustainability Appraisal of Strategic Land Availability Assessment](#), July 2022

<sup>29</sup> p.164, Section E3, Canterbury Landscape Character Assessment and Biodiversity Appraisal, October 2020

<sup>30</sup> p.164, Section E3, Canterbury Landscape Character Assessment and Biodiversity Appraisal, October 2020

<sup>31</sup> p.167, Section E3, Canterbury Landscape Character Assessment and Biodiversity Appraisal, October 2020

<sup>32</sup> p. 34, Sustainability Appraisal of Strategic Land Availability Assessment, July 2022

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*

concerns. Similarly, the [2022 Sustainability Appraisal](#) rejected land in Blean (referred to as ‘Amery Court Farm’) as suitable for a ‘garden community’ settlement due to its close proximity to the Blean woodland complex and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and the lack of appropriate road access, meaning the site would be car-dependent, thus increasing congestion in Rough Common and Canterbury city centre.<sup>34</sup>

Prior to the publication of the 2024 draft of the District Local Plan (2040), in December 2023 Canterbury City Council produced a revised [Sustainability Appraisal of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment \(SLAA\)](#), which updated the information in the July 2022 SLAA. Whereas the July 2022 SLAA had rejected the University of Kent sites as “technically unsuitable” for development, the December 2023 SLAA reversed this assessment, stating that *“the site is identified as suitable, available and achievable... While the SA has identified significant and minor negative impacts it is determined when reviewed alongside the SLAA on the balance of impacts and considering possible mitigation and design, that the majority of these impacts can be addressed”*.<sup>35</sup> Site C12 was therefore included in the new Local Plan as a *“mixed-used freestanding settlement”* for 2,000 houses and associated infrastructure, even though none of the landscape, ecological, heritage or transport factors previously identified by Canterbury City Council as “technically unsuitable” for development had physically or materially changed between July 2022 and December 2023.<sup>v</sup>

The public consultation on the 2040 draft District Local Plan closed on 3 June 2024. A total of 3,819 responses was submitted, of which 1,244 related to the University of Kent site. Canterbury City Council [published the responses](#) in September 2024,<sup>vi</sup> along with an announcement about a change in the [draft Local Plan timetable](#). In June 2025, the City Council issued a further [change](#) to the draft Local Plan timetable, announcing that it was postponing the publication of the final draft of the Local Plan until spring 2026, with the final Plan due to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in autumn 2026.<sup>36</sup> An additional Regulation 18 consultation will be held on the draft Local Plan in September 2025 (the fifth public consultation on the new Local Plan) and a final Regulation 19 consultation will take place in spring 2026. The Leader of the City Council explained: *“This relatively short delay will give us more time to work through the challenges and present the best possible plan we can while having the right evidence to hand when we need to make the inevitably tough decisions we will be faced with.”*<sup>37</sup>

## KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of the research are presented through the voices of the participants. Their lived experience of being caught in the middle of plans for a large housing development and their emotional responses to the loss of green space and nature and the profound alteration of their living environment are at the centre of this narrative. Photographs taken by members of the local community of the land, its nature and wildlife are used throughout the report to accompany the quotes and testimonies.

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<sup>34</sup> pp. 59-60, paragraph 5.6.24, Sustainability Appraisal Report, Canterbury District Local Plan (2020-2045)

<sup>35</sup> P.39, Sustainability Appraisal of Strategic Land Availability Assessment, December 2023

<sup>36</sup> The change in the Local Plan timetable takes into account the revised [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (published in December 2024) with new local government housing targets as well as a further ‘Call for Sites’ for more brownfield sites by the City Council to be identified.

<sup>37</sup> [Statement](#) by Councillor Alan Baldock, Leader of the Council, on June 6.





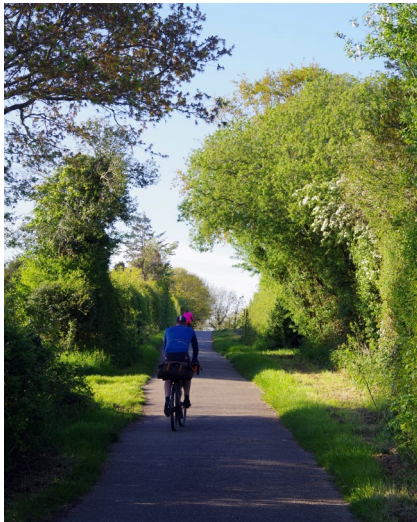
Community mapping exercise, November 2024: Rachael Reilly

## 1. ATTACHMENT TO THE LAND

**“My entire childhood is in these fields and valleys and brooks... always lived here.”<sup>38</sup>**

### a) Use of the Land in Daily Lives

The land is used regularly by people in the local communities and surrounding areas for a range of different recreational, sporting, well-being and commuting purposes. The Crab and Winkle Way is particularly well used by parents and children as a safer and healthier way to reach Blean Primary School, by cyclists commuting to work and to the university and by people cycling, running, walking and even horse-riding for fitness and pleasure.



Cyclists on Crab and Winkle Way, 4 May 2024: Stephen Burke; Horse-riders, Crab and Winkle Way, June 2024: Margaret Connolly; Walkers Crab and Winkle Way, November 2024: Rachael Reilly

<sup>38</sup> Participant in Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 27 November



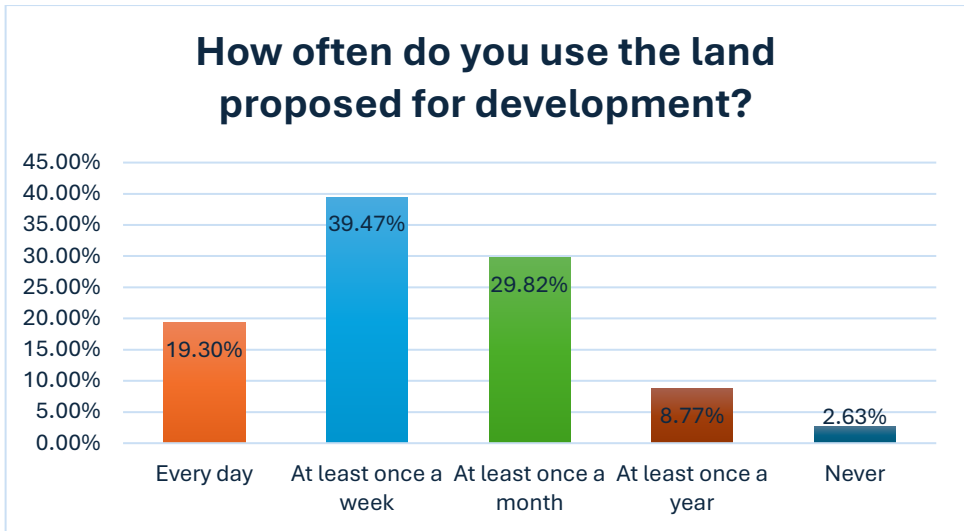


Figure 8: Social Survey Q14: Answered: 228; Skipped: 2

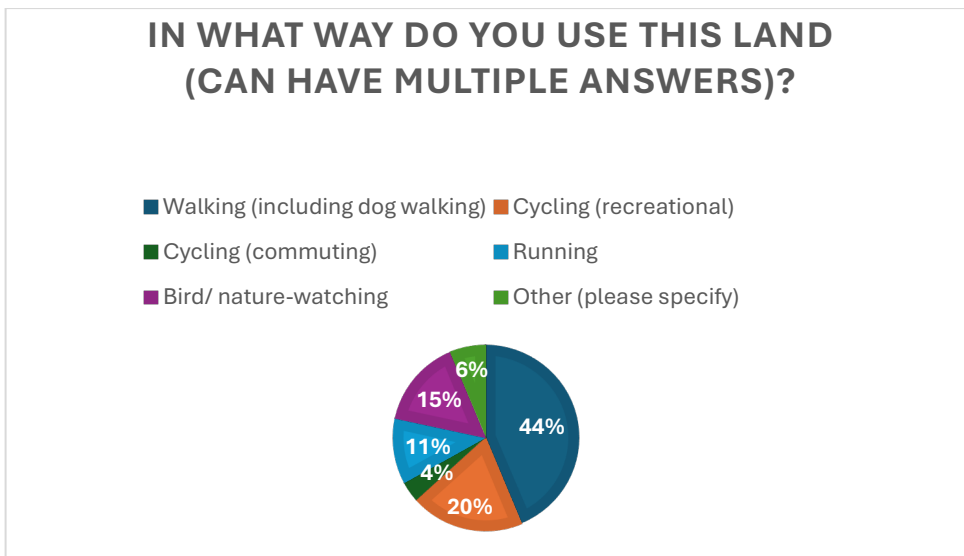


Figure 9: Social Survey Q15: Answered: 224; Skipped: 7

Other uses of the land cited in the social survey include walking from Tyler Hill to Blean to attend Blean church, accessing Blean shops, meeting friends, star-gazing and photography.

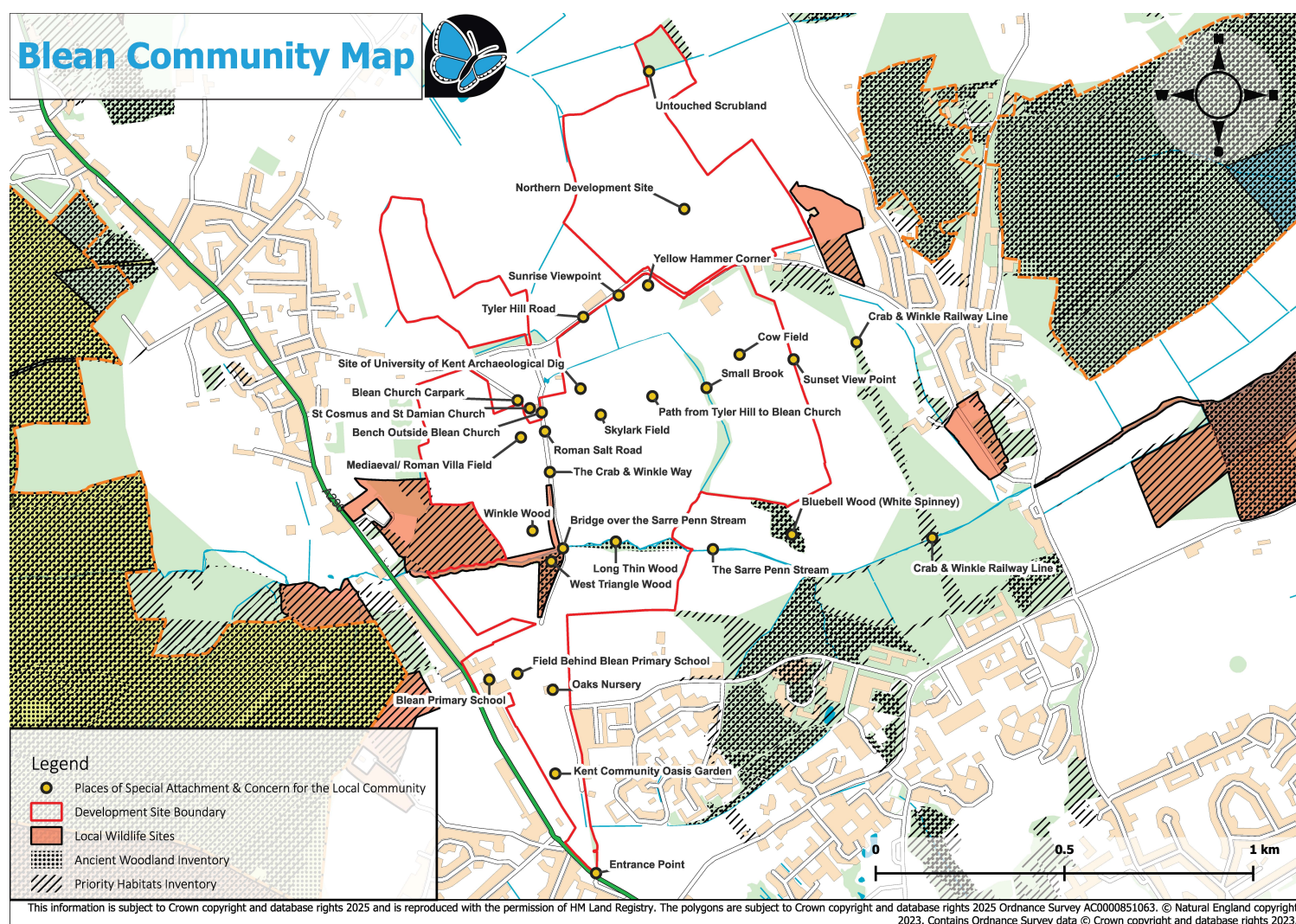
Participants in the social research said that the loss of this land would significantly impact their daily lives and well-being:

*"For me, this is also a real area for recreation as well. I cherish my cycle route... I love the Crab and Winkle... I cycle along the Crab and Winkle, I run the park run and I go all the way through to Clowes Wood."*  
 [Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November]

*"I use the woods regularly for running and for cycling and occasionally for walking when I have some time. I've always loved the Sarre Penn valley. I think it's a beautiful place and I will be very depressed to see it go."*  
 [Speaker C, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

## b) Favourite Places and Memories of the Land

*“I have walked every square inch of this land over nearly 20 years. I know every blade of grass, every tree and every branch of every tree. I have spent a long time in all the little pockets of this land, whether it’s on the Crab and Winkle railway line, whether it’s in the fields along the Sarre Penn, in Long Thin Wood. I’ve seen it in every phase of the seasons. I’ve seen it in every phase of the weather, I’ve seen it in every condition, day and night.”<sup>39</sup>*



Community Map of the Blean, based on information gathered during the participatory research: Courtesy of Kent Wildlife Trust

During the community mapping exercises and community walks, participants identified favourite parts of the land or places associated with special memories. These included a special view of the landscape, a place where they sit and contemplate, a particular hedgerow or piece of woodland, or the Sarre Penn stream running through the valley. Some participants had memories of playing along the old Crab and Winkle railway line or on the banks of the Sarre Penn stream as children; others associated the land with family memories, of children growing up, walking with animals, and in some cases with family members who had since died.

<sup>39</sup> Individual interview with Rowan\*, 25 November. \*All names in the report have been changed.



### Childhood Memories

Some participants had lived all their lives in the area and not only had vivid childhood memories of the land but also identified with the land as part of who they are and where they had grown up.

*"I've got very strong ties to the village... almost took it for granted, which is probably a terrible thing to say, but you play in the field, you do poo sticks at the bridge, you do it, your kids do it. Married, christened, confirmed at the church, everything. So many, so many connections."*

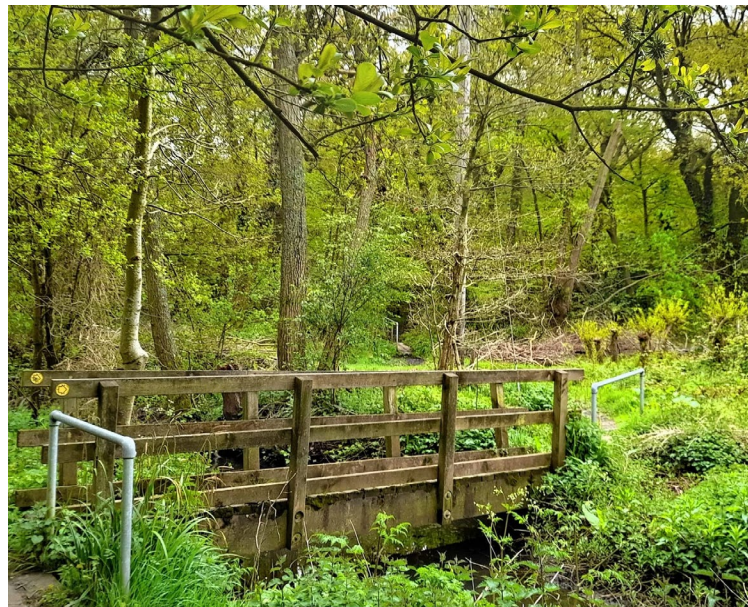
[Participant C, Community Walk, 21 November]

*"I was born here... so I know the area very well. We walk across the fields to church once or twice a week and would have roamed around all of it a lot trespassing when I was a child, so I know every single bit of the country around Tyler Hill generally... I have a whole lifetime of memories, some of which I've forgotten, and they're only just coming back to me now... some of it seems a very long time ago, you know, when we were teenagers. But I suppose it's where you're brought up. It's going to be part of your identity."*

[Oral History with Ash\* while walking the land, 21 November]

*"I've lived on and off in the area for 47 years. I've lived, played in the area. I took kids to cycle here, walked here, walk most of the time now with my dog in the woods and all along the paths.... When we were kids we used to walk across here from school, walk through this field and the next field was just known as the 'horses field' because there were some wild horses there, then you'd go under the bridge... Now I walk a lot of the same routes that I walked as a child so like coming along here, getting to the bridge at the end, there was the cobnut tree, you know, trying to take the cobnuts off and see if you could eat them."*

[Participant B, Community Walk, 21 November]



Bridge over Sarre Penn stream on Crab and Winkle Way, May 2024: Ania Bobrowicz; Bridge over Sarre Penn, April 2024: Jeremy Kendall (Chaucer Fielder)

### Places Associated with Special Memories

Some people associated particular places on the site with special memories – such as the church where they had married or attended school concerts, the fields at the back of Blean Primary School where they had held school picnics, parts of the land they had played on with their children, or places where they had spotted special birds and wildlife:

*“But as my family were growing up, we’ve used the land all the time... I’ve spent years just behind where the school back entrance is, Blean Primary School, playing with the children, taking them in and out, collecting them, going for walks, dog walks, having rounders, playing cricket, family events, barbecues, the lot, everything.”* [Participant C, Community Mapping Exercise, Blean, 20 November]

*“As you go down the Sarre Penn on the left hand there’s a side stretch of ancient woodland which is beautiful. Bluebells and wood anemones. I was walking with my husband one day and we popped into there. And he suddenly said to me: ‘Be quiet, there’s a treecreeper!’. I’d never seen a treecreeper. And he’d never seen a treecreeper before. And it was a special moment because this bird was just creeping up the tree beautifully. And so that’s my special memory.”* [Participant A, Community Mapping Exercise, Blean, 20 November]

*“I used to pick up my daughter when she was at the nursery. And I used to grab any of her friends who wanted to come as well, and the parents of any friends, and we’d go trotting down into West Triangle Wood. There’s a fallen oak that provides a bridge over the river that’s been there for years and years and years. It probably fell 20 years ago. And of course, how great for the kids to, you know, to walk over this bridge and keep their balance: ‘Don’t fall in the river! Look at the trails of the badger, look at the trails of the fox, look at the mushrooms...!’ I’ve got photographs of taking my kids there.”*  
[Individual interview with Rowan,\* 25 November]

Many participants mentioned St Cosmus and St Damian Church (Blean church) as a special place that is central to the local community and has played an important part in their lives over many years. They associated the church with family occasions and special events including marriages, baptisms, funerals and school concerts:

*“Then we got married in the church. That was in 2021, so before this happened. And I’m not really a churchgoer, but it’s such a special place, you know, it’s such an amazing little 11th-, 12th-century structure and it’s evolved over the years. And when I was reading all the historical background to it, I thought this is amazing. You know, I didn’t realise how important it was from a social point of view...”*  
[Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November]





St Cosmos and St Damian Church, Blean, November 2024: Rachael Reilly; Graveyard, February 2025: Jeremy Kendall (Chaucer Fielder)

### ***Favourite Places***

Participants in the community mapping exercises and on the community walks pointed out their favourite places and parts of the land. For some people these were particular places or features of the land, but others explained that their attachment was to the whole landscape, the views and the sense of open countryside, green space and nature:

*"I like it there at sunset... looking over that way because the sun, well, that's west and so you get the sun setting in the trees, and it's nice when the cows are there too... I think that's a beautiful view, cows all there in the field and orange."* [Participant C, Community Mapping Exercise, Tyler Hill, 21 November]

*"I would say for me, like in the morning when you run and the sun is coming up, looking across here. But then also, you know, walking across those fields, really nice, really serene."*  
[Participant A, Community Mapping Exercise, Tyler Hill, 21 November]



Sunrise over the Blean, November 2024: Rachael Reilly; Sunset over the Blean, June 2025: Kat Barnett

Many participants said that their favourite place was the bench outside the church on the Crab and Winkle Way (the old Roman Salt Road) looking east across the fields to Tyler Hill and south to the university. They referred to this as 'Skylark Field' because of the endangered Skylarks that nest in the field every spring; there is even a sign sponsored by Canterbury City Council and Kent County Council (dated December 2011) entitled 'Salt, saints and skylarks' next to the bench. Several participants said how much they appreciated this spot for the beautiful views, the peace and tranquillity and listening to the Skylarks in the summer. They also mentioned that this was a favourite place to sit and meet friends.

