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Attitudes to housing and community

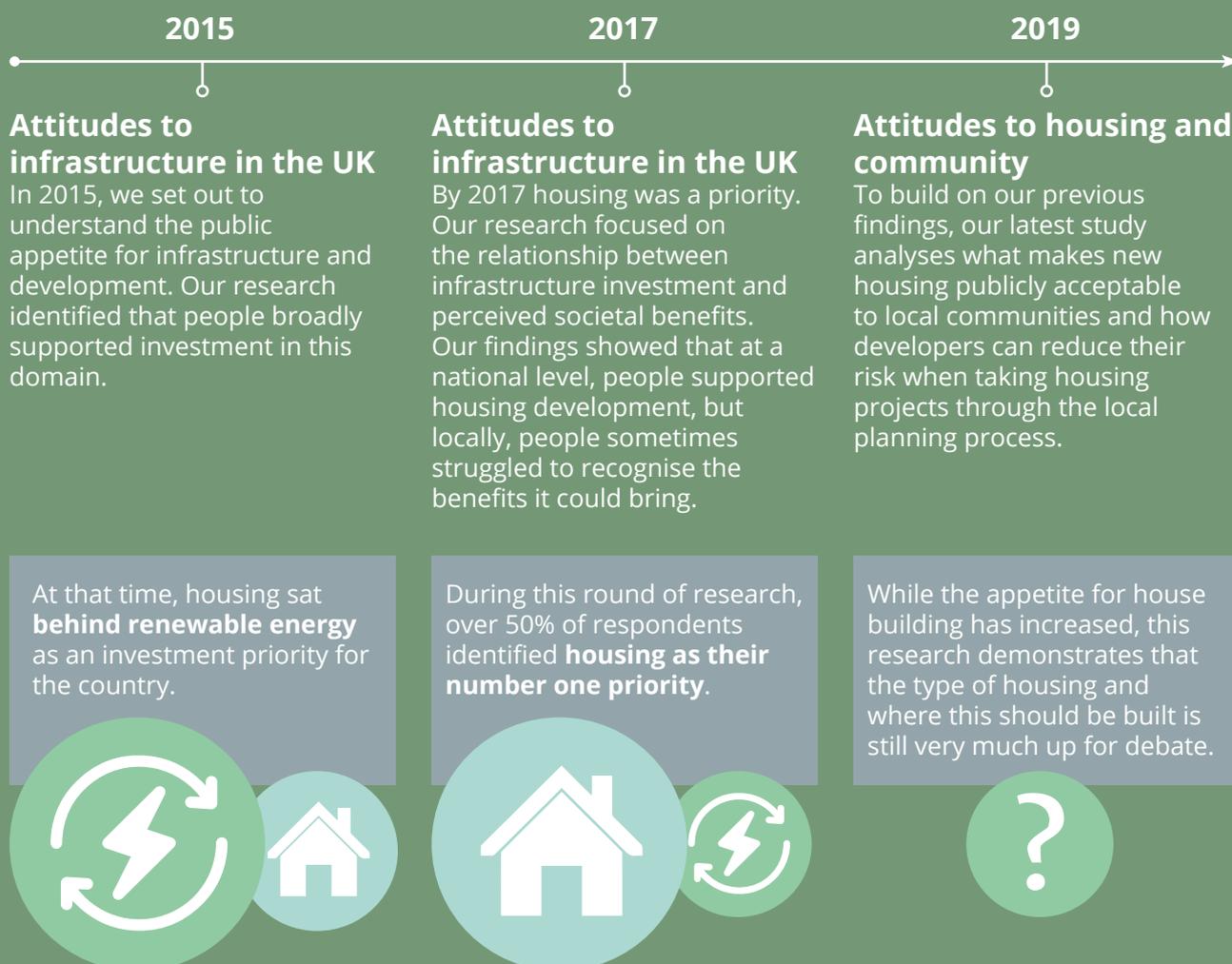
A study by Copper Consultancy

Attitudes to housing and community

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Copper Consultancy has set out to investigate how the public feel about infrastructure and development in the UK. Previous rounds of research have identified that, while people are generally supportive of investment, at local level people feel that infrastructure is 'done to them' rather than 'done for them'. In our most recent study, we examine the public's views and opinions on housing developments in their area.

The story so far:



Executive summary

Do the UK public support housing developments?

The public recognise that housing presents a serious problem with an urgent need for investment across the UK. They perceive the current standard of housing as particularly low compared to other forms of infrastructure and, in principle, support new developments. However, at a local level, developers face difficulties in generating advocacy for their projects.

When it comes to developments in their area, the public overwhelmingly support brownfield development over the use of greenfield land. However, affordable housing – enabling communities to stay together – and improvements to infrastructure and services can increase support for developments among local communities, even for developments that impact greenfield space.

There's no 'one size fits all' approach as the main priorities and concerns vary. Factors such as geography and political standpoint of local residents, among others, are critical. It is essential to have a tailored approach when engaging with stakeholders, which identifies their needs and concerns early in the planning process and doesn't simply inform people of plans once they have been decided.