*"Just sitting there and going to the church itself. That's on the actual footpath – there's a chair there, so you can sit and look out, sitting on the bench. So it's looking down across the bare fields with views across to the university..."* [Participant B, Community Mapping Exercise, Blean, 27 November]

*"I love all this bit of the Crab and Winkle. It's a lovely walk. It's away from the road. That bit that would be a favourite for me too going across that field - the Skylarks live there. And that's just amazing. That's wonderful."* [Participant B, Community Mapping Exercise, Tyler Hill, 21 November]



Salt, saints and skylarks sign outside Blean church; Bench outside Blean church, November 2024: Rachael Reilly

### c) Self-identification with the Countryside

***"It makes me feel very sad, to be honest. I moved to Blean knowing that the village was surrounded by farmland and it's nice in the countryside. I like to be in the countryside."***<sup>40</sup>

Several participants in the research described themselves as being a 'country person' and expressed a strong personal attachment to the land and nature. This applied equally to those who had not grown up in the countryside but who had consciously chosen to move and live there and identified with a more rural lifestyle. They felt this would be existentially threatened by a large housing development that would turn their local area into a conurbation and destroy what had attracted them to move to this area in the first place:

<sup>40</sup> Social Survey Response, Q. 23



*"I've been here, I want to say five years now, but I also studied here 12- 13 years ago at the University of Kent. So I kind of fell in love with the area then. I'm originally from London, so it's quite different, all of the woods and the fields and stuff. And I just loved the countryside.... I just thought I was a country girl, really. So I wanted when I could move out of my parents to find a place in the country. And I fell in love with this area."*  
[Speaker D, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

*"I've been living here since 1997. My wife and I and family were attracted to Tyler Hill because it's separate from Canterbury and it's surrounded by countryside and it's got a sense of a village, even though it's very close to Canterbury. And what this development does is threaten the whole sense of being in a village. And the reason in fact that we came to live here."* [Speaker G, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

One interviewee described her children's attachment to the land:

*"They're out there walking the fields and they know all the bird names and you know it's like we're not twee about it, we live in it. We inhabit this space... it's really a shame that more people don't live like this, kind of engaged with the land. You know, the kids really understand it. We grow things. They grow their own vegetables. We plant saplings. They understand what the value of nature is."*  
[Individual interview with Hazel,\* 18 November]



Fields with crops, May 2025: Wendy Stennett

#### d) Changes in Land-use since knowing about the Development

***"I walk more often so I can enjoy the beauty of Blean before it disappears."*<sup>41</sup>**

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<sup>41</sup> Social Survey Response, Q. 18



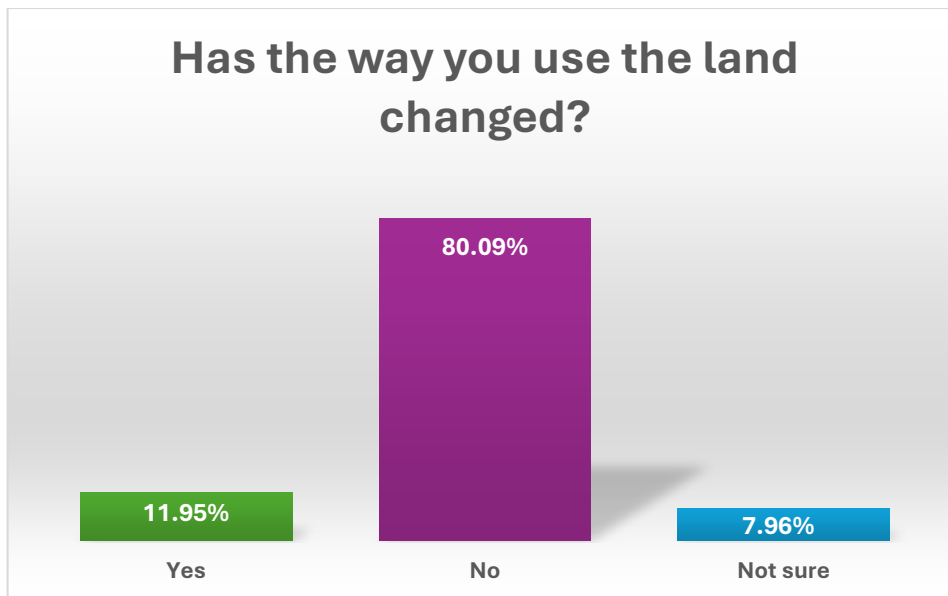


Figure 10: Social Survey Q17: Answered: 226; Skipped: 4

In both the Social Survey and during the focus group discussions and community walks, participants were asked if the way in which they used the land had changed since they found out about the proposed housing development. Most respondents (80% in the social survey) said that the way they used the land had not changed since they found out about the development. Out of 37 people who responded to a question about how their use of the land had changed, 15 (40.5%) said they used the land more regularly now and appreciated it more knowing it may be lost.

- *I still use the land as I have done. In fact, the proposal has increased my use of the land and my appreciation of it.*
- *The threat of 2,000 houses has made me value the land more and appreciate how precious it is, especially when greenfield sites around us are all being swallowed up for housing.*
- *I appreciate the tranquility more, knowing it isn't a given. Trying not to take it for granted that the land use will remain unchanged.*
- *It has become more important to me. It is ancient woodland that needs protecting.*
- *It hasn't changed the way I use the land but has made me more aware of what would be lost if this awful development goes ahead.*
- *I try to use it more in case it's gone forever, but it is with a sense of foreboding.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 18

However, some respondents to the Social Survey and in the focus group discussions said they avoided the area now because it was too distressing to imagine the land being bulldozed and the countryside destroyed, while others said they still used the land but with a sense of great sadness and foreboding about what would be lost:

- *I try to avoid it now as it just depresses me to know it is going.*
- *I just feel so very sad when I go for my walks.*
- *Every time I pass through Blean I am filled with a deep sense of sadness that future generations won't be able to experience the gateway to our natural environment as I was able to when I was growing up.*
- *Every time I walk through the Sarre Penn valley I think of the damage the proposed development will do. That saddens me.*
- *Already impacting how much I enjoy visits to and through the area as I worry about the potential development.*

Social Survey Responses, Q18

These responses were echoed in the community research:

*"I always go in by the Kent College entrance, which is where it's all going to come in and out from, and for weeks I'd walk that area and I'd be looking at the trees and thinking 'now will they be able to save that tree?' 'Would they get a road? How will they get it in?'. And I was planning in my own head exactly where that road was going to go, which trees would have to go and which trees could possibly stay. And then 'how does it go up the Crab and Winkle line? Will they take out the forensic science building or will they leave that? Will Hothe Court be saved? What's going to happen to the Oasis [Garden] people?'. Because they have put a huge amount of time and effort into that garden. There are newts there which are research newts for the university. So why on Earth are they putting a road in there when they've got research newts? There are beehives. And I can't walk that now because I can see all that and I have visions of what's going to happen to them."* [Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

*"I'm sad, I walk out the back, walk through the campus, go for a walk and walk to the church. I just feel the sense of sadness, not despair, because I'm trying to keep positive but the idea... you look and you visualise how it could be and it's horrifying. It's really horrifying."*  
[Speaker C, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

*"It doesn't stop me using the land any more or less than I did before. It's just almost a sort of disbelief, really. Is this really just going to be some kind of housing estate or a new town? You know, I think it doesn't affect the way I use the land. It's just a sense of anger and depression actually more than anything else."*  
[Speaker G, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

**Summary:** Participants in the study demonstrated a strong connection to the land proposed for development. The land is used regularly by local residents and people from the surrounding area for a range of recreational, well-being and functional purposes. Many people use the land on a daily or weekly basis and the loss of this amenity would significantly impact their daily routines and quality of life. People identified favourite places and parts of the land and particular features and view spots associated with special memories. Several participants had lived in the area for all, or most, of their lives and had vivid childhood memories of the land, which they said formed part of their identity and who they were. Many people expressed a particularly strong attachment to St Cosmus and St Damian Church and the view across 'Skylark Field' from the Crab and Winkle Way. Although most people said that the way in which they used this land had not changed since finding out about the development, many people said that they used and appreciated it more, while some people said they now found it too sad and distressing to be on the land.

## 2. WHY PEOPLE VALUE THE LAND

***“For me it’s just being able to walk out of my door and walk immediately into what I would call deep countryside or tranquil countryside without having to get in the car or without having to walk miles before I get there.”<sup>42</sup>***

During the community research, participants highlighted the reasons they appreciated the land proposed for development. These included: open countryside and greenspace; a place of peace and tranquillity free from cars and pollution; nature and wildlife, including green fields, ancient woodland and hedgerows, the Sarre Penn stream and natural habitats for a variety of birds and wildlife; an ancient landscape with important historical, archaeological and cultural heritage sites; productive farmland; easy accessibility and a place for recreation; and a place to meet friends and socialise.

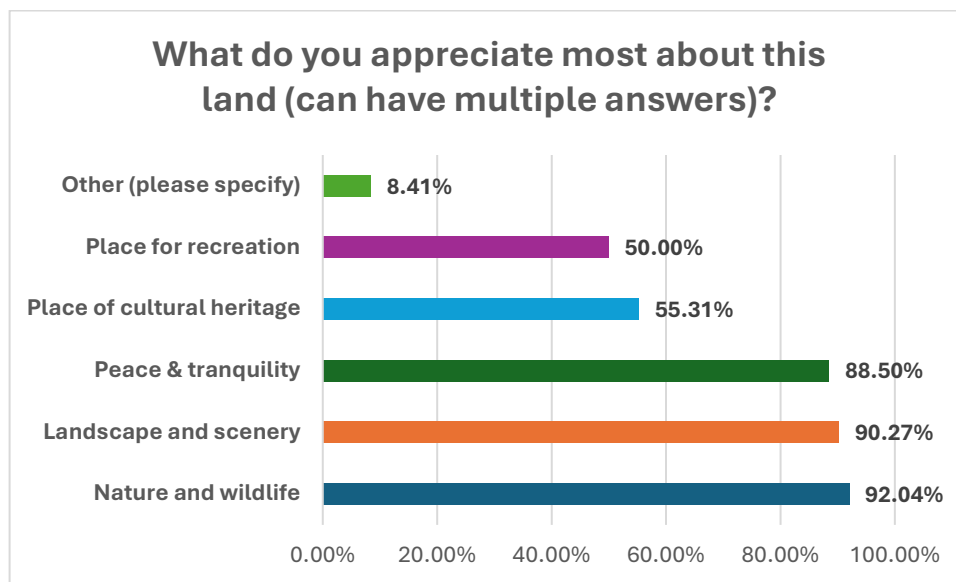


Figure 11: Social Survey Q. 16; Answered: 226; Skipped: 4

Under ‘other’ reasons for appreciating the land, respondents cited the farmland and farm produce; a car-free cycle and walking route between Canterbury and Whitstable and an important link to the sea; a place to socialise and bring people together for activities such as the park run, archaeological digs near the church, the Oasis Community Garden at the University of Kent and organised walks; a safe place for children to learn to cycle; open countryside between the towns of Canterbury and Whitstable; nature and fresh air and childhood memories.

### a) Nature and Wildlife

***“It’s my favourite part, but you have to trespass to get there. It’s a piece of scrub which has got fantastic birds in it... it hasn’t been cultivated for, I don’t know, 30 years or something, so it’s absolutely untouched – I don’t think anybody goes in there. And it’s full of warblers and birds which sing a lot in April, May, migrant ones mostly. It’s absolutely alive. And also the native Chaffinches and Bullfinches, all those sort of traditional hedgerow birds.”<sup>43</sup>***

<sup>42</sup> Speaker B, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November

<sup>43</sup> Oral history with Ash\* while walking the land, 21 November

Throughout the study, participants stressed how much they appreciated this land for its nature and wildlife. They underscored the importance of this land as a natural habitat for birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, including several protected and endangered species. Participants highlighted the important aquatic habitats around the Sarre Penn stream, the hedgerows that provide a rich habitat to birds, small mammals and insects, and the clusters of ancient woodland across the site that are covered with Wood Anemones and Bluebells in the spring.



Ancient hedgerows in spring, April 2024: Stennett; Song Thrush, January 2025: Kieron McDonnell; Sarre Penn stream in Long Thin Wood, February 2025: Kieron McDonnell

### **Untouched Scrubland**

Several participants noted untouched areas of bush and scrubland on the site that had not been farmed or cleared for many years and as a result are particularly rich in bird and plant life:

*"The other place there is loads of wildlife is behind the Hare and Hounds... it's an area that has never ever had anything done to it at all... I'm down there sort of pretty much soon after it gets light. But trees grow, trees rot, trees fall down and it's just completely left. Nothing actually gets done, managed, cut or anything in there and that is a lovely little wildlife place. In the spring it's just alive with birdsong first thing in the morning. It's lovely."* [Participant D, Community Mapping Exercise, Blean, 27 November]

### **Birds and Wildlife**

Some of the participants in the research were keen birdwatchers and wildlife observers; they described the birds and other wildlife they have seen on this land:

*"They're pretty Red-listed now, Skylarks, they're going down in numbers. But Nightingales, I've had several singing Nightingales in this area this spring, especially on this hedgerow, been one or two down here, a couple more down there. There's also quite a few Tawny Owls about as well – I've heard quite a few Tawny Owls when I was doing a Nightingale survey."* [Participant A, Community Walk, 21 November]

*"My best sighting was down the other end of Long Thin Wood, like right with the corner of Brotherhood Wood. I saw a Stoat, or was he a Weasel? I don't know because Stoats and Weasels are so similar but very distinguished. Well, he was looking at me and I looked at him for a while and that was a beautiful moment. The only time I've ever seen one."* [Participant E, Community Walk, 28 November]



*"I'm a big birdwatcher as well. I mean, there's Yellowhammer, there's Nightingale, which although we've heard some here, they're more in Clowes. We've got the Skylarks as well... the Skylarks nest all around here. We've got Barn Owl. We've had loads of Buzzards, and Buzzards just love it. Red Kite, always Red Kite in June over there. Treecreepers, lots of Treecreepers in the Blean woods, but you do see them occasionally on the ancient woodland... you often see Kestrels around here as well."*

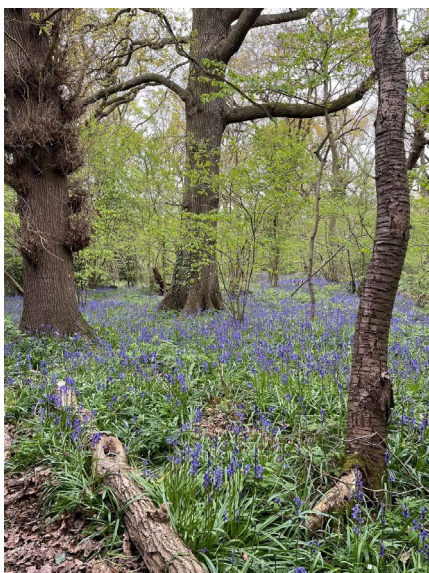
[Participant A, Community Mapping Exercise, Tyler Hill, 20 November]



Bullfinch, January 2025: Kieron McDonnell; Tawny Owl, March 2025: Job Dexters; Spotted Flycatcher, September 2024: Kieron McDonnell

### **Colloquial Names**

As part of their interaction with the land, people have given names to particular parts of the landscape, often relating to the birds and wildlife that are frequently seen in these areas. Two notable areas that many participants mentioned were 'Skylark Field' next to the church on the east side of the Crab and Winkle Way and 'Yellowhammer Corner' on the corner of Tyler Hill Road. Participants also referred to a piece of ancient woodland on the east side of the site as 'Bluebell Wood' due to the carpet of bluebells that covers the woodland floor in spring (one participant also called this woodland 'White Spinney' because of the abundance of Wood Anemones).



Bluebell Wood, April 2024: Wendy Stennett; Skylark Field, November 2024: Rachael Reilly

## b) Landscape as a Whole

***“I love all different aspects of it, different places... everywhere is special, really. There’s so many lovely views, walks, little hidey-holes. I’m still finding things out.”<sup>44</sup>***

Some participants in the study said they valued the whole landscape – the wide-open spaces, sweeping views and “peace and tranquillity – all of which they feared losing. Participants described their appreciation of “deep countryside,” one person described their relationship with the landscape as a “paradigmatic experience”, while another person pointed out that the landscape as a whole featured in many walking books of the area and this would be lost with the development.



Looking across the Blean from the south, August 2024: Jeremy Kendall (Chaucer Fielder)

*“You know, for example, the Skylarks in the field by the church, you walk across that field from the church and the Skylarks spring up from the land and start singing. And that’s all part of the experience. And that’s a sort of paradigmatic experience, but you can’t just pin it down and say it’s the Skylarks. It’s the Skylarks in the context, you know, in a certain kind of world, the whole history and literature of the idea of the Skylarks, all the associations that are there, the symbolic significance.” [Individual interview with Oakley,\* 26 November]*

## c) Ancient Landscape

***“Access to wild places is severely reduced and this area still has a sense of the ancient woodland and historical landscape that the Blean area is so valued for.”<sup>45</sup>***

Several participants remarked on how old the landscape was, with ancient paths linking the villages of Tyler Hill and Blean, including the path across the fields from Tyler Hill to St Cosmus and St Damian Church, which would have been used by generations of churchgoers; the old drovers’ route that connected the villages of Tyler Hill and Blean, which is still in use today (Tyler Hill Road); the Roman Salt Road between Canterbury and Seasalter (now the Crab and Winkle cycle path); and the site of the Crab and Winkle railway line – the first passenger railway in the world that brought day-trippers from Canterbury to the seaside in Whitstable. They described how they related to being in such an ancient landscape:

<sup>44</sup> Participant C, Community Walk, 28 November

<sup>45</sup> Social Survey Response, Q. 16



*"I always like coming out and standing here. We've been associated with the church for a long time. So Harvest Festival Sunday, for instance, we would come out and start the service here singing. I grew up in a town and I'd always longed to live in the countryside, so to stand out here on a morning looking across fields, singing a song that, you know, people in the countryside have sung for donkey's years that speaks of food security and a winter coming when your harvest is all that stands between you and death speaks of those sort of ancient things, feels very special."* [Participant A, Community Walk, 28 November]

*"And I consider that pathway that goes through the wood and the field opposite. I consider that to be the legitimate pilgrimage towards the church – to come over the bridge on the little tiny brook that comes down from the farm. To come over that little bridge and just crest the little hill and then see the path straight ahead. Whether it's in the winter and there's no crop, or whether it's in the summer and there's high crop. That to me is of deep spiritual value and very ancient value."*  
[Individual interview with Rowan\*, 26 November]

*"I think it's very clear, you know, the line of Tyler Hill Road and this route is really significant in terms of the woods as a whole. Because somewhere along this line here there's a connection between the Radfall in Blean Woods on the west of Blean village and the Radfall in the Tyler Hill Woods. Because we know that was a drovers' route for people taking their animals through. It's somewhere along the line of the road and this path that's part of that whole landscape. And clearly if this is all built over, the sense of the continuity of that would go completely because it'd be a big block of building in the middle of it."*  
[Participant D, Community Walk, 28 November]



Path from Tyler Hill to Blean church through Skylark Field, June 2025: Kieron McDonnell

#### d) History and Cultural Heritage

***"One of the straplines for Blean church is it's the 'church in the fields'. And there's something important historically about the fact that the church is in a remote position surrounded by nature."***<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Individual Interview with Vicar of Blean church, 22 November

Participants pointed out the unique cultural heritage of this site, with archaeological evidence of Mesolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages, Roman and Medieval settlements in the area. St Cosmus and St Damian Church, located in the centre of the site, dates back to before 1233, with references to a church recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 and possible theories of a church on this site since the 6th century.

### ***St Cosmus and St Damian Church – remote location and ancient history***

For many local residents and parishioners, including the Vicar of St Cosmus and St Damian, the remote location of the church, surrounded by fields and woodland, is an integral part of its cultural heritage, history and identity. Many people expressed dismay that this could be destroyed by a massive residential development that would profoundly alter the identity of the church, its historical significance and the surrounding landscape.

The Vicar of St Cosmus and St Damian church explained that, like many churches in England, St Cosmus and St Damian would have started as a chapel for the Saxon-Norman manor house and surrounding scattered farmsteads and later grown into a parish church. He stressed that the remote location of the church must be taken into account when considering any development in this location:

*“There’s something important historically about the fact that the church is in a remote position surrounded by nature because we think historically it’s due to the fact that Blean church was a manorial church... The Blean area wasn’t a nuclear village, it was farmsteads dotted around... And the whole point of Blean church is that its position reflects that history.”* [Individual interview with Vicar of Blean church, 22 November]



Stained-glass window of St Cosmus and St Damian Church, Blean, September 2024: Our Wild Habitats;  
'The Church in the Fields', February 2025: Jeremy Kendall (Chaucer Fielder)

Some participants expressed a deep spiritual connection to the church and its Christian and pre-Christian history:

*"I feel a deep attachment to that place at a level where it's a living sanctuary dedicated to two healers. It's just astonishing. There is something about that church which speaks to me in a way that other churches don't."* [Individual interview with Rowan,\* 26 November]

Several participants on the community walks expressed theories about the early, pre-Christian origins of the St Cosmus and St Damian site. Their comments demonstrate how people mix historical knowledge with myths, folklore and conjecture to build stories and narratives about their local landscape. They also demonstrate how ancient local residents believe this landscape to be and the importance of preserving and protecting it:

*"The other thing in the landscape that's kind of particularly relevant today is that on some of the maps, you know, there's a spring down in that direction over there to the south-west, there's a spring that goes down to the Sarre Penn. And on some maps that is indicated as being the Cosmus and Damian well... I would guess that might have been some kind of ritual well that the Romans used, where they used to chuck things in the water or something like that. And maybe the association with Cosmus and Damian was actually with the road going from Seasalter down to Canterbury and there being a kind of votive well down there or something like that. Now that's pure conjecture..."* [Participant B, Community Walk, 28 November]

*"I've always wondered whether the well goes back well before that (we'll forgive the pun!) and was associated with healing, as springs and wells often were in the countryside then, if that persisted in folk memory, it would be a natural association to then when this new religion came to dedicate your church to saints associated with healing. But you know, it's just, it's blue-sky thinking."*  
[Participant A, Community Walk, 28 November]

### **Archaeological Importance of the Land**

Several participants commented on the wider archaeological importance of the site, with some mentioning an archaeological survey by students from the University of Kent in 2020 in the field on the east side of the church that revealed evidence of important Bronze Age settlements suggesting that the whole site could be far older than previously thought:

*"Now, one of one of the things I thought was really interesting was that they weren't categorically able to age the things here. But I think there is a theory that along the top of the hill here and connecting all the way round, you know to the east in that direction there, there's a Bronze Age landscape here with circular enclosures of some kind in it. Now again this is just conjecture, but I thought it was quite interesting... there were circular kind of enclosures here and then we've got a church sitting on an embankment, which is, you know, approximately circular here. And nobody knows the age of that embankment. So could it actually be a very ancient embankment?"* [Participant A, Community Walk, 28 November]

### **Crab and Winkle railway**

Other participants expressed deep attachment to the old Crab and Winkle railway line. Parts of the old railway line are still visible and older residents of the community still have vivid memories of playing on the line as children and hearing stories about the trains:



*"We spent more time on the railway line and the tunnel was still open when I was a kid and we used to scare ourselves to walk through. It got a bit scary because there were some places where the bricks had caved in. Yeah, it collapsed, it was looking a bit dodgy before it collapsed."*  
[Oral history with Ash\* while walking the land, 21 November]

**Summary:** Participants in the research appreciate the land for its open space, natural beauty and wildlife. They value what they described as "deep countryside," a place of peace and tranquillity and an important local amenity where they can exercise, meet friends and be in nature. Many people appreciated the land for its ancient landscape and important historical, archaeological and cultural heritage sites; others attached special importance to the natural habitats the fields and hedgerows, ancient woodland and Sarre Penn stream provide for birds and wildlife.

### 3. LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

***"I've lived here for 24 years in the village and I do a lot of birdwatching in the surrounding woods and the surrounding farmland. I've recorded about 72 species so far this year. I've always been keen on birds. It will be very sad, I think, losing this beautiful area."***<sup>47</sup>

As well as appreciating the natural beauty and cultural heritage of this site, many of the local residents and regular users of this land have a deep knowledge and keen understanding of its history, landscape, geology and plant, animal and bird life. Since the publication of the draft Local Plan, members of the community have started to record their sightings of birds and wildlife on sites like [iRecord](#) and [BirdTrack](#) in a tangible demonstration of what is known as 'citizen science'.<sup>48</sup>



Photos taken by local birdwatchers: Goldfinch, April 2024: Job Dexters; Song Thrush, January 2025: Kieron McDonnell; Chiffchaff, April 2024: Job Dexters

Several keen birdwatchers participated in the research, including one local resident who has recorded 72 different species of birds on the land over the past year. Other participants were knowledgeable about the trees, stream and pondlife and woodland flowers. Some were experts in the local history and archaeology, while others had expertise in farming and agriculture, water and soil quality and flood risks. As one participant explained:

<sup>47</sup> Participant A, Community Walk, 21 November

<sup>48</sup> Photos taken by local birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts are included throughout this report.

*“In fact I think that I’m part of a wider network of people with great knowledge and, you know, a really close understanding. What I like is that everyone has their own strengths. So some people know about the hydrology, some people are really clear on the geology, others much more clued up about the heritage and the archaeology... in all these areas there are different people with really specialised knowledge... My specialised knowledge I’d really put down to what I call arboriculture and I would say that my knowledge is quite detailed of not only the variety of trees in the landscape but also the age and the state of those trees... I like the fact that you’ll find that everyone has their interests and they can bring those interests together... I know a fellow who knows every type of fish in the Sarre Penn, you know, the stickleback and the Tench and the Perch.” [Individual interview with Rowan,\* 26 November]*

A world expert on environmental and sustainability impact assessments lives in one of the impacted local communities and was interviewed for the research:

*“Local people will have access to on the ground information such as the presence of particular species because they live in the area. In terms of their expertise, well that’s highly dependent on the population. You know, for example, I’m a world expert on impact assessment who happens to live locally and one of my neighbours is an RSPB ornithologist. So there are experts within the community just by happenstance.” [Individual interview with Environmental & Sustainability Expert, 28 November]*

Some participants explained that having specialist knowledge made it harder to accept the viability of the development plans:

*“And, you know, it’s not just a personal thing. It’s that I work in sustainability. I work with farmers and food production. I also care deeply about biodiversity. And, you know, we’re living in a climate and nature crisis. And so to have this just in an area that seems so inappropriate, it’s really, really hard to deal with.” [Individual interview with Hazel,\* 18 November]*

During the individual interviews, several informants mentioned that the ecological surveys commissioned by the university’s land agent – Avison Young<sup>49</sup> – had concluded that the site had “limited ecological value.”<sup>50</sup> They questioned this conclusion, arguing that local residents who use the land regularly may have a deeper understanding of the biodiversity of the local area than outside consultants commissioned by developers who only visit once or twice:

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<sup>49</sup> Extensive documentation prepared by the university’s consultant, Avison Young, for the draft Local Plan process can be found under the [Canterbury City Council New Local Plan Consultation Responses](#).

<sup>50</sup> See p. 27 Avison Young, [University of Kent Representation to the Draft Canterbury District Local Plan, 2020-2045, January 2023](#). According to Avison Young, a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Phase 1 Habitat Survey) (‘PEA’) concluded that the University of Kent sites were of “limited botanical interest” and the site itself had “limited ecological value” and “existing valuable habitats can either be retained or re-provided on-site”.



*"There is a visible contradiction between their assessment of the biodiversity value and the assessment of everyone who lives around there. And this is not only people who are deliberately looking for the most rare species... this is just people who just walk around and say, well, look, there's a Nightingale, there's the Skylark, the Yellowhammer, the Meadow Pipit... And the thing is, it's not just hearsay because as the Facebook page is a good sort of log there are people recording, identifying, posting their findings. And that constitutes a much more reliable and realistic ecological survey, I think.... I'll give you an example: the ecological survey mentions nothing of Skylarks. Well, anyone who walks along there knows that there are Skylarks. The ecological survey mentions nothing of Yellowhammers, mentions nothing of the Nightingale. Now I was cycling along Tyler Hill Road... I think it was probably May in the evening and we heard the most wonderful Nightingale and I recorded it there and then."* [Individual interview with Rowan,\* 25 November]

*"But there's actually quite a lot of biodiversity here... you've got hedgerows, you've got a stream, you've got a riparian edge, you've got ancient woodland. And we live here, so we know what's here. We know that there are Skylarks and great crested newts and bats. And you know, we see them all the time. And I think if you don't live somewhere and you don't see that daily, you don't know what's lost. You think, oh, it's fine, we'll just build some houses. But when you live with these creatures, as, you know, kind of our friends, we know where all the birds are and we go out and watch the Great Crested Newts lay their eggs and have their little babies every year. And, you know, that's just really, really sad to think it'll go."* [Individual interview with Hazel,\* 18 November]

**Summary:** There is a wealth of local knowledge and expertise among the local communities and regular users of the land that has been under-utilised and overlooked throughout the Local Plan process. Among participants in the social research there were local experts in ornithology, arboriculture, the history and archaeology of the local area, in particular St Cosmus and St Damian Church, sustainable farming and agriculture, water and soil quality and flood risks and a world expert in environmental sustainability impact assessments. There has been a surge in 'citizen science' since the announcement of the development plans, with one local birdwatcher recording 72 species of bird on the development site.

#### 4. CONCERNS ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT

***"It is not possible to separate in my mind the loss of the agricultural land from the other aspects – loss of a decent distance walk route, wildlife, loss of nature, loss of tranquil recreation space, loss of cultural heritage, damage to the remaining environment, flood risks and run-off risks and general degradation of a treasured area currently managed well. The Blean has already been badly fragmented, but enough remains for it to be a very precious resource."***<sup>51</sup>

Nearly every participant in the social research had concerns about the proposed development. 97.5% of respondents to the social survey said that they had concerns about the development, while only 2.5% said they had none. Respondents were asked to identify one main concern:

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<sup>51</sup> Social Survey Response, Q. 23

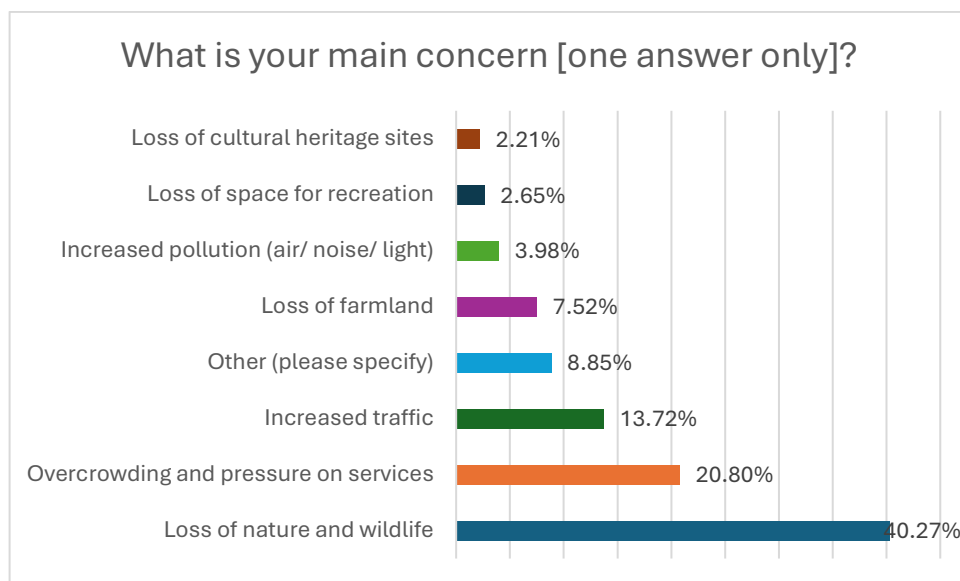


Figure 12: Social Survey Q 20: Answered: 226; Skipped: 4

Under 'other' concerns, cited were the lack of infrastructure, especially roads and sewage treatment and environmental impact; loss of a place of peace and tranquillity to be at one with nature; the impact of a sudden growth in population; and concern that the houses being built would not meet local needs for social housing. A number of respondents replied that they could not choose one reason – all were equally valid.

#### a) Loss of Nature, Wildlife and Rural Landscape

***“It’s the connectivity, because it’s the whole, without one bit, the other bit doesn’t survive. So if you take away this, the Skylarks will go and then you’ll end up with little or no insect life. And that’s the problem.”<sup>52</sup>***

The number one concern raised by participants in the research was the loss of nature and wildlife and the permanent alteration of the landscape if the proposed development were to go ahead. Participants expressed concern about the loss of trees, hedgerows and ground-nesting habitats for the birds and wildlife that live in the area, as well as loss and damage to aquatic habitats around the Sarre Penn stream. They were concerned about damage to the ancient woodland on the site and the loss of fragile plants and flowers, such as the Bluebells and Wood Anemones that carpet the woodland in the early spring. Many people spoke emotionally about the loss of open space, green fields and woodland that would be irrevocably lost and could never be replaced:

*“Imagine losing these trees. When you think of all the threats there are to trees at the moment, you look out there and you can see all the different species, all the different shapes and imagine how long it took for those to grow. The thought of losing them is just heartbreaking.” [Participant A, Community Walk, 28 November]*

#### Skylarks

Participants expressed particular concern about what would happen to the Skylarks – for which this site is famous. They expressed concern that once the Skylarks’ nesting ground was destroyed, they would never come back. There was a wider concern that all the planned development on wide, open fields around the Canterbury area would have a very negative impact on Skylarks’ nesting grounds:

<sup>52</sup> Participant A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November

*“They are ground-nesting. So they’re very vulnerable to dogs and cats and people walking over them and they’re particularly strong in that field next to the church. I don’t know why, but they always have been... some years even from March, you know, you can hear three or four or five at any one time.”*

[Speaker B, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

*“One of the things that I think is a real concern about Skylarks is in the overall plan... in terms of environmental impact, nobody has been thinking about the set of impacts that there will be for endangered wildlife across the whole of the Canterbury development plan. And the Skylarks are a really important part of that... my understanding is that where the plan for the solar farm is, the Skylarks may be at risk there. They’re going to be at risk here. They’re certainly at risk on the open land that they’re talking about developing near Whitstable, on Brooklands Farm, because there are Skylarks down there... there are Skylarks almost everywhere they’re talking about developing because it’s the last bits of big open land, which is what Skylarks like.”* [Participant B, Community Walk, 28 November]



Skylark, July 2024: Dave Smith

### **Connectivity – Wildlife Corridors**

Several participants stressed that the damage to nature and wildlife could not be contained within this site – they pointed out that as well as providing a habitat for many birds and animals, the land is also an important wildlife corridor connecting the East and West Blean woodland complexes and explained that destroying nature here would affect the birds and wildlife in the whole Blean area:



*"Of course, you can't just look at it as if you've got the woods either side and the birds don't move. It's a whole system, isn't it?" [Participant A, Community Walk, 21 November]*

*"They're saying keep this field, the Medieval field, but the hedge line that runs along the side of that Medieval field is alive with birds and all sorts. They're not just going to stay in that hedge line, are they? You know, it's very naive that they think by keeping these so-called buffers... it's not going to work – there will be a decline in everything. It will reverberate further afield." [Participant C, Community Walk, 28 November]*

Several participants expressed frustration that the draft Local Plan included proposals for *"green corridors to connect habitats and improve ecology"*,<sup>53</sup> including on the Blean site, when in reality any plans to develop the land between the East and West Blean complexes would destroy existing wildlife corridors and connectivity and further fragment the countryside:

*"It's the whole thing about continuity, isn't it? And you know, one of the things that made me really cross was to talk about creating wildlife corridors when actually they're planning to destroy [them]." [Participant B, Community Walk, 28 November]*

*"It all feels so small and separate and fragmented. You know, it's a bit like, oh well, we'll build that there, you've got that green land. It's a bit like the NHS with our bodies, you know, that you see someone about your ears and someone else about your feet and all this fragmentation." [Speaker F, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]*

Some of the reflections of participants during the research mirror closely the University of Kent's vision in its 2019 Masterplan to use the Sarre Penn valley to create a wildlife corridor between the East and West sides of the Blean woodland complex, to restore connectivity along the Sarre Penn stream and to reintroduce some of England's "rarest farmland species" such as the Turtle Dove and the Brown Hare:<sup>54</sup>

*"That's why the idea of joining up all the bits of the Blean is so crucial... because this is a little bit of woodland, but if this bit goes, then you've lost one bit that might help things to connect from Blean Woods that side to Blean Woods that side. And I mean, we've lived here for 30 years... we've watched Glow-worm numbers decline massively. We've watched Nightingale territories decline massively... if we could use it to join it all up, then there's a chance that the Turtle Dove might come back, there's a chance that we'd see Woodcock again, that we'd see Nightjar again." [Participant A, Community Walk, 28 November]*

<sup>53</sup> p.26 [Draft Canterbury District Local Plan](#), 2040

<sup>54</sup> p. 161, paragraph 7.5.1, University of Kent, Canterbury Campus Framework Masterplan, Final Draft, April 2019, <https://media.www.kent.ac.uk/se/23966/draft-framework-masterplan-2019.pdf>

### **Sarre Penn Stream**

Participants expressed serious concerns about the aquatic habitats and ancient woodland along the Sarre Penn stream and the impact on the water quality from toxic construction and residential waste, especially as the stream lies at the lowest point of the site where wastewater will flow down into it.

*"It will just be completely devastated if there are buildings going on and the water will be contaminated and whatever wildlife manages to survive in it at the moment won't for very long... what will happen to it if suddenly it's 2,000 houses all around there, there's going to be all kinds of wash-down, or whatever the term is, from the building process and from the pollution of the 2,000 to 4,000 cars..."*  
[Speaker B, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 21 November]

Some participants were also concerned about flooding risks at the bottom of the valley due to building houses on sloped London Clay land that is not free draining:

*"So as soon as you put a hard surface in, the water has got nowhere to go. Well, it's going to end up in here because, you know, I've walked along here and during the winter it's really soggy. So you imagine, you know, that's full of houses, water is going to go somewhere, it's going to end up here... So you then have a huge flooding risk all the way along."* [Participant H, Community Walk, 21 November].



Sarre Penn stream in West Triangle Wood, November 2024: Rachael Reilly; Flooding on the land proposed for development, March 2024: Robert Wildman

### **Ancient Woodland**

There were specific concerns raised by participants about what they refer to as Long Thin Wood, which runs along the bottom of the valley on both sides of the Sarre Penn stream. According to the development plans, a new access road will be built alongside the east side of the existing Crab and Winkle Way and will cross the Sarre Penn stream at the bottom of the valley. The existing bridge over the Sarre Penn is too small for heavy construction vehicles and will need to be widened. This will entail carving out a piece of Long Thin Wood on either side of the Sarre Penn.



Although Long Thin Wood has previously been classified as ancient woodland in various [University of Kent documents](#),<sup>55</sup> several participants were perturbed that the university consultants, [Avison Young](#), had subsequently concluded, based on a technical survey by the University of Kent's [Arboricultural Consultant \(WSP\)](#), that Long Thin Wood was potentially not ancient woodland and was of insignificant biodiversity value. Avison Young used this information to argue that the construction of a road within the recommended 15m buffer zone<sup>56</sup> of Long Thin Wood would have minimal impact on Long Thin Wood.<sup>vii</sup> Participants were also concerned about the proximity and impact of massive construction on the stability and connectivity of clusters of ancient woodland throughout the site:

*"Avison Young have already said, oh, you know, we won't touch the woodland, but they will. They'll have to come through that because the only accessible point is up by the school and they'll have to come through the woodland, which is ancient – it's called Thin Wood and it's down here, it's along there."*

[Participant A, Community Mapping Exercise, Tyler Hill, 20 November]

*"Their proposal is to use the existing bridge and widen it off... and obviously extend it further to the east into that patch of ancient woodland. Now how are they going to justify that? By saying it's not ancient woodland...! But the university itself had already provided the evidence to show that this is ancient woodland, the same evidence that they are now pretending they never presented, that doesn't exist because they're now saying 'Oh, it's not ancient woodland after all!'."*

[Participant E, Community Walk, 28 November]



Wood Anemones in ancient woodland on proposed development site, April 2024: Anne Frost;  
Wood Anemones, April 2025: Kieron McDonnell

### **Human Impact on Nature and Wildlife**

Some participants noted that although areas of ancient woodland on the site could not be built on, the presence of heavy vehicles and increased air, noise and light pollution over many years of construction, as well as the

<sup>55</sup> See p. 28, Figure 1, University of Kent Woodland Management Plan in University of Kent, Estates, Landscape and Biodiversity Strategy 2021-2025

<sup>56</sup> [UK government recommendations](#) are that there should be no construction or development within at least 15m of ancient woodland to avoid damage to the trees' root systems.



increased human footprint of thousands more people living on the site, would inevitably have a negative impact on the fragile woodland habitats:

*"It's the whole devastation of that area... We did a Nightingale survey in Clowes Wood, but the extra residents that's going to bring in would just destroy that whole area because it would become a no-go area... And it's the light pollution, it's the air pollution and the sound. Once all those lights are on, that will be bat life gone... I mean, we saw the Aurora vividly from our garden. We won't see that again."*

[Participant A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November]



Aurora Borealis seen from Blean village, May 2024: Doreen Ngan Stone

### ***Destruction of the Garden of England***

Several participants expressed broader concerns about the density of new housing development on greenfield and agricultural land across the whole of Kent and the transformation of the landscape, which is being progressively concreted over:

*"So many places have been concreted over. I mean, Kent is supposed to be the Garden of England and it's becoming increasingly less garden-like because they're building over so much rural land, agricultural land, places that used to be forests and orchards and, you know, fields and stuff."*

[Participant B, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 21 November]

### **b) Agriculture**

***"What about food security, we'll be importing everything?  
It is all farmland that's being built on!"<sup>57</sup>***

Participants in the community research and the social survey expressed serious concerns about what they viewed as short-sighted decisions to build on agricultural land during a climate and food security crisis. They emphasised that land was urgently needed for food production and future food security:

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<sup>57</sup> Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 27 November

*"I am an environmentalist and I work in sustainable food and farming and the destruction of prime farmland across Kent is terrifying. We are called the Garden of England because our land and climate are the best in the UK, and as climate change impacts our national food supply is going to become ever-more important. We must not lose agricultural land for housing. It is madness."* [Social Survey Response, Q. 23]

*"I worry about things like food security because, you know, we don't grow enough food in this country, we have to import quite a lot. And the other thing with net zero, farmers are going to come under a lot of pressure not to use so much fertiliser, which is very energy-intensive and it'd be better for wildlife etc etc. But the yields will go down. So you don't want to be taking too much land out of production."*  
[Speaker B, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

Some participants also expressed concern about generations of children growing up without understanding where food comes from if agricultural land continues to be built on:

*"You build on land like this and you're losing all that agricultural land. I mean, I take the grandchildren for a walk there, they see sweetcorn growing, they understand the sweetcorn comes up these great big tall stems. They've walked through the cornfield and it's wonderful for them. I've taught children who do not know some of the vegetables or how these vegetables grow. And if we carry on building on agricultural land like we are, we're going to have generations that just do not know what agricultural land is, what it's like to go out into the countryside and see all this food growing. And we won't have the food either."*  
[Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]



Wheatfield, Blean, May 2024: Liv Troth; Children walking through maize (Skylark Field), August 2024: Robert Wildman

### c) Threat to Cultural Heritage and Ancient Landscape

***“I feel like we are losing our havens of tranquillity. Ancient land being bulldozed and built on seems such a travesty.”<sup>58</sup>***

Concern about threats to cultural heritage emerged repeatedly and passionately during the community research. Participants expressed grief at the potential loss of the ancient landscape around St Cosmus and St Damian Church and damage to historic buildings, archaeological sites and monuments. For many people, the isolated nature of St Cosmus and St Damian Church, surrounded by fields and woodland, is an integral part of its historical identity and spiritual essence. They view the entire landscape around the church as being of great historical importance, including the Roman Salt Road and the site of the old Crab and Winkle railway. There was a widely-held view that any development on this site would destroy its unique cultural heritage:

*“I’ll just say my deep and abiding love and respect and deep connection with St Damian and Cosmus Church leads me to feel very bleak at the possibility of that whole area [being developed]... And I think that if we pull out all the stops, that’s one stop that has to be pulled out, which is, you know, the heritage value of this extraordinary church, which is intimately connected to the three World Heritage Sites of Canterbury. You know, its relationship with Canterbury Cathedral, with Christchurch, is very important. Its relationship with the old Salt Way...”* [Individual interview with Rowan,\* 26 November]

*“What’s on the table at the moment is a threat. Because it’s a threat to people’s way of life, it’s a threat to the environment and I think it’s a threat in terms of the character, the historical character of the area... there’s a reason why Blean church is isolated. There’s an important historical reason for it that is part of the character of the church. And obviously to surround it by buildings would wipe out that historical legacy.”* [Individual interview with Vicar of Blean church, 22 November]

### d) Impact on Daily Lives/Lifestyle

***“The thought of not being able to walk the Crab and Winkle, or visit the church, or hear birdsong because of a sea of houses and the accoutrements of urban living. Very concerned about huge increase in traffic and pollution and loss of wildlife.”<sup>59</sup>***

Concerns about disruption to their daily lives caused by the proposed development emerged continuously throughout the research. These ranged from the noise, traffic and air pollution during the construction years to the permanent loss of countryside, green fields and open views, and the loss of a valued place of recreation for local residents and people from the surrounding area. Some people were worried about how the new development would impact the value of their properties, while many people were worried about how increased traffic on already dangerous and overcrowded roads would impact their daily lives.

#### ***Disruption during the Construction***

Many people said their main concern was the disruption to their lives during the construction phase of the development with heavy vehicles on the roads, increased noise, air and light pollution and generally how unpleasant life would be for many years while the construction was ongoing. Several people said they would be unable to walk or drive past the site during the construction phase as it would be too painful to see so much destruction of nature and the countryside.