Once a position of compromise is established, there's a need to communicate the benefits and opportunities of developments in a way that communities want to receive it.

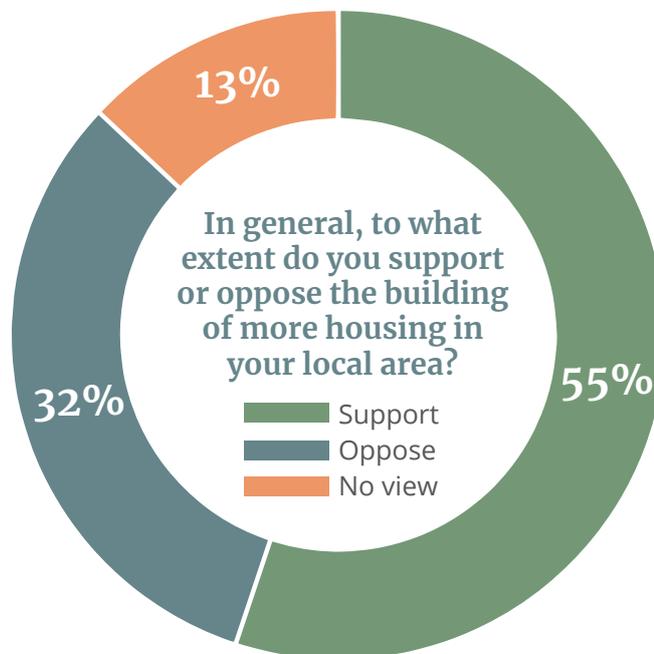
As the need for housing continues to be a significant issue for many people in the UK, it's vital developers explore the potential to create substantial placemaking schemes that are shaped by the community. Once these schemes are realised, crucially they will offer tangible benefits to the lifestyle of existing residents, as opposed to just offering accommodation to incomers.

The following results come from a weighted and representative sample of 1,600 individuals independently surveyed by YouGov. This sample includes individuals from:

- Across the political spectrum
- England, Scotland and Wales
- Different demographics – across age ranges and social classes

What factors make housing developments acceptable?

Our survey found that 55% of people support local development in their area. Less than a third (32%) oppose it and 13% do not have a view.



Our survey found the following main factors make housing development acceptable:

Brownfield urban development

70%



70% of respondents said they prefer use of brownfield land. Only 12% would prefer a new garden community (purpose-built settlement in the countryside with its own facilities and infrastructure)

Affordable housing

49%



Even if on greenfield land and close to them, 49% would support a development if it provided affordable housing

Improved local infrastructure

50%



Even if on greenfield land and close to them, 50% would support a development if it improved local infrastructure

In-keeping design

35%

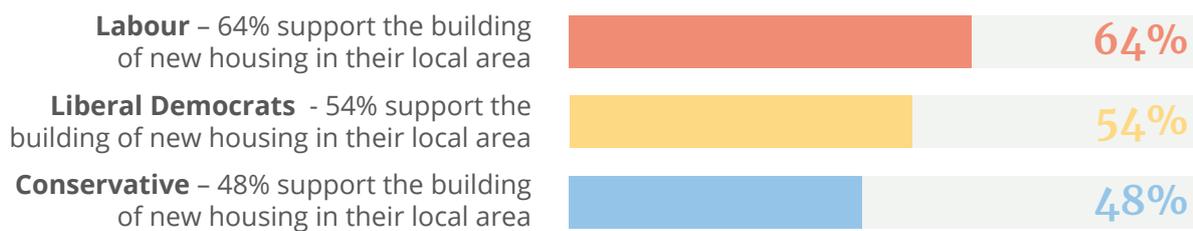


34% said that a design which was in keeping with the area would also make them more supportive of developments

Political views on housing

There is broad consistency across the political spectrum in prioritising housing development over other infrastructure and development schemes. However, priorities in relation to housing differ between voters.

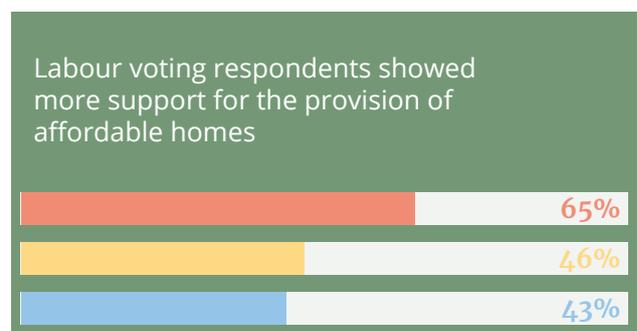
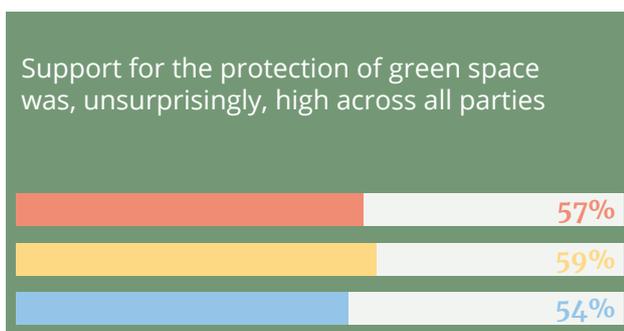
Compared to an average of 55% of people supporting the development of more housing locally:



However, this support falls to a cross-party average of just under 30% (27.3%) when it comes to new housing being developed on nearby green space.