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<sup>58</sup> Response to Social Survey, Q. 23

<sup>59</sup> Response to Social Survey, Q. 23



*"I live close to the proposed development site and every time I pass through the area I now imagine what it would be like concreted over with a new town built here. I feel very sad and fearful, and I dread the destruction during the many years of the build – the earth shaking, the tearing down of trees, the mowing down of hedgerows, animals fleeing never to return."* [Social Survey Response, Q. 23]

*"It's [not just] the finished development, but it's the process. It's all the work and everything and the fact that there's going to be work with the solar plant as well. I just feel like we're going to be a little island with all this work going on around us. And, you know, I just feel it would just be very, very sad..."*  
[Participant B, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November]

*"Obviously because the building wouldn't just happen in one go. It would go on for years and years. So we'd have heavy traffic going up and down the roads all the time. There'd be noise all day and dust and all of that. So obviously one of the things about a church is you want it to be a peaceful, pleasant place to go. And if it's surrounded by building sites, it's not going to be that, you know, the short to medium term would be fairly gruesome."* [Interview with Vicar Blean Church, 22 November]

### **Traffic Congestion**

A topic that came up repeatedly throughout the research was the impact of such a large increase in population on road infrastructure and traffic. Respondents felt that the local roads and transport infrastructure could not cope with such a dramatic increase in population and were worried that because of its location this would be a car-dependent development. The increased traffic (potentially an additional 4,000 cars, as well as daily delivery and service vehicles) and lack of capacity on local roads was a constant worry for nearly everyone who participated in the study. Many people described the increased traffic from the proposed development as completely unsustainable:

*"And then there's just the practicalities of it that I've said a few times, that there's too many people already. The traffic is absolutely just insane. It's not sustainable in this area. We can't do it, it's just not possible at the moment. There just needs to be another solution... when we're talking about that tiny little road, that's the only way into it. That's not a road that can take traffic. So it's not sustainable."*  
[Speaker D, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

This problem seemed particularly acute for residents in Rough Common who feared that their village had already become a congested traffic through-way and the new development would destroy what remained of a village identity:

*“Rough Common is more and more being seen as a kind of get from A to B road. The village used to have an amazing drama society and it used to have such a strong identity, but this cut-through has wrecked that identity nearly already. And then if you put more traffic on the road... the village won’t exist... these little incremental changes add up to transforming a place, don’t they? And I think we’re just about hanging on to this village as a village. It will be very sad if it goes.”*

*So, you know, there’s already cars been written off along here... I’m going on about cars because this is going to be a big impact on here... It’s because people come whacking along because they see us as a run-through. And I think when people see a place as a cut-through, they don’t remember people living in it... When big lorries come along here they make the house shake. But with all the construction vehicles are we going to get compensation?” [Individual interview with Willow, \* 25 November]*

Participants also raised serious concerns about Tyler Hill Road, which they said was narrow, windy and dangerous and totally unsuitable to take additional traffic. Several people raised questions about how the proposed development on the north side of the site could be accessed without using Tyler Hill Road (at the moment there are no other access routes to this site):

*“I’m concerned about the traffic because I think Tyler Hill Road has just got worse. And the speed, you know, when the cows are in the field and we have to walk down the road, I just feel so vulnerable. You know, we had a cat run over outside our house a couple of weeks ago, it’s just people just hare past...”*  
[Speaker B, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November]

*“I think the other thing that really worries me as well is the traffic. The traffic I just can’t believe. I mean, if there’s 2,000 houses, you can bet your bottom dollar that means 4,000 cars more than likely: more down Tyler Hill Road and down the Whitstable Road and Rough Common Road. I mean Rough Common Road has suddenly become dreadful to go down, but Tyler Hill Road, I mean it would be impossible!”*  
[Speaker F, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]



Tractors on Tyler Hill Road, June 2024: Margaret Connolly; No More Traffic sign, April 2024: Ania Brobrowicz; Traffic in north Canterbury, April 2024: John Buckels

Several participants raised concerns that the proposed development would be car-dependent and plans for a sustainable development site with improved public transport and cycling routes were unrealistic. They explained that the local villages were already very poorly served by public transport with an infrequent and unreliable bus service and the roads around were hilly, narrow and dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists and would become even less safe with the increased volume of traffic:

*"I'm also concerned that it's not a sustainable community that's going to be built there. It's going to be car-based. I can't see anybody cycling or walking into Canterbury from there. And also with the proposals to put shops in, there's doctors' surgeries, there's the schools, it's going to generate even more traffic. So I just find the whole thing rather depressing..."* [Speaker C, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

*"And to talk about buses and public transport and cycling. I mean, seriously. We've got no buses in Rough Common now. There used to be five a day. Now there's one on Wednesday and one on Monday, but no one knows about it... I live right by the bus stop, there used to be about five or six women my age or older, standing there waiting for the bus. Where are they now? I don't see them."* [Speaker D, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

Some participants pointed out that increased traffic congestion wouldn't just affect the three villages around the new development but would have a far-reaching impact on the whole area, in particular on the road from Whitstable into Canterbury and for people living in north Canterbury.

#### **Pressure on Local Infrastructure and Public Services**

Another major concern among respondents was the impact of such a large-scale housing development on public services and local infrastructure and whether Canterbury had the capacity to absorb such a large population increase. Several respondents were concerned about whether the water supply and sewerage could cope with such a dramatic increase in population, while others said that existing public services in Canterbury were already stretched to capacity. They bemoaned the fact that it was already very difficult to get a doctor's appointment, see a dentist or get a school place and wondered how the local area could cope with the planned increase in population:

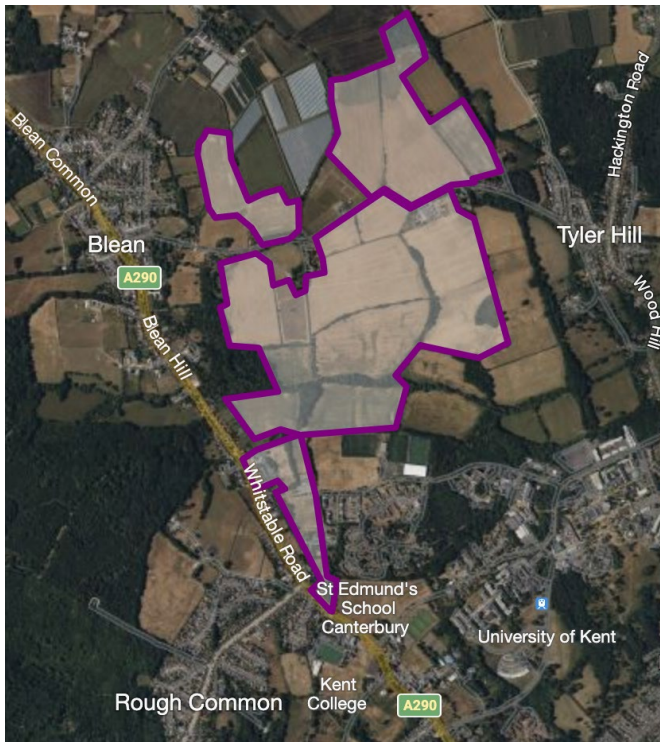
*"It's the older people, we are an ageing population in Blean and Tyler Hill here and we need, you know, the bus service here, we need the hospitals, they're already overrun. There's no provision for new GPs, there's no provision for extra hospital beds..."* [Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

#### **Urbanisation – Permanent Loss of Rural Character**

A common concern was that the proposed development would permanently alter the distinct, rural identity of three separate villages – Blean, Tyler Hill and Rough Common. Participants were worried that building 2,000 houses on greenfield land between these three villages would create an urban conurbation, permanently change the rural character of the area and destroy village life:



*"It will create a town because it's going to be at least 5,000 people. It's going to be a small town, which means that we are going to lose the rural character of our villages. And it's going to be an urban sprawl. That's what is going to happen. There will be no distinction between what's going to be built and our villages will just be subsumed. At the moment we have quite a good separation actually from Canterbury and, you know, as you get into Tyler Hill you go into the very dark streets because people object to street lighting... and obviously we are surrounded by woods and it's just a lovely place to live. So it's very different to the city sprawl."* [Individual interview with Holly,\* 22 November]



Aerial view of proposed development site showing villages of Blean, Tyler Hill and Rough Common

Villagers were concerned that the size of the proposed new settlement was completely out of proportion with the existing villages; they described it as a “new town” and feared they would become swamped in the middle of an urban sprawl and lose their separate village identity:

*"The fact that that all the villages are going to be one village, basically. Well, it won't be a village anymore, will it? Obviously just in my lifetime I've seen immense changes just in the hub of the village. But to change it on such a scale is just bloody awful. Absolutely awful..."*  
[Speaker D, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 27 November]

Some participants noted that it would be more appropriate to add houses to the villages of Tyler Hill, Blean and Rough Common and infill within the boundaries of the existing villages, rather than ‘dump’ 2,000 houses in the middle between them:

*"I don't think anyone in Tyler Hill or Blean would object to housebuilding that was linked to each of the villages, to a slight enlargement of Tyler Hill or slight enlargement of Blean, but not having a town three times the size of either village in between them – it is so out of proportion."*  
[Speaker G, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

*"And I guess, you know, I'm also realistic. I think it may be that houses get built here at some point in the future, but I'd like to think they would get built in a totally different configuration. So not just a big blob in the middle but, you know, attached to the campus. Or, you know, a couple of hundred around Blean, a couple of hundred around Tyler Hill, like build out the communities that already exist here. Just respect what is here in the first place. And actually that's what good planning, my understanding of it, is about. Planning is about building around what's there, respecting the topography, respecting the existing lie of the land and the existing lie of the city and so on. So just redesign it into something that actually makes human sense."*  
[Individual interview with Hazel,\* 18 November]

Others were worried that the new development would have "no heart," that it wouldn't have an identity of its own and it would just be a big mass between three very distinct villages.

*"So my issue is that they say that it's going to be a bus-led [development], but they're plonking a big, and it is a settlement, it's not just coming out from an urban sprawl, it's not an extension of anything. It's plonk in the middle of green land, you know, farmland... they are putting a settlement in between three very different or very separate parishes... the parishes are separate, but they all come together for lots of different things, but suddenly you'll have this big settlement in the middle that won't have an identity. It won't have a heart..."*  
[Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November]

#### **'Not what we signed up for': Loss of Rural Living**

Several participants said they had made a conscious decision to live in a rural area surrounded by countryside and the transformation of their rural environment was not 'what we signed up for':

*"I moved here because I wanted a village life... the city is two miles one way, beautiful farmland and fields behind and in front and the sea five miles in the other direction. It is a perfect place. I run a lot as I have a busy and stressful job and the fields and cycle route is the place for me to relax."* [Social Survey Response, Q. 23]

*"Well, I think when people came to live here, they had a particular vision for where they wanted to live, where they wanted to bring their children up, where they wanted to retire. And it was a tranquil, you know, semi-rural environment where you have a lot of woods and there is the beauty of the landscape and protection of wildlife and just enjoying the benefits of the nature that we have around us. And that's not what we signed up for, you know..."* [Individual interview with Holly,\* 22 November]

They felt that their freedom to choose where they lived was violated by this construction and a profound change in their living environment was being imposed on them against their will. People expressed concerns that having chosen to live in the countryside, they would now find themselves living in an urban conurbation or extended suburb of Canterbury. Some people described the development as "life-changing".

*"If you have made a choice to live in a city and one day you're told it's all going to be knocked down and you're going to be living in a field, you'd be quite unhappy. And vice versa, you know if you made a choice to go and live in a certain place and then you're told actually it's all going to be ripped down and it's going to be concreted and you'll be living in a suburb, you know, its life-changing."*

[Individual interview with Hazel,\* 18 November]

*"I don't want to live in a suburb, which is what it would become.... I don't want suburban parks or a few token bits of long grass or bushes."* [Speaker B, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

Several people pointed out the irony of promoting a free-standing "rural settlement" when in the course of building it the very countryside on the basis of which it was being marketed would be destroyed:

*"I quite like the phrase you've used of deep countryside and the notion of access to countryside. If there's a sort of fragmented approach where you stick 2,000 houses in somewhere close to the countryside you've removed the deep countryside. So you don't have access to the thing that you're claiming to provide access to, you're destroying that thing..."* [Speaker E, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]



Marbled White butterfly, June 2025: Kieron McDonnell; from left to right, Comma butterfly: Iain Leach; Path through wheatfield: Isola B; Great Crested Newt: Lena I; Crab & Winkle Way: Julia Kirby Smith; Red Admiral butterfly, November 2024: Kieron McDonnell

### ***Loss of a Local Amenity and Place of Recreation***

Participants noted how the loss of a local amenity and place of recreation for being in the outdoors would affect their daily lives and well-being. Many were concerned about the impact on the Crab and Winkle Way and the loss of a car-free path for cycling, running and walking if it became part of a built-up residential area.

*"That's one of the few safe places to ride a bike in Canterbury that truly is off-road [Crab and Winkle cycle path]. I mean, they keep talking about building cycling infrastructure, but personally I don't want to cycle on the road full stop. But it was nice to have something that's dedicated to off-road cycling."*

[Participant F, Community Walk, 21 November]

*"It's in the back of your mind that our green space with lovely views and birdsong will be replaced with a housing estate; instead of cycling through the Crab and Winkle, I will be cycling through a housing estate."*  
[Social Survey Response, Q. 23]

Participants also raised concerns about how they could use land while the construction was ongoing:

*"And the fact that we'll be walking through there when there's all this building work going on. Well, we won't be able to. You can't walk through a building site. It's too dangerous. How are you able to do that?"*  
[Participant A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

#### e) Inappropriate Housing

***"The houses will be too expensive for the majority of people who are in desperate need of housing. There really are no benefits."***<sup>60</sup>

A concern raised many times during the community research and the social survey was that the houses being built would not meet local needs. There was a view that the site would be used to build car-dependent, four- to five-bedroom executive homes for commuters from London who had no investment in the local area. Many of the participants acknowledged local housing needs, citing the 2,000-3,000 households on the Canterbury District housing waiting list<sup>61</sup> but said that the houses planned on this site would be unaffordable for local people and would not meet local housing needs. Some participants said they would be more likely to agree to the development if they thought it would provide affordable housing for local families who already had an investment in the local area. There were concerns that London councils were already buying properties in Kent to house people on their housing waiting lists, including in Canterbury:

*"And how many of those houses will be affordable? There's hasn't been anything to say 35% of those houses will be affordable – 45% or 50% would be affordable housing. OK, great, then people can come from Canterbury and they'll be able to afford those houses. But people in Canterbury won't be able to afford them. They'll be people down from London and that's just displacing a population. And then you get these great big houses where, you know, I can't afford to buy them!"*  
[Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November]

*"As a younger person, what I hear amongst my peers is none of the kind of new housing that has been directed towards them is affordable..."* [Speaker E, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

**Summary:** The biggest concern among research participants (40.3% of respondents to the social study) was the impact of the proposed development on nature and wildlife. Participants expressed specific concerns about how the development would impact birds and wildlife living in the area, in particular the Skylarks in the field next to the church. They were concerned that the development would destroy an important wildlife corridor between the East and West Blean complexes and thought it was naïve to say that environmental impacts could be contained within this site. Concerns about the loss of productive agricultural land and damage to the ancient landscape and monuments, including St Cosmus and St Damian Church and important archaeological sites, also featured highly in people's responses. The second major concern for participants was how the development would impact their daily lives (38.5% of respondents to the social survey). Concerns included: noise, light and air

<sup>60</sup> Response to Social Survey, Q. 21

<sup>61</sup> See UK Government Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government: Table 600: "Number of households on local authority housing registers (waiting lists)." There were 2,089 people on the Canterbury District housing waiting list in 2023.



pollution from years of construction; increased traffic and congestion on already overcrowded and dangerous roads; pressure on local infrastructure and public services from an increased population; the loss of a place for recreation and to be in nature; and the potential loss of property value due to the construction. Many people feared that the development would permanently alter the rural character and distinct identity of the villages of Blean, Tyler Hill and Rough Common, resulting in an urban sprawl and destroying village life. Some participants said that this was “not what we signed up for” when they chose to live in a rural area and felt these profound changes to their living environment were forced upon them against their will. Participants said that they would be more favourable to the development if they believed the new houses would meet local need. Some said they would accept new housing if it was more sensitively planned within the boundaries of the existing villages, rather than ‘plonking’ a massive new development down between the three villages that would have no identity of its own and was grossly out of proportion with respect to the existing villages.

## 5. BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

**“I don’t see any benefits from a development on this site that are not outweighed by the loss of part of the Blean.”<sup>62</sup>**

Although the majority of participants in the study were opposed to the housing development, some potential benefits of the development were raised during the research. 180 people responded to a question in the survey about what benefits the development could bring: of these, 118 people (65%) said that the development would bring no benefits to the local community in this location. A few respondents to the social survey and one participant in the focus group discussions indicated that they were in favour of the development. A senior representative from the University of Kent set out the university’s position on the benefits that the residential development would bring, not only financially to the university but also to the wider community. The university’s response can be found in [Annex A](#).

### **More Housing**

The main benefit that respondents thought the development could bring was much-needed local housing, although several people said they doubted whether such a development would meet local need for affordable housing, and others said that due to developer greed, affordable houses would not be built:

- *I am hoping it will provide housing for people on low incomes; however, I do not think that housing in this area is likely to be affordable for that group.*
- *For existing residents unlikely [to be] any, but for the country as a whole more houses might eventually reduce pressure on the housing market.*
- *I suppose it will supply new houses at a time when they are greatly needed, but unfortunately they will not be for the people who need them.*
- *More affordable homes in the area, as long as the developers are forced to build them.*
- *One could argue that it should lessen the pressure on housing in the Canterbury district, but equally (from seeing what happened with similar developments) I suspect that this will not be happening, due to developer greed.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 21

Some people felt that housing was needed, but fewer, more appropriate and affordable houses should be built to meet local need and these should be added to existing villages, rather than a huge development on green fields between three villages:

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<sup>62</sup> Response to Social Survey, Q. 21

- *Additional housing is much-needed. I think a reduced number of houses should be considered.*
- *None unless the number of houses built were greatly reduced, they were the most appropriate properties to meet local needs, not overspill from London, and were situated to have minimum impact on local wildlife.*
- *Additional housing should be built in smaller quantities and distributed throughout the south-east. Not as infill, between two villages and a city!*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 21

Two people (one respondent to the social survey and one participant in the focus group discussions) said that they hoped family members could benefit from housing like this development:

*"I would like my son to have an opportunity to buy a house on this development."*  
[Social Survey Response, Q. 25]

*"As you probably noticed, I am not in agreement with other participants. I have not protested and do not see loss of nature as a big problem. The nature is largely lost. It could be improved if hedges and lines of trees were to be planted to screen development. When I was young in [name of place], we lived in a bungalow with an acre of ground. The other bungalows were similarly blessed. The gardens were overgrown and I played in all of them, watching the flocks of birds and rabbits. The cuckoo visited every year and called incessantly. All of those gardens were built on. That was a loss of nature, but I benefited from the sale. I have a house and a car. My children do too and my grandchildren will want to. How can I object except that the houses to be built will be out of their price range and not screened and landscaped adequately."*  
[Email communication with Speaker F, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 27 November]

### **New Primary School**

One benefit that several people cited was the upgrading of facilities for Blean Primary School. Eight respondents to the question in the social survey (out of 180) said that a new school building for Blean Primary School was the only benefit they could see arising from the proposed development:

- *I cannot find any benefit except perhaps a new school.*
- *Difficult to think of any. The redevelopment of the existing Blean school is long overdue*
- *Very few. Perhaps an inflow of fresh blood to Blean Primary School. New premises for the school.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 21

However, this view was qualified by several participants in the study who expressed concerns about plans to demolish the existing school building to build an access road into the development site and wondered what would happen to the current school while the construction was taking place: would the old school be demolished before the new school was built; where would classes happen during the construction period (if the old school had to be demolished to provide access to the construction site); what impact would these disruptions have on the education of children currently in the school?

*"They are demolishing it [Blean school] to make an access road so they can build a new school. Where are the kids in the current school going to go while they build the new one?"*  
[Speaker B, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 21 November]

### **Blean Church**

The Vicar of St Cosmus and St Damian Church, Blean, explained that initially there were two viewpoints within the church community:

*“When the plans were first announced, there were two streams of thought, one stream of thought was ‘Oh, you know, this isn’t good news’. The other stream of thought was ‘Well, actually, if loads of houses were built near the church, then it could revitalise the church in the future’. Because obviously the position of the church in its community would be transformed.” [Interview with the Vicar of Blean Church, 22 November]*

Although the Parochial Church Council (PCC) decided to publicly support the Save The Blean campaign in opposing the housing development, the Vicar acknowledged the potential benefits to the church of having a large residential population in the area and the opportunity to grow the congregation. He explained that the church would adapt to reality as it evolved. Currently, its duty was to support the local community in its opposition to the plans; however, if the plans were to go ahead, then the church would obviously welcome residents from the new houses into the church community.

### **Improved Public Transport and Cycle Routes**

Some people hoped that the development would result in improved public transport for the local area and upgraded roads and cycle paths:

- *I’d hope the buses to Tyler Hill would become more regular.*
- *Better provision of cycle routes and walking paths in to and around the city to access places without the need for getting into a car.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 21

### **Upgraded Local Infrastructure and Public Services**

Some people suggested that the development could bring extra revenue to the local villages and additional taxes from the new residents could be used by the City Council to upgrade local infrastructure and facilities, while others said that without such investment the development would not benefit anyone locally:

- *If there is no real obligation and commitment to improve infrastructure and facilities, while being respectful to the environment, then I really do not see any benefit. I have not seen any real commitment by the developers nor the council that will ensure what I have said.*
- *None if there are not the services to serve it. School places, doctors, hospitals. Most people can already not get a GP appointment.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 21

### **Change in Demographics**

A few people mentioned increased diversity in the area as a potential benefit; one person said that Canterbury had a declining population and needed more inhabitants:

- *More people for Canterbury, which has declined over the last 200 years from the major centre of east Kent to needing Whitstable to support even one MP!*
- *None? Or maybe diverse variety of cultures at the very least.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 21



### **Only benefits for University of Kent and Canterbury City Council**

Several people said they believed the proposed development would only bring benefits to the University of Kent, in helping to solve its financial difficulties, and to Canterbury City Council, in helping to meet government-imposed housing targets, although they said these benefits would be transient and would not resolve the underlying causes of the university's financial challenges or the national housing crisis. Some participants thought that ultimately the only people who benefited were the banks and the developers:

- *Financial rewards for the University of Kent, and success for CCC in meeting imposed building targets. None for residents.*
- *I cannot foresee any benefits other than ameliorating the university's debt. And this debt can only be addressed by blighting the residents of Canterbury. The increase in population and the resultant traffic and pollution will affect the entire city for decades to come.*
- *Nothing for Canterbury and the community but revenue for the university and the council.*
- *It will cement the wallets of the developers who will do very nicely out of destroying beautiful countryside. Housing estates should be built on brown land/unusable spaces.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 21

### **The Costs outweigh the Benefits**

Several people replied that any benefits would be heavily outweighed by the environmental costs and disruption to the lives of the local community that the development would bring:

- *Not many, if any! Destruction of natural environment rarely brings benefits, except financial, to so-called developers.*
- *It will only benefit those moving into the houses. Every other consideration will have a negative impact on the lives of local people.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 21

As one participant put it:

*"I can accept that there are benefits. I mean there's always benefits. If they would build an airport, you know, knock down the cathedral and build an airport, there'd be benefits. It'd be easier to fly to Tenerife. You know, of course there are benefits with anything, but that doesn't mean that those benefits outweigh the cost. And in the case of C-12... do the benefits from that outweigh the costs? No, the costs way outweigh the benefits!"*  
[Individual interview with Rowan,\* 26 November]

**Summary:** Although most participants in the study said they could not name any benefits that would improve the lives of the local population, some participants did identify possible benefits that may arise from the development. These include much-needed local housing; upgrading and new school buildings for Blean Primary School; new families to revitalise Blean church community; improved public transport, cycle routes, infrastructure and public services. Some participants felt that the new development would only benefit the university and Canterbury City Council, while others thought that the only winners would be the banks and private developers. Many participants said that the environmental and social costs of the proposed development far outweighed the benefits.

## 6. IMPACTS ON HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING

***“Walking regularly along the Sarre Penn and Crab and Winkle Way is a balm to the soul and losing this would be devastating.”<sup>63</sup>***



Spring meadow, May 2025: Wendy Stennett

One of the objectives of this study was to examine how the threat of a large-scale development impacted the health and social well-being of affected communities. The research looked at the impacts on the mental and physical health of local communities when threatened with a major development and the loss of green space, nature and wildlife, with a focus on the impacts *before* the development took place when local communities were engaged in resisting it. 130 people responded to a question in the social survey about how the development had impacted their health and social well-being: their responses were detailed and powerful and have been included throughout this report.

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<sup>63</sup> Response to Social Survey, Q. 23

## HAS YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING BEEN IMPACTED BY THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT?

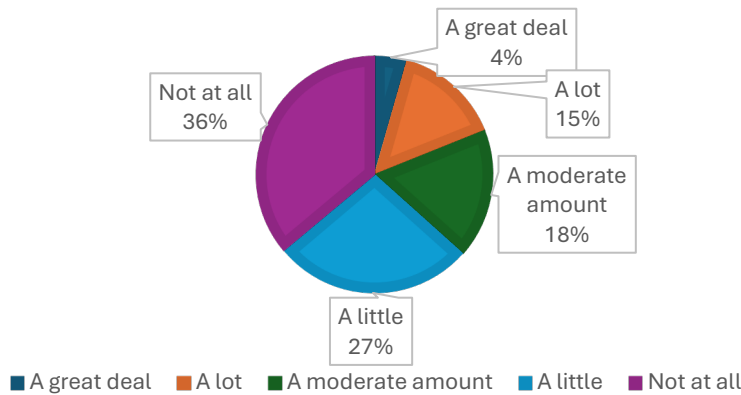


Figure 13: Social Survey, Q. 22, Answered:3 227; Skipped: 3

### a) Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Using this Land: “A Balm to the Soul”

***“The beauty and the tranquillity of the countryside and the woods is an antidote to all the stresses of urban 21st-century living.”<sup>64</sup>***

Participants in the research described the benefits access to this land had brought to their physical and mental health and well-being. Some participants described how being in nature was a tonic and the benefits it brought to their mental health:

*“I’ve lived here since 1998, brought my two children up here. My husband passed away in 2007. So this area is so important to me, like walking my dogs, the mental aspect. I just have to get out in nature. And then in 2013 I was lucky enough to meet [name]... He died in 2020. So I’ve lost two husbands. I just find nature is so important to me, to get out and it just does me so much good. And having four dogs, so they keep me fit. And the thought of losing this is just heartbreaking. I don’t think I could stay here if that went. I would just have to go somewhere else...”* [Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 27 November]

*“I’m a keen cyclist and walker and the Crab and Winkle Way and kind of the whole area either side of the road, actually. I think walking and being out in nature for me is a kind of first defence for any kind of mental health; after a bad day, being out in nature is a kind of good tonic to that.”*

[Speaker E, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

Others described using the land daily for physical exercise and how the land and the surrounding landscape had motivated them to be outdoors and to keep fit:

*“I’m just so saddened that the joy that this land has brought me and my children could be taken away. Each time I ran those Park Run hills on a Saturday morning, I just marvelled at the beauty of the landscape and it inspired me to keep running and enjoying the incredible scenery. How can you take that away from people?”* [Social Survey Response, Q. 23]

<sup>64</sup> Speaker C, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November





Runners on Crab and Winkle Way, October 2024: Gary Sampson

## b) Mental Health Impacts of Losing the Land

***“It is depressing that housing is being built over so much green space. There will be a huge impact on mental health.”<sup>65</sup>***

Many participants described feelings of sadness, despair and depression at the thought of losing green fields, woodlands, nature and wildlife. People described a sense of grief that hung over them now as they used the land and contemplated that it could be lost, while others said that if the construction went ahead they would avoid going near the land. For some people their feelings of grief were existential at the thought of so much green space, farmland and wildlife being lost, not only in their local area but across the whole county of Kent and throughout the country:

Speaker C: *“It would be hard to watch the destruction.”*

Speaker A: *“I couldn’t go down to that area. If I know that goes ahead from opposite me, the lane there, that’s where they’re going to go in, I don’t know where I would walk...”*

Speaker C: *“And I get this feeling of grief.”*

Speaker A: *“Yes, it’s like having a limb cut off, isn’t it...”*

[Conversation between Speakers A & C, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 27 November]

- *I either give up my hobby or move. Also, that cycleway will be useless as a way of bolstering my mental health.*
- *I use the proposed area as an escape on my days off to take in nature and practise photography, as well as pursue my other hobby of birdwatching. This is a benefit to my mental health. With 2,000 houses, this will no longer be a tranquil spot to sit peacefully to reflect. A loss for nature as well as people and also the character of the area.*
- *As a farmer myself, I struggle with mental health and taking my children for long uninterrupted walks where they’re safe is so important to me. It feels new houses are built everywhere we look and no natural land will be left.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 23

<sup>65</sup> Response to Social Survey, Q. 23



Some people expressed concern about the environmental impacts for future generations growing up in an area where so much countryside and wildlife had been lost to construction:

- *Concern about environmental impact makes me feel worried for the future.*
- *Concern for the future generation in terms of access to the countryside.*
- *It is important for us and future generations that these sacred green spaces remain. Build on unused land, not sacred spaces.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 23



Sarre Penn stream. November 2024; Common Blue butterfly, May 2025: Kieron McDonnell

### c) Physical Health Impacts of Losing the Land

***“If this development goes ahead, it will severely impact my exercise routine, and the huge increase in traffic along my road will be a major health hazard – in pollution and in road safety.”<sup>66</sup>***

Some participants described how the loss of green space for recreation would impact their physical health and fitness. Others expressed serious concerns about how years of construction on the site, including heavy construction vehicles on the roads, air, noise and light pollution and the impact of increased traffic and pollution from the development would impact their physical health and well-being:

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<sup>66</sup> Social Survey Response, Q. 25

- *Anxiety over the project, for the loss of wildlife, my mental health and physical health. I am asthmatic.*
- *The church, countryside and local wildlife will be radically changed forever. I take so much pleasure from identifying the presence of local wildlife. Especially as I have serious health issues.*
- *Increase in stress, concerns about the long-term impact to mine and my family's health due to the increase in pollution and toxins in the environment, loss of green fields.*
- *We are all asthmatic and chose to move to Blean as there is more countryside and less traffic pollution compared with urban areas. I fear the pollution and its impact on our health that will be negatively impacted by the proposed development.*
- *I'm beginning to think that Canterbury is getting too congested and polluted; this reduces my enjoyment of cycling and impacts on my asthma.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 23 & Q. 25

#### **d) Threat of Development causes Constant Anxiety and Worry**

***"I think about it all the time with considerable anxiety."*<sup>67</sup>**

Participants in the research described being in a constant state of anxiety and worry since they found out about the proposed development. This manifested itself in concern and uncertainty about the future; feelings of sadness, anger and depression; constant preoccupation and worry about the development; and in some cases sleeplessness and anxiety:

- *It is an ever-present threat which is depressing.*
- *Increased stress and anxiety about what may happen and the negative change to the area.*
- *It's made me depressed and sad and angry.*
- *Stress – don't sleep as soundly. Concerned about increase in traffic lack of infrastructure.*
- *This development has caused an enormous amount of anxiety, especially given my location.*
- *Brought back my anxiety. Been a very stressful time which has resulted in sleepless nights... Feel very unsettled for what the future now holds in our latter years.*
- *During the consultation phase, particularly at the start, there were many nights of poor sleep caused by worry and anxiety. Every time I see the fields I am instantly reminded of the threat faced and there is no escape from it whilst at home. Previously the view was one of peace and calmness.*
- *It does disturb your peace of mind at home knowing 2,000 homes could be built in your village.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 23

#### **e) Sense of helplessness and powerlessness over lives and future**

***"Sense of worry and despair at not having control over the area in which we live."*<sup>68</sup>**

For some people the greatest cause of stress and anxiety was the feeling that decisions about where they lived and their local environment were completely beyond their control. They felt they had no say in decisions that would profoundly impact their daily lives, their future and their health and well-being. This left people with a profound sense of helplessness and powerlessness that they found very debilitating:

<sup>67</sup> Social Survey Response, Q. 23

<sup>68</sup> Social Survey Response, Q. 23

- *Helplessness. Disappointment. Lower mood and happiness about the future here or continuing to live here.*
- *Feel very powerless and depressed about it.*
- *Anger and stress. Feeling unsettled and in limbo awaiting a decision which is out of our hands.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 23

*“I mean, for me it’s more like disappointment and helplessness. I just kind of feel like I have so little control over anything. And then anything I did say I don’t think would make any difference. Yeah, I find it very depressing. But I just feel disappointed, really, that all of that area that I’ve grown to love in the last four years with my dog, I mean, I walk there every day, you know, it’s just awful. And then it will just ruin the whole area.” [Speaker D, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]*



Protect the Beauty of the Blean placard, January 2025: Hilary Scott; Bluebell Wood, April 2024: Wendy Stennett

#### f) Stress and Uncertainty: Plans for the Future have Changed

***“My family have lived in Blean for over 284 years. Sadly, I don’t want to be here when it is destroyed!”<sup>69</sup>***

Participants in the research described how the proposed development would be “life-changing” – impacting their daily lives, their health and well-being and their plans for the future. For many people, the uncertainty caused by the development was one of the greatest causes of stress and anxiety. People described how they were reassessing their plans for the future, often in a radically different way to what they had imagined before learning about the proposed development.

<sup>69</sup> Social Survey Response, Q. 25



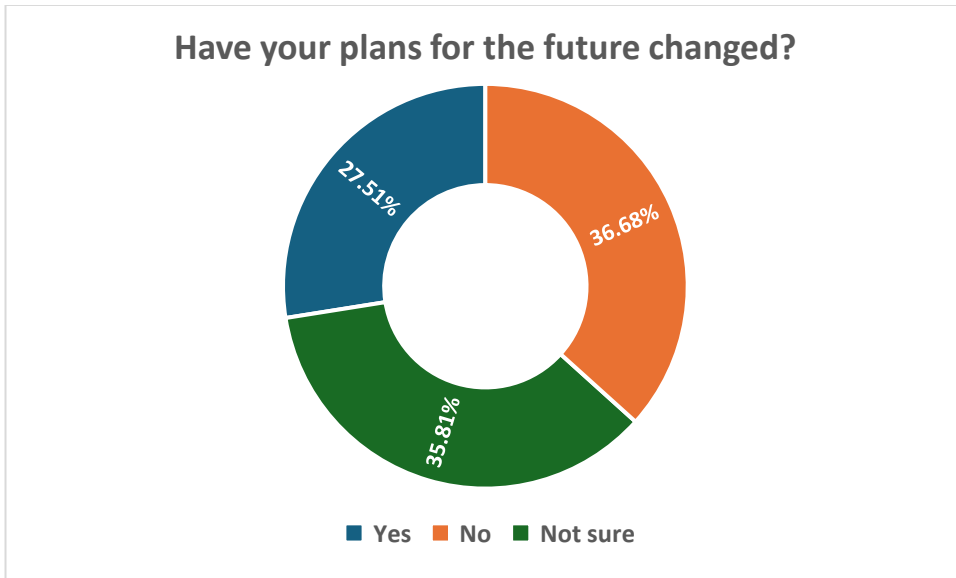


Figure 14: Social Survey Q. 24: Answered: 229; Skipped: 1

Of the 100 people who responded to a question in the social survey about whether the proposed development had impacted their plans for the future, 62 said they were considering moving or leaving the area, including one person whose family had lived in Blean for 284 years. Some people said they had expressly moved to Blean to be in a rural area and this would be ruined by the proposed development. Some people had chosen to retire to Blean and said they were now re-evaluating this decision; others said they had lived for all, or most, of their lives in Blean and had never anticipated having to move.



The Blean in spring, May 2025: Wendy Stennett



- *I no longer wish to live here anymore despite the fact I am born and bred in this area. It fills me with rage as to the devastation that the developers create. I stand with nature, not people, money and greed.*
- *Having grown up in Blean my whole life and meeting my partner in the village from a young age, Blean is my home and until recently I thought this would always be my home. Changing the character of the area with 2,000 houses is making me think about moving somewhere quieter in the future.*
- *We are considering moving in the future, as we chose Blean believing it will be a perfect blend of village and country life. The additional traffic, construction, noise, pressure on services is of great concern.*
- *It was the intention of both my wife and myself to live out our days here. We are now considering if moving is to be an option.*
- *Not sure I will be able to cope with construction of development and the destruction of nature. Will not cope with construction traffic on Rough Common Road. Anticipate that what was our final house may be a temporary one and we will have to move to get the peace we need in latter years.*
- *If it goes ahead, in all likelihood I will move away from Canterbury. I live close to the area and to see it changed so irrevocably will be so upsetting. The proximity to the countryside is a big reason for living where we do.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 25

Some people expressed frustration that they would be forced to change life plans and move away because of decisions that were out of their control; for some, the uncertainty about the future was causing family tensions.

- *I had no plans to move, but this development will threaten that. My concern is that Blean will become the centre of a sprawling estate with a lot more traffic and light pollution. These are already very high due to many other developments in the surrounding area. If I wanted to live in a town or city, I would have, but I love the quiet. So, I feel like I am going to be 'forced' to move away from my family home, which will have an impact on my family (I have two children).*
- *We are considering moving out of the area – something we never intended on doing. This has caused a little stress between my wife and me.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 25

Some people blamed the University of Kent for forcing them to change their plans for the future:

- *Happy enough to remain in Tyler Hill until the Grim Reaper came knocking. Now reviewing that situation due to the greed of Kent University.*
- *I've been here a long time and have no real ties elsewhere. Nevertheless, this proposal, and others like it, make me think that Kent is being overstretched. Roads are chaotic already; school places are under pressure; natural resources are squeezed. It's an unpleasant prospect for long-term residents. The Blean is a special place. UKC should look elsewhere to solve their financial problems.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 25

For some people, it wasn't just the Blean development, but over-development across the whole of the Canterbury area, that was making them reconsider where they wanted to live:

- *Together with other local housing developments, it has made me consider whether I want to spend my retirement in this region. I enjoy my ties here, but planned increases make me worry about the future.*
- *Makes me want to move out of the area as yet another big development in Canterbury district is just crippling the already-weak infrastructure of a once-great city.*
- *I won't be staying in Canterbury for the foreseeable future. It is so overcrowded already and the traffic is appalling and adding more people, houses and cars into the mix is just irresponsible and I don't think it will be a place worth living.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 25

Some people said they had changed specific plans (for example, house extensions or moving house); several people expressed concern that even if they wanted to move, the development plans would lower the value of their properties.

- *My financial situation is likely to be severely impacted as the value of my home, in which I have considerable equity, will be adversely affected.*
- *We have now not moved house to an area closer to the proposed development.*
- *House extension planning application not submitted.*

Social Survey Responses, Q. 25

Some respondents, however, were resolved to stay and fight the development plans:

*"I've had estate agents come to value the place. At first I was, like, 'I don't want to live here anymore'. And the estate agents just came and valued it. And then I thought 'Actually, no, I'm just going to stay here, I'm going to fight it.'" [Individual interview with Linden,\* 23 November]*

### **g) Hopeful or Pessimistic about the Future?**

People had mixed views about whether they were hopeful or pessimistic for the future. Some participants said that the strength of the Save The Blean campaign and voices joining together gave them hope for the future:

*"I think there's more of a sense of hope. And I think that's largely because of the kind of stuff that's coming out of Save The Blean, because I think people are being persuaded that you can actually do something about this. And I think without Save The Blean there would have been much more of a sense of resignation because, after all, we are seeing this sort of thing happen everywhere."*  
[Individual interview with Vicar of Blean church, 22 November]

*"I think individually I feel pretty helpless. But like groups like this, you know, the voices then sort of stick together... And I think if you gather people together, it then becomes a louder voice and people start to listen and it's by no means an easy process or a quick process, but if there's a group you're more likely to have your voices heard or at least people engage with you."*  
[Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

Others felt that the forces they were up against at the university, the City Council, corporate developers and central government, were too powerful and they were unlikely to win:

*“As a person living in Blean, I can’t thank the [Save The Blean] committee and all the members that are fighting this enough because it’s just been a fantastic effort by everyone to try and save Blean. But I just feel that the university, they’re in a dreadful state financially. They want the money. And I’m afraid I am very concerned that they’re going to win.” [Speaker F, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]*

Several people stressed that even if they didn’t succeed, it was important to have tried.

*“I try to be optimistic. Sometimes I fail, sometimes I do feel despair, but I try to be optimistic when I can and seize what I can to be optimistic. And one of the reasons is if you sustain engagement, suppose the worst happens, suppose this does go ahead and this ridiculous plan comes to fruition – at least, and this is small consolation, but it’s true, at least you can say to yourself in all honesty and to your family and your children, at least I tried.” [Speaker E, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]*

**Summary:** The impact of the proposed development on the health and social well-being of affected communities is significant. Participants described the mental and physical health benefits of having access to this land, as a place to exercise, be in nature and de-stress. 64% of respondents to the social survey said the development proposals had had some impact on their health and well-being. This included: constant worry and anxiety about the development plans, including sleepless nights; fears that the development would impact their physical health – both through loss of outdoor recreation space and the increased air, noise and light pollution, including for those with pre-existing health conditions such as asthma; a sense of helplessness and powerlessness over decisions affecting their lives; and stress and uncertainty about the future. Several people described the development plans as “life-changing”. 27.5% of respondents to the social survey said the development proposals had made them change their plans for the future; 36% said they were not sure. When asked how their plans for the future had changed, 62 respondents (out of 100) said they were considering leaving the area.

## **7. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS**

***“I am angry. I’m very angry with the university for what they’ve done. I’m angry with the City Council for the manner in which all this information came out. It was a shock!”<sup>70</sup>***

A key component of this research was to understand how the local community had engaged with the public consultation process on the draft Local Plan and whether they thought they had been listened to, or what they said would make a difference. The research sought to understand what information had been shared with the local communities about the development plans prior to the publication of the Local Plan, how they reacted when they first heard about the plans, how they engaged in the public consultation and whether they thought it was a genuine consultative process.

### **a) Initial sense of shock**

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<sup>70</sup> Participant A, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November



## HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THIS DEVELOPMENT?

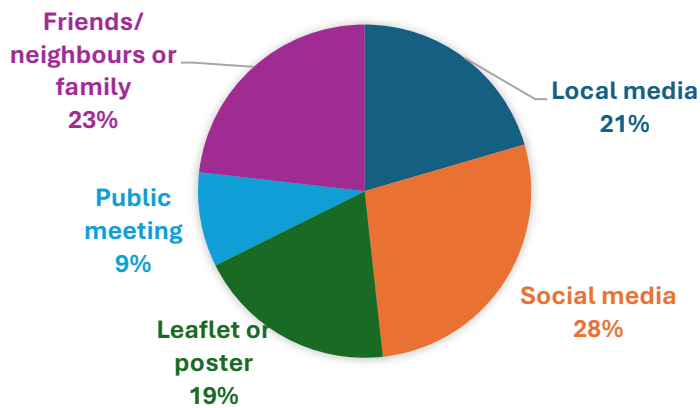


Figure 15: Social Survey Response Q. 5: Answered: 230; Skipped: 0

Participants in the research described a “sense of shock” when they first heard about the proposed development. Almost everyone interviewed said they had not heard about the University of Kent site prior to the publication of the draft Local Plan in March 2024. There had been no attempt by Canterbury City Council or the University of Kent to meet members of the local community or hold information meetings in any of the affected villages prior to the publication of the draft Local Plan and the inclusion of the site came as a complete shock. Although the university asserted that it had met local representatives from the Parish Councils of all three villages as well as City Councillors for the affected wards (Blean Forest and St Stephen’s) when the first draft of the Local Plan was published in October 2022, most members of the local community said they were unaware of these meetings and if they had taken place there had been no public feedback to the general public. [See [Annex A](#) for the full response from the University of Kent.]

Participants described their shock when they first learned about the development proposals:

*“So it was actually a link to a Kent Live article that was put on the Facebook group that my husband is part of... So my husband heard about it and then showed me the details in the article. And it was basically showing that this Masterplan was going to come out as part of the draft Local Plan and it would be voted on in cabinet the following week. And that was the first we heard of it... It was deeply shocking. I mean, my husband and I both cried about it at different times because it’s really upsetting, you just think this is life-changing, this is huge.”* [Individual interview with Hazel,\* 18 November]

*“It was in the online newspaper, I think it was the Kent Online... I think in the article it had a map so I could see it was the fields next to me. So that weekend I spent all of Saturday and all of Sunday with my wife and two children at my parents’ so I didn’t have to see the site to get sort of that distance away from it. Yeah, it wasn’t a good weekend... At first it’s just shock and in the early stages you have lots of questions and no answers, so you’re trying to take in a lot of information, struggling to process it all. Whereas now I think I understand most of it and I can reason and make sense of it all a bit more now...”* [Individual interview with Linden,\* 23 November]

## b) Consultation with Canterbury City Council

Once the draft Local Plan was published in March 2024, there was a 12-week period of public consultation during which Canterbury City Council held a series of public information meetings and local residents had the opportunity to respond to the details of plan, either through an online form or by sending in written comments to the City Council. 59% of respondents to the social survey said they had participated in the public consultation.

Generally, participants expressed dissatisfaction at how Canterbury City Council had engaged with local communities, although a few people interviewed felt that the council had made an effort to consult with the public in an open and inclusive way, albeit within the rigid confines of the statutory consultation process.

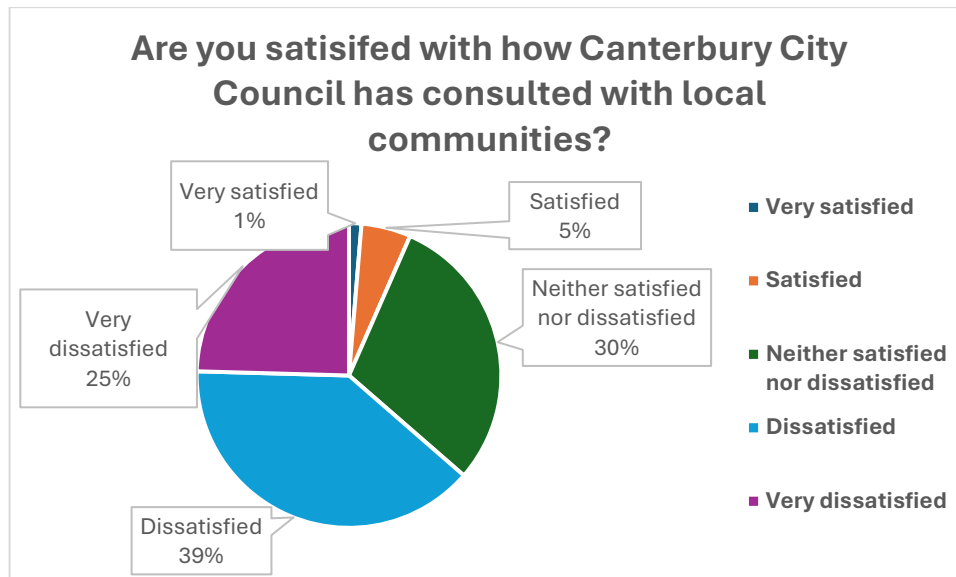


Figure 16: Social Survey Q. 10: Answered: 228: Skipped: 2

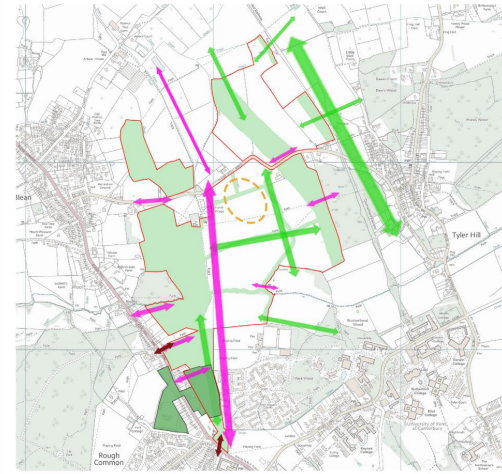
### **Lack of Detailed Information**

The lack of any consultation or communication with impacted communities before the publication of the draft Local Plan meant that when the Plan was published in March 2024 people lacked detailed information about what exactly was being proposed. This led to a sense of confusion and heightened shock as they did not know how precisely the proposed development would impact their lives (for example, with respect to access roads, the scale of development, what would happen to their houses etc).

*"Well, then we went from the newspaper article to go and look at the documentation and then you work out, you have to scroll through, you know, hundreds of pages and you find out it's called site C-12. And we just looked at this thing and just were kind of horrified because on many levels it was obviously going to be life-changing for us, but also looking at it, it was so obtuse. You know, it was sort of pink arrows and green arrows and this kind of Masterplan that didn't show any houses or roads or things that you obviously know they plan to be there. So it just felt very deliberately obtuse, actually." [Individual interview with Hazel, \* 18 November]*

## Policy C12 - Land north of the University of Kent

## Land north of the University of Kent - concept masterplan



## Key

- Site boundary
- Open space/ biodiversity opportunities- Indicative locations
- Green Gap
- Opportunities for green corridors
- Vehicle access- Indicative location
- Opportunities to improve cycling/walking access and safety
- Community hub- Indicative location

52

Site C12, Draft Canterbury District Local Plan, 2040

People who attended public information meetings said they were frustrated that the City Council was unable to provide detailed answers to their questions and they were repeatedly told that the plans were “conceptual”:

*“I think the City Council actually did it [the consultation] because they had to do it. I don’t think they really listened to what we said. I went to one of the meetings. At that time I was particularly interested in primary access point one, which goes over conservation land, which upsets me greatly. So I asked a question about going over conservation land and the response I got was that it was conceptual, which means nothing. I wanted details of exactly what they were going to do and how they were going to do it and they haven’t got that information, which irritates me intensely.”* [Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

Several participants felt they were unable to adequately respond to the public consultation because they didn’t have access to detailed information and the plans presented to them were so vague and non-specific:

*“Well, it wasn’t even a true representation of what they were going to do. I mean, it was so brief and it was so watered down and they haven’t even given us enough information really for us to make detailed constructive criticism of it because the specifics aren’t there. ‘Oh, we’ll build 2,000 houses.’ ‘How will you build them? Will they be sustainable? Will they be ecologically friendly? Will they have solar power on the top of them? Are you going to have restricted lighting? Are you going to have low-level lighting? Are you going to have proper lawns or you’re going to have artificial grass?’ And we had to do all of this consultation without the traffic survey. So none of that information [was available]...”*

[Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November]

### ***The Consultation was Non-participatory and Non-inclusive***

Many participants in the research study were dissatisfied with how the consultation was carried out and felt that it was neither participatory nor inclusive. Some people felt it was a very one-sided consultation, where the public had to make an effort to inform themselves and find out about the Local Plan, rather than the City Council actively engaging with the local community. They suggested that the only way to genuinely consult with the local community would have been for the City Council to hold meetings in the affected communities, to meet the local residents and listen to their concerns:

*“I was quite worried then [at the public meetings] and I still am to a certain extent that you just don’t get listened to... I think they could improve it. I think they should have had something local. It’s quite staggering really how they misjudged the reaction of the people in this vicinity to only have the three initial meetings, none of which are in this local area. Which is really worrying because how do you not realise putting in 2,000 houses is going to create concern and opposition? I think they should have done one locally.”*

[Individual interview with Linden,\* 23 November]

Some people had specific complaints about the public information meetings held by the City Council on the draft Local Plan, which they felt were not genuine consultations, with insufficient opportunity for members of the public to actively engage with City Council officers and councillors. They argued that the information provided at the meetings lacked sufficient detail about exactly what was planned, there was insufficient time for members of the public to ask in-depth questions and the responses given were vague and unsatisfactory. At one meeting, held at the Guildhall in Canterbury, members of the public were barred from entering the meeting because of insufficient space, although the City Council did hold an additional meeting at the Westgate Hall to allow more people to attend:

*“I have felt let down with regard to the deceitfulness of the council, the councillors and the faux consultation. The consultation has in my opinion not been at all genuine. It has been an exercise for the council to manage the public opposition in such a way as to minimise damage to their careers. In reality, everything important is happening ‘behind the scenes’.”* [Social Survey Response, Q. 23]





Public consultation meeting, Guildhall, Canterbury, April 2024: Ania Bobrowicz

***We won't be Listened to and What We Say won't make a Difference***

There was a high level of response to the public consultation on the draft Local Plan, with 3,819 responses received, of which one third (1,244 responses) were related to the Blean site. Despite the high participation, there was a strong sense of disempowerment among the participants in the research and a belief that they would not be listened to by either the City Council or the university authorities:

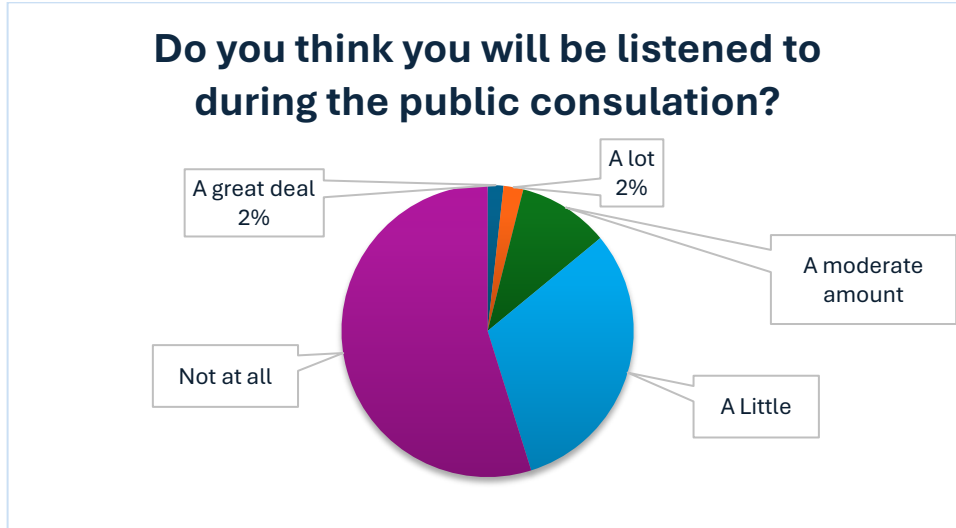


Figure 17: Social Survey Q. 12: Answered: 228: Skipped: 2

Moreover, the majority of respondents in the social survey felt that even if they were listened to, what they said would make no difference to the final outcome:

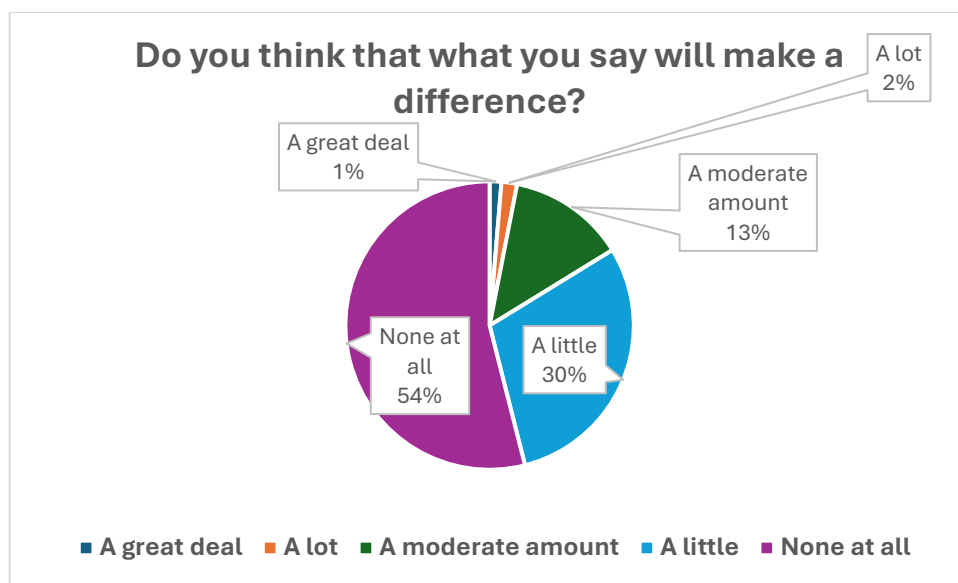


Figure 18: Social Survey Q. 13: Answered: 228; Skipped: 2

Many people felt there were more powerful forces at play, including the university's financial difficulties, the pressure on the City Council to meet central government housing targets and the vested interests of corporate developers, and that the views of impacted local communities would be ignored. Some people felt they had been let down by their elected representatives (Parish, City and County Councillors and local MP) who were not standing up for the interests of local communities. Several people pointed out that since the General Election in June 2024 there had been a shift in central government policy towards building more houses and meeting stricter housing targets to generate economic growth. The decision by the Secretary of State for Housing, Angela Rayner, to 'call in' a proposed development of 8,400 houses at Highsted, near Sittingbourne in Kent, in November 2024, just hours before Swale Borough Council had been about to vote on it, was at the forefront of many people's minds. They feared a similar fate could befall Canterbury and the final decision on the Local Plan would not be taken at the local level:

*"No, I don't think we will be listened to, not at all. You feel you have to do it [fill in the consultation] because you've done your bit, but I don't know that it's actually going to make any difference."*  
 [Speaker D, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 27 November]

*"I feel, do they really want to listen where it concerns money and the university wanting to gain money, do they really want to listen to our views, because, you know, it's where we live?... But if it was them, how would they feel? I just feel powerless and you're sort of helpless in a way. There's a feeling of being helpless because they've almost made their decisions and, like Angela Rayner now, you know, the government is going to build so many houses... I just find it very, very sad and that's why I get emotional that you've got a beautiful place, lots of history, lots of wildlife: 'Oh, we'll just bung some houses on there'."*  
 [Speaker B, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November]

### c) Consultation with the University of Kent

The majority of participants in the research felt that the University of Kent had failed to communicate and consult with impacted local communities about its development proposals and believed they had been left in the dark about plans that would profoundly impact their lives and well-being. Many residents in the three affected villages are connected to the university either as current or former employees and/or students. They

felt particularly upset and betrayed with how the university had engaged with and treated its closest neighbours and accused it of hypocrisy and undermining its own policies, strategies and long-term vision for the management of this land. For a full response from the University of Kent to these criticisms, please see [Annex A](#).

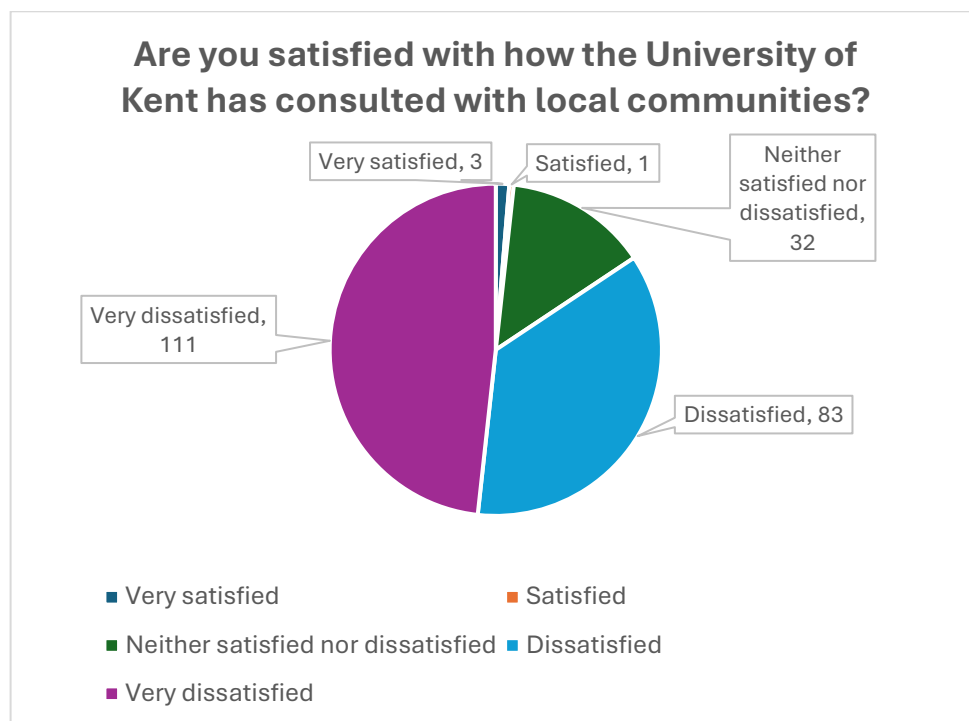


Figure 19: Social Survey Q. 11: Answered: 230; Skipped: 0

*"I would have expected them [the university] to engage much more with the local community and that has not happened before the plan was published... It would have been nice for the university to give us a heads-up that this is going to happen. It would have been really nice to have been at least informed before publishing on the 11th of March, maybe a month before, that this is coming..."*

[Individual interview with Holly,\* 22 November]

Although participants expressed disappointment in the way the university had consulted with local communities, there was also a prevailing view that because of the serious financial difficulties the university was facing, it would have no choice but to sell the land and the concerns of impacted local communities and damaging environmental impacts would be overlooked:

*"You know, they're in that much debt, aren't they? They need to service that debt. So the land will be sold, definitely. How else are you going to find a way of servicing that debt? That's what personally makes me think it will to some extent happen. I hope it gets reduced somewhat, but I think it will happen definitely in some form or other..."* [Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 21 November]

*“When I feel generous, I feel a little bit sorry for the university... they’re desperate, we know that. So when you start thinking about, well, what about the sense of place, what about people’s emotional attachment? It does not even figure because they cannot allow themselves to think that way because they have a job to do and the job is to bring money. And if they start thinking how much damage they’re inflicting on the local community, I think it’s almost like a form of denial. I don’t think they can accept that there is such a huge groundswell level of opposition because otherwise it will make their job very difficult.”*

[Individual interview with Holly,\* 22 November]

Some participants held the view that the need to ensure the continuing financial viability of the university as a major regional employer would also influence the decisions taken by Canterbury City Council:

*“But I think the concern I have, and I want to be positive, is the fact that for the university now it’s all about money in terms of the banks who are in charge and they have very good relationships with the specific members of the City Council. But I think money in the end, that’s the problem, which will overwhelm habitats, pollution and all the terrible kind of impact that it will have. And you know, they [the university] are looking at them [the City Council] and saying ‘We are a big employer’ and they [the City Council] are going to use that and take it seriously. And I’m afraid in the end money may talk.”*

[Speaker C, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

Others were particularly aggrieved at how the university had departed from its plans laid out in the [2019 Framework Masterplan](#) to protect and enhance the land north of the university. They pointed out that the university had engaged in a thorough and inclusive process of consultation with local communities to develop the 2019 Masterplan and expressed dismay that it had departed so radically from its policies to promote sustainability and biodiversity on this land. They also expressed disappointment that the university seemed to have abandoned its civic mission to serve local communities as laid out in the [Kent 2025 Strategy](#): *“Our civic mission goes to the heart of who we are as a university and why we are here – to serve our communities by contributing actively and sustainably to their health, wellbeing, prosperity and success.”*<sup>71</sup>

*“You may have come across the 2019 Masterplan, which is very big on, you know, promoting biodiversity and protecting wildlife, in engaging in a constructive way with the local community, and then this and none of this just rings true... all these vision statements and all these strategies and it’s not worth the paper it’s written on. That’s what really hurts, especially the 2019 Masterplan. I’m so angry about this... And I think ‘How dare you do this going against everything that you have believed, or maybe you have just claimed that you have believed!’.”* [Individual interview with Holly,\* 22 November]

Some residents, however, with fewer connections to the university felt that it was acting as any other corporate landowner would:

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<sup>71</sup> p.13, University of Kent, Kent 2025 Strategy, Mid-Term Review, Autumn 2021



*"I think older generations in the village feel more betrayed. They understand that the university bought the land purely for educational purposes... that's their understanding from being at the university at the time. Or just word of mouth between the villages. I don't because I wasn't around then. I just see it as their land so that ultimately they can do what they want with it. But I think if you own some land, you should be aware of the impact on your neighbours... I think I'm a bit different. I don't really see them as focusing purely on education to improve people's lives. I see them as a corporate machine."*

[Individual interview with Linden,\* 23 November]

#### **d) Loss of Trust in Local Government and Democratic Processes**

Several respondents noted that this experience had eroded their faith in local and national democratic processes and institutions. They said that they felt let down by the City Council (in some cases also by the local Parish Council) and central government. Some people said that they were so disillusioned by this experience they were not sure if they would vote again:

- *Before the plan was published, I had faith in local government to do what was best for the local people and environment. It fills me with dread and stress to think what the future has in store.*
- *Anger at how my employer is selling land to pay off debts to the detriment of the local community. Also at Canterbury City Council for being complicit in allowing developers to submit vague plans for shoddy housing on wholly unsuitable land.*
- *Anxiety and worry ongoing concerning the adoption of a myopic policy which so clearly contradicts all major policy actors' claims re. environmental sustainability and their supposed commitment to only develop land in appropriate locations. Leads to a sense of betrayal and revulsion at brazen hypocrisy.*
- *I may never vote again, or I will change who I vote for. I may resign as a Parish Councillor.*
- *It made me lose respect for the Parish Council, the Canterbury Council and the Government. This is a quick fix to demands for housing without any strategy and without any investment on the areas that actually will benefit from more housing. Blean is not one of these areas.*

Social Survey Responses, Q 23 & Q 25

**Summary:** Participants in the research were very dissatisfied with the way in which Canterbury City Council and the University of Kent had consulted with them over the development plans. The majority of participants said they had no information or knowledge about the proposed development site prior to the publication of the draft Local Plan in March 2024 and described a "sense of shock" when they first heard about the plans. One of the main criticisms was the lack of detailed information about the development site, which participants said hindered their ability to adequately respond to the public consultation. They also criticised Canterbury City Council for the non-participatory way in which it had carried out the public consultation, suggesting that meetings should have been held in the impacted villages to engage in a genuine consultation. Participants felt that the University of Kent had failed to communicate, consult with and inform impacted local communities about its development proposals and believed they had been left in the dark about plans that would profoundly impact their lives and well-being. Despite high participation in the public consultation, there was a strong sense of disempowerment among participants in the research. Most people believed they would not be listened to and what they said would make no difference. Several people said that this experience had eroded their faith in local and national democratic processes and institutions.

## 8. PROTEST AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

*“I think we have to speak out because Skylarks can’t speak out...”<sup>72</sup>*



Protect the Skylarks placard, January 2025: Hilary Scott

### a) Origins of the Campaign

Within days of the draft Local Plan being published in March 2024, a local campaign group – [Save The Blean Action Group](#) – was formed to protest the plans. The organisation, which had not existed before the publication of the draft Local Plan, sprang up organically – the initiative of a few local residents directly impacted by the proposals and outraged by the prospect of losing much-loved green space and nature. The group quickly evolved into a highly organised and visible campaign. Organisers spoke at Parish Council meetings in the three affected villages to muster support and inform the local communities about the development plans; initial campaign meetings were held in the local pub and a steering committee was formed. Within weeks of the publication of the draft Local Plan, the campaign group had printed leaflets about the proposed development that were hand-delivered to households in all three impacted villages and the surrounding area and produced eye-catching placards with slogans such as ‘Stop 2,000 Houses’, ‘No To More Traffic’, ‘Protect Blean’s Wildlife’, ‘Protect our Villages’, as well as giant posters that were put up in strategic locations, including next to the entrance to the University of Kent, with slogans such as ‘University of Kent – Don’t Destroy Our Communities, Our Wildlife and Our Future’.



Save The Blean placards, April and May 2024: Ania Bobrowicz

Campaign organisers described how the Parish Council meetings in Blean and Tyler Hill held shortly after the publication of the Local Plan were the launching pad for the campaign. The meetings were attended by a record number of residents concerned about the development plans and the organisers used these as an opportunity to collect contact details and start an email distribution list. As one organiser explained:

<sup>72</sup> Speaker F, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November

*"I'm no expert in campaigning, but I know what it involves through my work. And so it felt like a skill set that I could offer. I went to the Blean parish meeting where there were 50 people, probably biggest turn-out they've ever had. And then went to the Hackington meeting and there were 70-75 people. And at both of them I took a sheet and just started to gather signatures so we could begin an email list. And as soon as you've got an email list you've got a way of communicating with people and galvanising people."*

[Individual interview with campaign organiser, 18 November]

Another campaign organiser described the Parish Council meeting in Tyler Hill:

*"Hackington Parish Council meeting was on the 14th of March and we were expecting a good turn-out following the Blean Parish Council meeting. We had 72 people. We ran out of chairs I think towards the end and there were people standing, that's how incredible it was. And at that point I realised there is no way that that we can stick to the very prescriptive schedule of the meeting. We have to allow people to voice their concerns. So we had about a 40- to 45-minute debate about this, people asking questions, obviously worrying about this. It was all very fresh, very new because the plan had only just been published... I was surprised by the turn-out during the meeting. I was absolutely shocked. So they just kept coming and coming and coming... They were from Blean, they were from Rough Common, but mostly Tyler Hill. And people who you would never ever see in a Parish Council meeting were there and there were very strong opinions. And I have to tell you, not a single person out of 72 people was for this development."*

[Individual interview with campaign organiser, 22 November]



Parish Council meeting, Tyler Hill, 14 March 2024: Robert Wildman

The organisers tapped into the scale of public concern and opposition at the early Parish Council meetings to lay the foundations of the campaign group:



*"And then we held a meeting in the Hare pub for the community to all get together outside of parish things to have a bit of a kind of 'What are we going to do? How are we going to organise?'. And it was from that meeting that probably about a dozen or so people stepped forward and said 'Yeah, we'll form a committee and we'll try and do something'. It was quite exciting in some ways because, you know, out of something really awful, you suddenly get this huge surge of community."*

[Individual interview with campaign organiser, 18 November]

## b) Campaign Activities

In the early days of the campaign, a community walk was organised to draw attention to the proposal that more than 150 local residents, including many families and children, attended and to which the local media was invited. A month later, more than 300 people joined a march from the centre of Canterbury to the university carrying banners and musical instruments to protest the plans. Local organisations, including KWT, RSPB, CPRE Kent and Save The Blean representatives, addressed the march and the organisers handed over a letter to the University of Kent management urging them to drop the development plans. Local media covered the event.



Community protest walk, 20 April 2024: Julia Kirby-Smith, Suzanne Wyatt



Save The Blean protest march, Dane John Gardens, Canterbury, 25 May 2024: Ania Bobrowicz





Save The Blean protest march, University of Kent, 25 May 2024: John Buckels

At the same time, the campaign group geared up to encourage as many people as possible to respond to the public consultation on the draft Local Plan. Leaflets were printed with information about how to respond and the campaign group held drop-in sessions in all three villages to assist local residents to fill out the consultation forms:

*"It was absolutely amazing to go to all the consultation drop-in sessions that we put on and listen to people, some of them in their 90s, coming and saying 'You know, I don't agree with it. Can you please help me because I'm not digitally literate'. So we helped them understand what is at stake and we told them that this is how you can approach this. So there was a huge amount of effort that went into supporting people to engage with the consultation process."*

*"Well, the most important thing we did was motivate the community. We did engage the community. We raised awareness of the Local Plan. We raised awareness of how it's going to impact on the community and we managed to persuade a substantial amount of people to submit their responses. And I think that's what we have achieved in the first stage of the project. And I'm very proud of it. I think we've done extremely well with all the placards and all the leafleting."* [Individual interview with campaign organiser, 22 November]

**STOP THE DEVELOPMENT**  
**2,000 HOUSES WILL DESTROY THE BLEAN**

**What does it mean for you?**

- 2,000 new houses and a commercial hub, to be built on a large greenfield site owned by the University of Kent. Blean, Tyler Hill and Rough Common become part of the urban sprawl.
- Increase in local population from around 1,700 to 10,000 in a rural area. Pressure on water. Drainage running into the Sarre Penn stream. Increased air and light pollution.
- Major traffic increases on local roads. Two access points, by Kent College and through Blean Primary School, would funnel traffic down Whitstable Road. Rough Common Road becomes a cut-through.
- Loss of rare wildlife including skylarks, yellowhammers, nightingales, bats, great crested newts, butterflies, foxes, badgers, stoats. Loss of farmland, as well as green open spaces and ancient woodland.
- Destruction of the character of the area. St Cosmus and St Damian Church and other historical monuments surrounded by buildings. The Crab and Winkle Way would become an urban street.

Email [info@savetheblean.org](mailto:info@savetheblean.org) to join the mailing list

[www.savetheblean.org](http://www.savetheblean.org)

**STOP THE DEVELOPMENT**

2,000 new houses and a commercial hub, to be built on a large greenfield site owned by the University of Kent. Blean, Tyler Hill and Rough Common become part of the urban sprawl.

Major traffic increases on local roads. Two access points, by Kent College and through Blean Primary School, would funnel traffic down Whitstable Road. Rough Common Road becomes a bypass in all but name.

Increase in local population from around 3,700 to 10,000 in a rural area. Pressure on water. Drainage running into the Sarre Penn stream. Increased air and light pollution.

Loss of rare wildlife, hedgerows and ancient woodland. Heritage sites impacted, including the Crab & Winkle Way and Roman Salt Road. Loss of farmland, as well as Canterbury's precious green open spaces.

**WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

We are now in the middle of the Public Consultation. We need as many people as possible to give feedback so the Council understands the issues with this site. **Make sure you take part.**

The consultation form is found online. It may look a bit scary but don't be put off - there aren't many questions, you can skip lots of them, and with some explanation from us you can make a big difference by expressing your views. It only takes a few minutes.

Our handy **Guide to the Local Plan Consultation** is on the Save The Blean website.

If you still need help filling it in, or just want to talk it through, come to one of our drop-in sessions:

- 10-1pm, Saturday 27th April - Rough Common Village Hall
- 11-5pm, Friday 3rd May - Tyler Hill Memorial Hall
- 11-3pm, Saturday 4th May - City Centre outside the Beane Museum
- 11-4pm, Tuesday 7th May - The Hare at Blean Pub
- 11-4pm, Saturday 18th May - Blean Village Hall

The consultation deadline is **Monday 3rd June**. Make sure your voice is heard.

[info@savetheblean.org](mailto:info@savetheblean.org) | join the mailing list at [www.savetheblean.org](http://www.savetheblean.org)

Save The Blean Action Group is non party-political and separate from the local Parish Councils.

Save The Blean information and consultation leaflets

A total of 59% of participants in the social survey said they had participated in the public consultation:

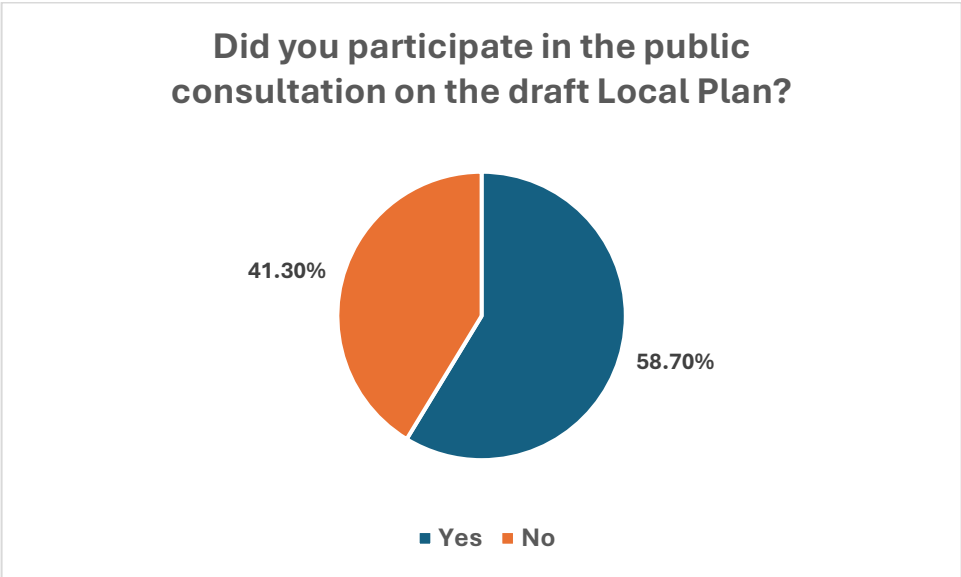


Figure 20: Social Survey, Q. 7

The campaign has continued to stay engaged in organising public events, raising funds and maintaining media and public attention. Events include a fundraising pub quiz in December 2024; sale of a 2025 Save The Blean calendar with photographs of the Blean; and a photography exhibition entitled ‘All That Could be Lost’ with photos of the Blean taken by local residents held at a gallery in Canterbury and at St Cosmus and St Damian Church in spring 2025. [A petition](#) against the proposed development was launched in October 2024 and at the time of writing had more than 25,000 signatures.



All That Could Be Lost photo exhibition, Canterbury, February 2024: Julia Kirby-Smith; Blean church, April 2024: Kieron McDonnell

**c) Support for the Campaign**

During the social research it was notable how many people expressed their appreciation and gratitude for the Save The Blean organisers and campaign. Many participants felt they had galvanised the community and praised their skills, organisation and dedication:

*"I greatly admire the Save The Blean campaign for what they have done. To have got up and running like they did so fast with the amount of skills that they've got and the amount of work they have put in. I can't believe how much work they have put in and how they have managed to do that and have families and everything else that goes on. So I think for them, I have to stay positive."*

[Participant A, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

Support for Save The Blean was widespread, as evidenced by the number of placards and posters in people's houses in all three villages and on the roads surrounding the development site. 55% of respondents (125 people) in the social survey said they had participated in some form of action:

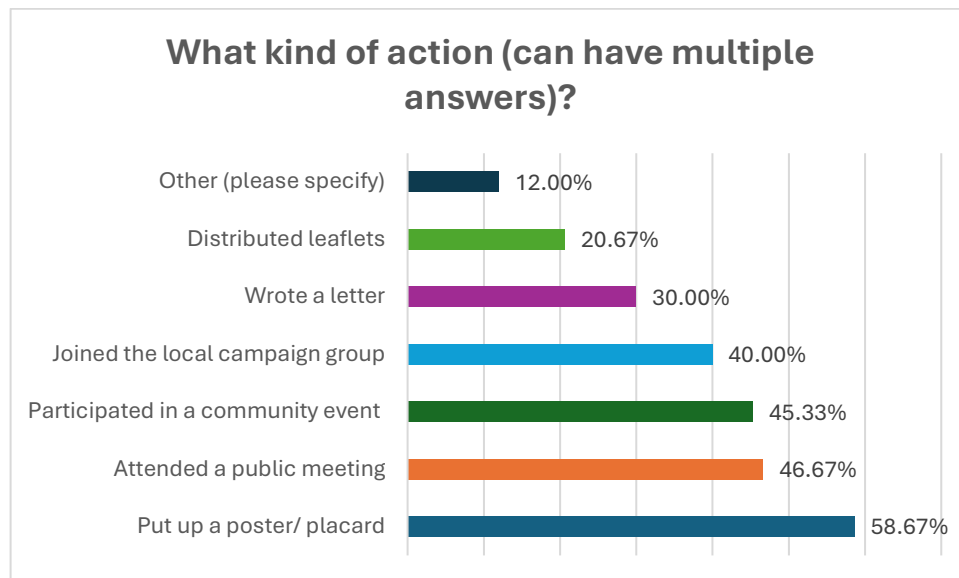


Figure 21: Social Survey Q. 9: Answered: 150; Skipped: 80

Other examples of action included donating to the campaign, contributing to the photography exhibition, signing the online petition, attending the pub quiz, buying the calendar, providing expert advice to the campaign group, setting up the campaign website, involving Blean church in the campaign and one person who wrote to the university and the local media in support of the development.

The Blean is an area of ancient woodlands, heritage sites, the Sarre Penn Valley and the villages of Tyler Hill, Blean and Rough Common. It is now under threat from a huge development proposed on greenfield sites owned by the University of Kent. This is being considered as part of the Local Plan for Canterbury.

Residents from Tyler Hill, Blean, Rough Common and Canterbury have come together

In huge opposition to this damaging proposal, which would destroy valuable farmland and an area of strategic importance to the Blean Woodland Complex, endangered wildlife and unique heritage.

By buying this calendar you are supporting the campaign to explore all avenues for fighting the development, and for funding a solution. We are working with local partners and funders

to create an alternative, funded vision for the land - and we hope that 2025 will be a year of positive outcomes!

Please follow us on social media and sign up to our mailing list at [www.savetheblean.org](http://www.savetheblean.org)

**£10**

Save The Blean calendar, December 2024



As one of the campaign organisers put it:

*"I think it's probably created a greater sense of people together... there's hundreds of placards and posters up and every single one has been put there voluntarily. You know, none of us went out planting placards... So hundreds of people wanted to show their support and have a placard out. Hundreds of people have donated to the fund that we've set up and we've used that for materials and leaflets and things and also ultimately we might need to take legal action and so on."* [Individual interview with campaign organiser, 18 November]

Blean church was one of the local institutions that decided to publicly support the Save The Blean campaign, a decision made formally by the Parochial Church Council (PCC). This support has included disseminating information and advertising events in its newsletter and noticeboards and hosting several Save The Blean events, such as a Save The Blean stand at a church World Environment Day event in June 2024 and the Save The Blean photography exhibition All That Could Be Lost in spring 2025.

#### **d) What Motivates People to Protest?**

The overriding reason participants gave for their involvement in the Save The Blean campaign was a sense that they had to try to do something to protest the development – even if it went ahead they would at least feel that they had tried to stop it:

*"Suppose the worst happens, suppose this does go ahead and this ridiculous plan comes to fruition – at least, and this is small consolation but it's true, at least you can say to yourself in all honesty and to your family and your children, at least I tried. At least I stood up for what I thought was the right thing to do. If you've just been fatalistic, although it could be rational to be fatalistic because you've got good reason not to think it makes any difference, at least you can say I tried my best."*

[Speaker E, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

*"You can't sit back. I think you've got to fight if you feel strongly. I mean, if we lose at the end of the day, at least we know we've tried."* [Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 27 November]

Others were involved out of a sense of outrage – they felt that the proposed development was profoundly wrong and ill-thought out – the wrong houses, in the wrong place:

*"I'm ready to keep fighting. I don't want any houses on the land at all. I'm not even thinking about accepting a small number of houses. I think that's a completely wrong approach to take... I think there's so many good reasons they shouldn't put it there. I just hesitate a bit because I question the councillors who have this ultimate vote. I don't think they will understand fully the site and its history and all these really good points about it. And it just seems wrong to have this urban sprawl. I think there must be better sites in the district, surely?"* [Individual interview with Linden,\* 23 November]

Some were outraged with the University of Kent and what they perceived as a betrayal of its principles and commitment to serve local communities:



*"And that sort of hypocrisy just keeps me going because I feel so angry and so frustrated, you know, because this is 'my university', I spent so long there and, yeah, I feel betrayed. On the one hand, I understand where they're coming from. I absolutely understand. Their backs are against the wall, there's no doubt about it, they are absolutely desperate to get the money and the banks are basically telling them what to do, it's my impression... but I am very, very disappointed and very frustrated, really. And that's what keeps driving me, the betrayal really."* [Individual interview with Holly,\* 22 November]

Some people were motivated out of a deep concern for the local environment – they saw the development as part of an existential threat to nature and wildlife:

*"It terrifies me, you know, and I just feel like ever since I've been fighting nuclear weapons, you know, in my late teens, it's still a fight to make people think this is a precious gift and we're here to look after it, you know, we're destroying it. So yeah, I feel really passionate about wildlife. I'm really passionate about the planet and this area."* [Speaker F, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

*"So nature's just been so important to me, you know, I can't explain it. And I'm not a nimby. I support things all over the country. If I hear anything going on, I'll sign something, you know. It's just instilled in me and I belong to all the trusts and stuff, you know, do my bit. And for my children, they're just as passionate as me."* [Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 27 November]

Among the campaigners, those people living closest to the site, whose lives were likely to be most negatively impacted by the development, were among the most engaged and actively involved. Similarly, people who used the land the most and had a deeper attachment to it, even if they didn't live as close to the site, were also among the most active in the campaign. Several people expressed the view that residents who lived further away from the development site or used the land less regularly and were more detached from it were less likely to actively protest. It was also suggested that residents who had lived their whole lives, or a very long time, in the area would have a stronger attachment to the land than those who arrived more recently, although the research suggests this is not the case and a more important determining factor is how regularly people use the land and how much they interact with the environment around them:

*"I think a lot of people are just like, oh, how will it affect me? What will actually be the impact on my day-to-day life? And they just seem to accept it, I guess because it's not material. Whereas people that actually walk it and cycle it and jog it, then they have more of an attachment to the land. They use it. Whereas if you live either side of it but don't necessarily use it, then yes, you'll object, but you're not up in arms about it."* [Individual interview with Linden,\* 23 November]

*"The reality that we're confronted with at the moment is a proposal that is clearly a matter of upset and concern to the community in the two villages that we serve... and it quickly became collectively apparent to the people in church that what we needed to do was to throw in our lot with the Save The Blean."* [Individual interview with Vicar of Blean church, 22 November]

#### **e) Greater Community Cohesion**

As well as spearheading opposition to the development, people said they felt the campaign had helped bring the local communities together. They pointed out that although the affected villages – Blean, Tyler Hill and Rough Common – were three distinct communities, the campaign had created greater community cohesion and united local residents:

*“And I just wanted to quickly say I have found when I was holding those placards or doing those leaflets, how lovely it is to be involved with people, meeting new people in the community. I found that a real positive, actually... And I think that that has actually been one real big plus. And what people are doing in the community, so bringing people together because it’s quite a linear village as well.”*

[Speaker C, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

*“I think the positive thing is that we actually have more of a sense of community, I think we really have pulled together. I’ve spoken to people I haven’t spoken to before... I know a lot more people now in the village than I ever did and we’ve pulled together.”* [Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 20 November]

One participant explained how the Save The Blean campaign might actually have galvanised a previously more fractured community and given residents a common sense of identity:

*“I was sensing when I first came here, there was something I called ‘old Blean,’ which was residents and families who really had been here for a very long time. But the reality is that Blean has become pretty suburban... which means that people come and live in Blean because it’s where they want to buy a house for the convenience, for schools, for transport or whatever else. So then they’re not buying their house because they love the community or necessarily want to contribute anything to the community... I think a number of people who represent what I call ‘old Blean,’ the families that have been here for a long time or many generations, it’s really dwindling and they are being replaced now.... So I think undoubtedly Save The Blean has pushed things the other way and that has to be a good thing. So you could say, in a funny sort of way, Save The Blean was the right thing at the right time.... Save The Blean seems to have shown us that there is some possibility of establishing a degree of community.”*

[Individual interview with Vicar of Blean church, 22 November]



Photo: Hilary Scott, January 2025

Participants in the research admitted that not everyone in the community was actively involved in protesting against the proposed development. They attributed this lack of involvement either to apathy, or fatalism – the sense among some people that the development was going to happen anyway and there was nothing they could do to change it. One participant suggested that there may be an age divide and younger people were more apathetic and less involved in protesting the development; however, several younger people (under 35) participated in the community research and 11% of the respondents to the social survey were aged under 35.

*"I'd say there are definitely people who either feel very apathetic or don't want it to happen but think it will just get pushed through. There's a few people like that. There will always be a couple of people that think we are just being nimbys and it will be all right and [say] 'Why is everyone so bothered?'. But I'd say yeah, 97% of people locally don't want it to happen."* [Individual interview with Hazel,\* 18 November]

*"I think a lot of the comments I get is we don't stand a chance and a lot of people are saying 'Why are we bothering?'. Of course I put them right on that one, but a lot of people are very worried it's a fait accompli... but I still get that from a lot of people: 'Well, I don't know why you're bothering because the university will win!'. "* [Speaker F, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

Some people felt that the bulk of the campaigning was being carried by a few individuals either due to apathy or a sense of fatalism:

*"I think a small group of people do a disproportionate amount of work... if I use as an example the leaflet distribution... a lot of people were sort of like 'Oh, what can we do? If it happens, it happens'. Yes, really apathetic. I just thought 'Oh, come on, where's your spirit here? Come on, let's do something!'... I think people do care. It's just maybe not enough. I think that everybody should be really up in arms about it, but they don't seem to be because when we did the march from the city centre to the university there were 300 people, I think it was, and Tyler Hill itself is about 600 people and there's over 1,000, I think, in Blean. So in my mind I'm thinking why didn't they just prioritise?"* [Individual interview with Linden,\* 23 November]

The campaign organisers said that overall they had found leading the campaign to be a positive experience – they had learned new skills, met members of the local community they might not have come into contact with before and enjoyed working alongside a team of skilled and dedicated campaigners:

*"I'm enjoying it. I wouldn't do it if I wasn't. I'm finding it quite energising and I'm learning. I like learning and I like being challenged. And, you know, weirdly it's allowed me to meet large numbers of the local community that I didn't know. It's really nice. And likewise with my network locally, it's nice professionally to sort of actually link up with different organisations and think about things that are related but also useful for my kind of day job. And you know, even if we fail, I just think you've got to give these things a go."* [Individual interview with campaign organiser, 18 November]

*"I think it has been eye-opening, actually, how much you can do and how much incredible expertise and experience you can get together... I think it made me realise we are part of something greater and it's just such an adrenaline rush. You know, we're doing something for the benefit of local people... we believe in it and I think we will just fight until the bitter end. We are here, you know, we're not going away. It's not going to stop until there is a resolution... we're going to do whatever we can to get this out of the Local Plan or, more importantly, to stop the development altogether. Because it's just going to be so destructive for so many people and the wildlife."* [Individual interview with campaign organiser, 22 November]

#### **f) The Campaign has Caused Stress**

However, participants in the research also acknowledged that it was exhausting and very time-consuming to run a local campaign on top of their jobs and family commitments and it had taken its toll on their health, jobs and well-being:

*"In April and May, I thought 'This is it, I'm going to have a burnout' because it was so fast and furious. So many things were happening. I mean, I was involved in I think every single one of those drop-in sessions... So my Saturdays were basically gone and I would be coming back and then going to a meeting the following day and then doing leafleting and doing the placards and everything else and trying to keep down my part-time job and the Parish Council and, you know, volunteering and everything else... I was completely exhausted because it's so emotionally draining as well. And it's kind of a rollercoaster. One day you hear some good news, the next day you hear something else... Having this fantastic group of people on the committee just really helps because it grounds everybody."* [Individual interview with campaign organiser, 22 November]

*"It's tiring enough when you have sleepless nights, but then during the day you have to concentrate on your employment and your actual job. But then you have all these other things now going on... I would say my work is affected. I have a project now which I have to get done by the end of this year and I think I might not be able to get that done and I think it's because I was drawn away from work and spent a lot of time on this topic."* [Individual interview with campaign organiser, 23 November]

Some people described the constant stress of fighting to save nature and wildlife as a drain on their energy and well-being:

- *Fighting to try to save countryside and wildlife when nobody in power listens is exhausting in itself.*
- *Depressed to be fighting yet again against an ill-considered development proposal that would entail loss of much that I value.*
- *Sick and tired of developers stealing our beautiful remaining countryside for their own greed.*

Social Survey Responses, Q 23

Although in the minority, a few respondents to the social survey said that the campaign had caused stress in the local community:

- *Tension and all the signs on windows are stressful.*
- *Completing the consultation was stressful.*
- *It is stressful seeing how many people are upset.*

Social Survey Responses, Q 23

#### **g) Learning from Previous Campaigns**

For some people, campaigning against the Blean development was an extension of local activism they were already involved in to protect areas from over-development across Canterbury. Some people had become involved in campaigning when the first draft of the Local Plan came out in 2022 and so were more alert when the revised draft was published in March 2024; others had been involved in previous campaigns against University of Kent developments. Members of the Save The Blean campaign had been involved in other local campaign groups, such as the [Save Chaucer Fields](#) campaign, the [Friends of Dukes and Neals Place Meadows](#), [Save Wincheap Water Meadows](#) campaign, the [Friends of Old Park and Chequers Wood](#) and the [Mountfield Park](#) campaign. They pointed out the value of learning from previous campaigns and the importance of groups joining together to protest inappropriate developments:



*"I sort of got involved when the first Local Plan came out and there was this plan to put a dual carriageway through Rough Common and finishing on the Whitstable Road. And where I lived, there was a huge swell of, you know, we can't allow this to go through, then we started looking at the whole Local Plan and other areas that were affected. And I see this as almost like an extension of that, I think we have to have groups that have joined up. So, you know, a concern that somewhere if you've learned something you can point people in the direction or just support them."* [Speaker A, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]

*"Basically, I got involved in a sort of push-back against the University of Kent with another project, which was called the Chaucer Fields project. I got very heavily involved in Save Chaucer Fields... That was successful, I mean we stopped that project... And that gave me sort of the sense that it wasn't always hopeless with these things if communities respond... And so when I found out about this, anger is a good word. I was very angry, not least because it felt like betrayal, a little bit like the Chaucer Fields thing."* [Speaker E, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

#### **h) Sustaining Engagement**

The campaign organisers acknowledged that sustaining the level of energy and community engagement was the biggest challenge facing the campaign, especially in the interim period between the end of the public consultation in June 2024 and the final decision on the draft Local Plan by the council, now due in the [spring of 2026](#). They argued that it was essential to keep the issue alive and in people's minds and to sustain pressure on the council and university authorities during this time. There was a view that delaying a decision on the draft Local Plan may have allowed public pressure to dissipate:

*"I think it has definitely brought people together, but I'm not sure for how long. That's the thing. I don't know if we can sustain it. We're trying to sustain it with, you know, new placards and the calendars and the pub quiz and there's going to be an exhibition and Blean walks and stuff like that. But beyond obviously the 3rd of June, which was the deadline for the consultation, you can imagine that people were not so much losing interest, but it was becoming less topical, less relevant. And for us, it wasn't, you know, it's always topical, it's always relevant. We kind of live and breathe this whole thing...So I think from that point of view, I hope that we can sustain the momentum."* [Individual interview with campaign organiser, 22 November]

*"I think it's to do with momentum. I think momentum matters to these things and if you think from the mindset of those who want this to happen, they will seize on any sense that things are fading or people are becoming less committed. So you have to keep on demonstrating commitment in momentum to not give them a licence to make the argument 'Well, now people have heard about it and they've thought about it and the reason we're seeing less activism is because people have accepted it'. That's what you mustn't allow them to do."* [Speaker E, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 20 November]

*"It's all about hope and how you sustain hope, it's the same for any campaign. Sustaining it is a part of hope, we keep people's hopes alive, which requires a sense of history. That's why I think going on about previous campaigns is very important. Because you know, you win some, you lose some, but you can win."* [Individual Interview with Oakley,\* 26 November]

**Summary:** Within days of learning about the development plans, a local campaign group, [Save The Blean Action Group](#), was formed. The initiative of a few local residents directly impacted by the proposals and outraged by the prospect of losing much-loved green space, the group sprang up organically and quickly evolved into a well-

organised and visible campaign. There was strong support for the Save The Blean campaign among participants in the research. 59% of respondents to the social survey had participated in the public consultation on the Local Plan and 55% had engaged in some other kind of action. The research found that those people living closest to the site and those who used the land most regularly were the most likely to be actively involved in campaigning against the proposed development. Campaign organisers and other participants said that overall the campaign had been a positive experience that brought the three communities together, although they acknowledged that sustaining engagement, energy and interest over a long period was a challenge. Some members of Save The Blean action group had been involved in other local campaigns to protect natural areas around the district and brought considerable networking skills and experience to this campaign.

## 9. AN ALTERNATIVE VISION FOR THE LAND

### a) Engagement with the University of Kent, Save The Blean and Kent Wildlife Trust

At a very early stage in the campaign, Save The Blean set up a small liaison group to engage in constructive discussions with the University of Kent about an alternative vision for the university-owned land. These built on earlier discussions that Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT) had been involved in with the university when the first version of the draft Local Plan was published in 2022. When the second draft of the Local Plan was published in 2024, representatives from the University of Kent senior management team and the Save The Blean liaison group agreed to meet on a monthly basis. The university described the meetings initially as both sides *“stating respective positions”*.<sup>73</sup> Save The Blean explained the reasons for the strength of feeling against the development within the local communities, while the university highlighted its reasons for putting forward this land for residential development and the positive gains *“over and above the potential financial gain to the university”*.<sup>74</sup> The university committed to *“continue and engage in a dialogue with Save The Blean and be as transparent, as commercially sensible, with those representatives and to use Save The Blean effectively as our channel to the community”*.<sup>75</sup>

Meetings between the University of Kent and Save The Blean continued on a regular basis and were subsequently joined by representatives from KWT. Together Save The Blean and KWT developed a proposal for alternative land-use that they presented to the University of Kent during a workshop in March 2025 and then submitted a final detailed proposal to the university in May 2025.

As one of the Save The Blean campaign organisers explained:

*“Essentially we’ve realised that we can fight or fund, sort of two approaches. And obviously we will do all the fighting and we’ve continued to do that. But in terms of funding, you know, clearly the land is basically up for sale. They obviously want to get the highest amount possible, but we’re looking at what alternative proposal we can put together and we’d like to try and buy the land for the community and for the district.”*

[Individual interview with Save The Blean representative, 18 November 2024]

While the university acknowledged that it was open to considering the proposal from Save The Blean and KWT, its representative stressed that:

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<sup>73</sup> Individual Interview with University of Kent representative, 28 November 2024

<sup>74</sup> Individual Interview with University of Kent representative, 28 November 2024

<sup>75</sup> Individual Interview with University of Kent representative, 28 November 2024

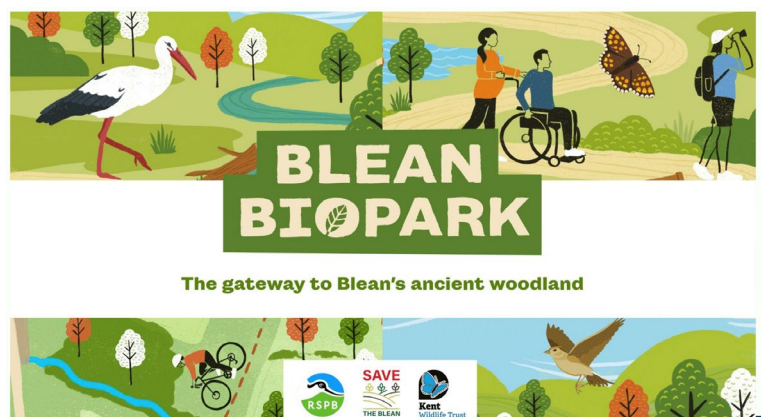
*“We’re both very clear that the university will continue to progress the development through the Local Plan consultation process and they will continue to vigorously oppose it using all the methods at their disposal. And we both understand that position. And I think in the main, that is a constructive dialogue between us.”*

[Individual interview with former Director of Commercial Services and Estates, University of Kent, 28 November 2024]

#### **b) Blean Biopark: Alternative Land-use Proposal**

Save The Blean, KWT and RSPB have developed an alternative land-use proposal, entitled [Blean Biopark: the gateway to Blean’s ancient woodland](#), that envisions dividing the land into six parcels with diversified land-use on each part of the site. These include:

- Regenerative farming, with the potential for agricultural research or a demonstration farm.
- A large biopark, the main part of which would be used for rewilding, reforestation and habitat regeneration efforts with a view to reconnecting the Blean woodland complex and existing wildlife corridors while maintaining controlled public rights of way; and a smaller area dedicated to recreation and cultural heritage, including accessible cycle and walking paths, a children’s play and learning area, picnic tables, a bird hide, toilets and other facilities.
- An area close to the university campus dedicated to ecotourism, with the possibility for holiday accommodation and conference facilities.
- Two areas for potential small-scale housing, one within easy access of Blean village and existing shops and transport routes, and the other on a brownfield site where there are existing barn buildings, which could be used for small-scale housing or for an agricultural visitor centre.



The alternative land-use proposal is a collaborative approach that benefits nature, the local community and the local economy through green capital projects, as well as bringing financial returns for the university. The university can enhance its reputation as a leading centre of ecological sustainability and biodiversity, building on its existing image as the ‘University of Kent in the Garden of England’ and the internationally-renowned work of the Durrell Institute of Conservation Ecology (DICE). The proposal would bring opportunities for Canterbury City Council to boost local tourism and generate green finance solutions, contribute to the vision of joining up the Blean woodland complex and build environmental resilience through reforestation and habitat restoration along the Sarre Penn valley.

The alternative vision for community land management mirrors closely the university’s own vision for managing the Sarre Penn valley laid out in its [2019 Framework Masterplan](#) and Canterbury City Council’s recommendations for management of this land in the [2020 Landscape Character Assessment and Biodiversity Appraisal](#). They all propose creating a wildlife corridor between the East and West sides of the Blean woodland

complex, restoring connectivity and biodiversity along the Sarre Penn stream and conserving the rural landscape, open views and ancient woodland in this area.



Path from Blean church to Tyler Hill, June 2025: Kieron McDonnell

## 10. THE WIDER DEBATE: BLOCKERS OR PROTECTORS?

***“Once it’s gone, it’s gone. And there’s too much around here. It’s got to stop, hasn’t it? For our well-being and our children’s well-being and nature. I think we have a responsibility to the world as well. You know, it’s not just our world.”*<sup>76</sup>**

This research took place against the backdrop of a national debate about housebuilding and a narrative being pushed by central government and the media portraying those who protest as [“blockers, nimbys and an alliance of naysayers.”](#) Participants were asked if they considered themselves to be ‘nimbys’ [not-in-my-backyard] or ‘blockers’ and what they thought about these terms and the wider, national debate about housebuilding in Britain.

Generally, two main viewpoints emerged from these discussions. One was the view that this particular site was uniquely unsuitable for such a large-scale housing development due to the topography of the land, risks of flooding, poor road access and unsuitable transport links and the damage it would cause to the environment and historical heritage. The people who held this view often said they understood the need for more housing, but it had to be the right houses in the right place:

*“And the sort of underlying message is you are nimbys, you should really get over yourself. But it’s not about that. It’s not about being a nimby. It’s about building something in absolutely the wrong place and the damage that it’s going to cause to surrounding villages, to the wildlife, to the heritage, to everything you know that we have learnt to love and cherish.”* [Individual interview with Holly,\* 22 November]

*“I understand why people feel aggrieved, but it’s about the right houses in the right place. So we’re not saying don’t build houses anywhere. We’re saying partly don’t build them here because the site is difficult. The road network, the access and then the biodiversity and the heritage. You know that there are so many problems with this site.”* [Individual interview with Hazel,\* 18 November]

Other participants said they would protest a large-scale housing development on a greenfield site wherever it was planned if it caused significant damage to landscape, wildlife and communities. They rejected the label ‘not-

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<sup>76</sup> Speaker B, Focus Group Discussion, Blean, 27 November



in-my-backyard', arguing that they did not believe in displacing an unsuitable development from one location to another site where its impact would be equally damaging:

*"I would be aware of the threat anywhere... I can certainly sympathise with people who are trying to protect their land, even if it's a land which is by other people's lenses low in value. And a good example is the campaign to protect Swanscombe peninsula... Even though it's not a land I know, I know how attached people can be to it. They feel that sense of urgency when they see the threat. Now, if they're called nimby, I say 'Wait, stop a minute. What does nimby mean?'. You need to unpack that, you need to say 'No, not in my backyard, but not in anyone's backyard'. And you can extend the net to say 'Well, my backyard is everyone's backyard and everyone's backyard is my backyard'. So the danger with nimbyism is saying I don't want it there but put it somewhere else. That is highly problematic. And I've heard that sentiment of 'We don't want the 2,000 homes here, we should find another location for it'.... My position is no, we shouldn't because that is the negative aspect of nimbyism."* [Individual interview with Rowan,\* 25 November]

*"I don't think it's a helpful label to use. Not in my backyard implies 'OK, in somebody else's backyard', but anybody who thinks about why they object would see that it's generalisable to other people's experience as well and they wouldn't want other people to have to put up with it, either."*  
[Individual interview with Oakley,\* 26 November]

Some people argued that there was a gradation of objection to development plans, ranging from individuals protesting developments that caused them personal inconvenience (such as spoiling the view from their house), which they characterised as a more selfish form of nimbyism, to communities protesting to protect the natural environment, which was characterised as legitimate nimbyism:

*"I think it's a gradation, really. I mean, the extreme case of nimbyism would be somebody objecting to a particular planning application because it's going to spoil their view from their bedroom window, or something like that. But there's a whole spectrum of increasingly impartial objection to things that are destroying things for your neighbourhood, or for your community, or for the world. So of course people get most involved, put most energy into it, when it's in their backyard and any campaign will need to draw on that energy. But at the same time, that needs to articulate itself in terms which aren't just selfish... You know, when people talk about nimbyism, there's a perfectly proper dimension for that... it's not just that this is a valuable space for me, it's a valuable space for lots of people and it's part of a global struggle to protect the natural environment."* [Individual interview with Oakley,\* 26 November]

Some participants viewed the endless destruction of the natural environment for construction as an existential crisis and spoke with great passion and emotion about the need to protect nature and wildlife for the sake of our planet and for future generations.

*"I really feel like we have to have a voice because the things we're talking about protecting don't have a voice. And we know, those of us that are old, that in the '60s when rampant development happened, that was when the Green Belt was designed because they said we should never let this happen again. And now they're building on the Green Belt. So, you know, people have very short memories about protection and I think we have to speak out because Skylarks can't speak out..."*  
[Speaker F, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]



Restore Nature march, London, June 2024: Ania Bobrowicz

Others talked about their sense of responsibility to protect their own local environment, arguing that if they didn't stand up for nature in their own local area, who would?

*"We've got to look after it because nature everywhere is becoming decimated. If we don't do it, who else would? I mean, biodiversity is so poor across the whole of the UK, one of the most biodiversity-depleted countries in the world, that's our record... What are we leaving for our children? And if we can't sort it out at a local level, OK, I'm not a Prime Minister, I'm not a politician, whatever, but if we can't sort it out at a local level, it's got to start somewhere. And I do believe, you know, the grassroots is absolutely vital. It can be frustrating sometimes, very frustrating... but absolutely there is a sense of responsibility for what we're leaving for the younger generations."* [Individual interview with Holly,\* 22 November]

Several participants felt that 'nimby' was a lazy and derogatory term used to deflect and dismiss the valid concerns of local communities and as an excuse not to engage with them:

*"And so actually 'nimby' is just this really pejorative way of saying 'No, I don't agree that you can change my life without my consent'. It's just one of those horrible dismissive words, it's like 'woke' and 'snowflake' and all these kind of rude words that are very unkind and also very shorthand. Like it allows people to not really think about what we're saying."* [Individual interview with Hazel,\* 18 November]

Others argued the case for reclaiming the term 'nimby' to reflect a more positive motivation and outlook and some people had even devised their own alternative acronyms:

*"I've come to a conclusion that I would very happily own it if it means that it equates to destruction of wildlife and the destruction that will happen as a result of this development. I'm quite happy. I've even thought about a sort of appropriate acronym... So something much more positive like 'Nature In My Back Yard'. You know, for example, when you own 'snowflake,' or you when you own something that is very derogatory that maybe the right-wing media would throw at you, you own it, you just turn it upside down and you own it. And I really have no problem with that."* [Individual interview with Holly,\* 22 November]

*“My thoughts [about the term ‘nimby’] are well maybe yes, but also that’s not necessarily a bad thing when you have all of these memories from childhood, it’s perfectly understandable to want to protect it. I think that’s a very human reaction. And whilst the term is kind of derogatory in intention, perhaps it’s something that you can own without guilt.” [Speaker E, Focus Group Discussion, Tyler Hill, 19 November]*



Orange-tip butterfly, April 2025; Painted Lady butterfly, November 2024; Nursery Web Spider, May 2025: Kieron McDonnell

## CONCLUSION

The views of the participants in this study and their emotional responses to the threat of losing green space and the permanent alteration of their local landscape can be found in rural communities throughout the UK, especially across the south-east of England and in Kent, where the drive to build is particularly intense.<sup>viii</sup> What makes this study different is its approach: taking the time to listen, document and record these views and emotions.

The debate around housing and infrastructure development in the UK has become increasingly divisive – in part due to the derogatory and dismissive language used by politicians and the media to disparage those who protest. When simplistic labels such as [‘nimby’](#), [‘blocker’](#) and [‘naysayer’](#) are used to stereotype people who object, it masks the need for both sides to listen and engage with each other in a meaningful dialogue. The rhetoric and the [legislation](#) are moving further away from any kind of constructive engagement by government and developers with the local communities whose lives will be impacted by large-scale development. The drive seems to be wholly one-sided: to aid the planners, property developers and construction firms to [‘get more shovels in the ground’](#) and push aside anything that comes in their way – be that [nature](#) or people.

This report presents an alternative perspective. It acknowledges but doesn’t attempt to provide answers to the complex economic and housing crisis that the government is seeking to address, or the financial crisis that is forcing higher-education institutions and farmers across Britain to sell their land. The voices of young people trying to buy their first homes, homeless people living on the streets and families in temporary accommodation or on council waiting lists are not reflected in this report;<sup>ix</sup> neither does it answer the question of whether the vast housing estates being built across farmland in the south-east of England will actually meet their needs.<sup>x</sup>

What the report does is give space for the voices of those communities who will lose out in the government’s drive to build to be heard. The participatory methods used in this research are not difficult or expensive to implement. But in a context where communities feel disempowered and disillusioned, an inclusive and



participatory approach to consultation can bring significant benefits. As one participant said in their feedback on this study:

*“The researcher’s interest, concern and questions about our emotional attachment to the landscape and our responses to the impending loss felt extremely validating. Sharing these responses with other people who had similar feelings reduced my feelings of being alone, helpless and unheard. I felt more optimistic about being heard.”* [Participant feedback form, 20 November 2024]

Far from restricting local communities’ ability to engage in planning processes and provide input into decisions that will impact their lives and local environment, as the new [Planning and Infrastructure Bill](#)<sup>xi</sup> threatens to do, local authorities and central government should be seeking ways to engage more constructively and consult more meaningfully with communities. If residents are unable to participate in decisions that profoundly impact their lives, well-being and future, they are likely to become alienated and disengaged and the chasm between policymakers and rural populations will grow wider. Participatory approaches and the inclusion of social impact indicators to measure the impact of loss of nature and green spaces on people’s health and social well-being can assist local authorities and central government to understand more accurately how communities are affected and why they protest. The deep attachment that rural communities hold to their local landscape and the grief and despair they feel at seeing it destroyed and permanently altered are real: their voices deserve to be heard in the complex debate about housing, development and economic growth in the UK.



Sunrise over the Blean, November 2024: Rachael Reilly



## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> There is an extensive body of literature on social impact assessments and holistic human well-being with respect to development and conservation projects in the global south. See for example: Woodhouse, E.; Homewood, K. M., Beauchamp, E., Clements, T., McCabe, J. T., Wilkie, D., Milner-Gulland, E. J. (2015) *Guiding principles for evaluating the impacts of conservation interventions on human well-being*. Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B. Biological sciences, Vol.370 (1681)

<sup>ii</sup> The [Planning and Infrastructure Bill](#) is currently under consideration in the [House of Lords](#) (July 2025). The CPRE, the [Wildlife Trusts](#) and the [Community Planning Alliance](#) have all criticised the Bill for its restrictions on [local involvement in planning decisions](#) and its damaging implications for nature and wildlife. [Wildlife charities](#), including the Wildlife Trusts and RSPB, have described Part 3 of the Bill on 'Nature Recovery' as a '[licence to kill nature](#)' as it removes vital existing environmental protections and would result in irreparable damage to Britain's already fragile natural landscapes, habitats and wildlife species without adequately compensating local communities for lost nature and green spaces.

<sup>iii</sup> The Blean Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC), West Blean and Thornden Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Church Woods SSSI and Blean Woods National Nature Reserve (NNR) are all within close vicinity of the site; and the Tyler Hill and Blean Meadows Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and Blean Biodiversity Area are located within the site.

<sup>iv</sup> In September 2020, the University of Kent carried out an archaeological excavation on the multiperiod site around Blean church as "*part of a wider public engagement effort to connect the university more closely to its landscape setting and to the villages which surround it, by supporting research into local heritage*". For more information see <https://ukcbleandig.wordpress.com/about/>

<sup>v</sup> For a full analysis of the process for including site C12 in the 2024 version of the draft Local Plan (2040) please see the [Independent Review: Canterbury District Local Plan 2040, Sustainability Assessment and Strategic Environmental Sustainability Assessment](#), May 2024, prepared by Dr Rufus Howard, Greenfriars Ltd.

<sup>vi</sup> All the online and written responses to the Regulation 18 Consultation are now [publicly available](#), as well as a [summary report](#) prepared by the City Council and [qualitative data reports](#) on each section of the draft Local Plan. The qualitative data reports indicate the key issues raised on each part of the Local Plan and the number of comments received. The qualitative data report for [Site C12](#) closely matches the qualitative and quantitative data collected during this study.

<sup>vii</sup> Extensive documentation prepared by the university's consultant, Avison Young, for the draft Local Plan process can be found under the [Canterbury City Council New Local Plan Consultation Responses](#). Specific University of Kent documentation relating to ancient woodland on the site can be found [here](#). See also p. 27, Avison Young, [University of Kent Representation to the Draft Canterbury District Local Plan, 2020-2045, January 2023](#).

<sup>viii</sup> Although not included in this report, the views and sentiments expressed by two other local campaign groups – Conserve Adisham's Rural Environment (CARE) and the Save Brooklands Farm campaign – closely mirrored those expressed by participants in the Blean. The Community Planning Alliance (CPA) has documented more than 700 local campaign groups fighting to save their green spaces. An interactive map highlighting the location of campaign groups and the developments they are fighting can be found on the [CPA website](#).

<sup>ix</sup> Research by the homelessness charity [Shelter](#) in December 2024 found that there were a total of 354,000 homeless people in Britain, of whom 326,000 were living in temporary accommodation, 3,900 people were sleeping rough on the streets (on any given night) and a further 16,600 single people were living in hostels or other homeless accommodation. Of the 126,000 households in temporary accommodation, more than 80,000 were families with children. Due to the chronic shortage of housing for social rent, more than 1.3 million households are on social housing waiting lists across the country.

<sup>x</sup> These issues are addressed in a 2025 report by the Community Planning Alliance, [Homes For Everyone](#), which sets out a plan for how Britain can meet its housing needs without uprooting nature, concreting over food-producing land and destroying communities' sense of place and heritage and in a 2023 report by the CPRE, [Unravelling a crisis: The state of rural affordable housing in England](#).

<sup>xi</sup> See above, Endnote ii