That said, opposition to this proposal does vary between parties with Conservative voters most likely to be opposed (72%) compared to Labour (53%), and Liberal Democrats (62%).

When it comes to factors that could influence respondents' support or concerns regarding the building of new housing locally, priorities begin to change.



Public concerns about development?

When asked what the main reasons for concern were about new housing developments, impact on greenfield land (29%) and on existing services, infrastructure and facilities (28%) were the two primary concerns respondents had with developments. However, there is disparity of concerns between age groups.

29%

The overwhelming number one concern for **18-24** year olds was the impact on countryside and greenfield land.

28%

People in the **65+** age bracket were most concerned with the impact on existing services, infrastructure and facilities.

Question: What would make you more supportive of building new housing in your local area? Please tick all that apply.

Design that is in keeping with an area helps to make new housing more acceptable (**35%**), but poor design isn't commonly cited as a main factor of concern in regards to new developments (**4%**). Factors such as loss of greenfield land, impacts on infrastructure and affordability continue to be the main concerns.

Question: What do you think are the main benefits of building new housing in your local area? Please tick all that apply.

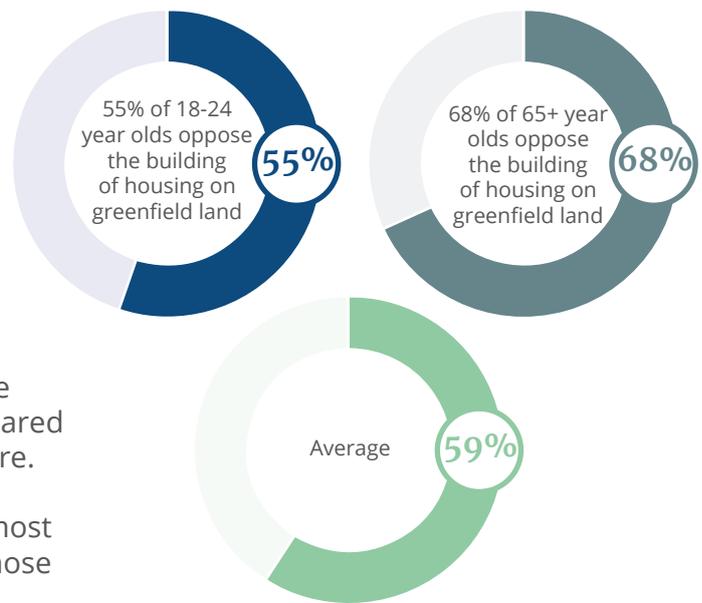
One in six people (**16%**) said that there were no benefits to building new housing. From this, it is clear that elements of some communities are not aware of the benefits that housing developments have the potential to bring.

Age

Opposition to increased development on greenfield land generally increases with age.

When given a choice, there is overwhelming support across all age ranges for smaller scale urban development on brownfield land compared to a new community with its own infrastructure.

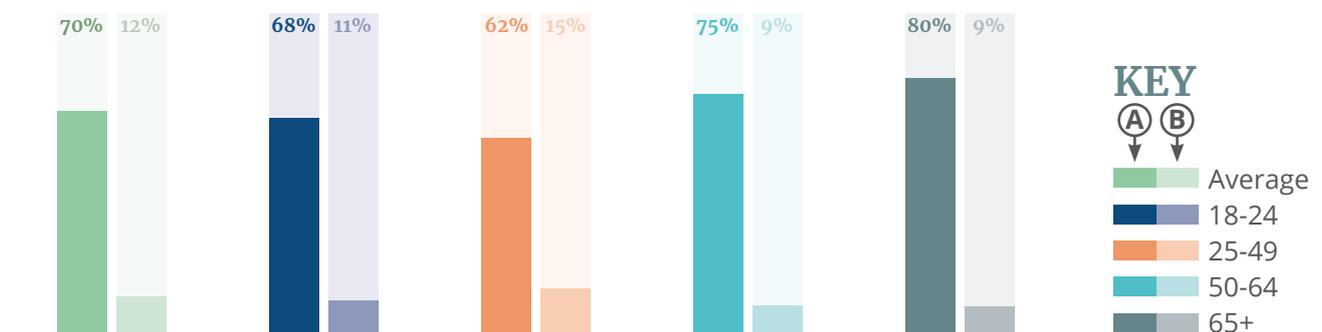
In the over 65 age bracket this opposition is most prevalent at 80%, compared to 62% among those aged 25-49.



Question: Thinking about ways to tackle difficulties in housing provision in the UK, which of the following would you prefer if you had to pick one?

Answer A: Smaller scale urban development, on brownfield land (land that has previously been built up, such as former industrial land) where possible, as part of an existing community?

Answer B: A brand new community, built in the countryside with its own facilities and infrastructure.



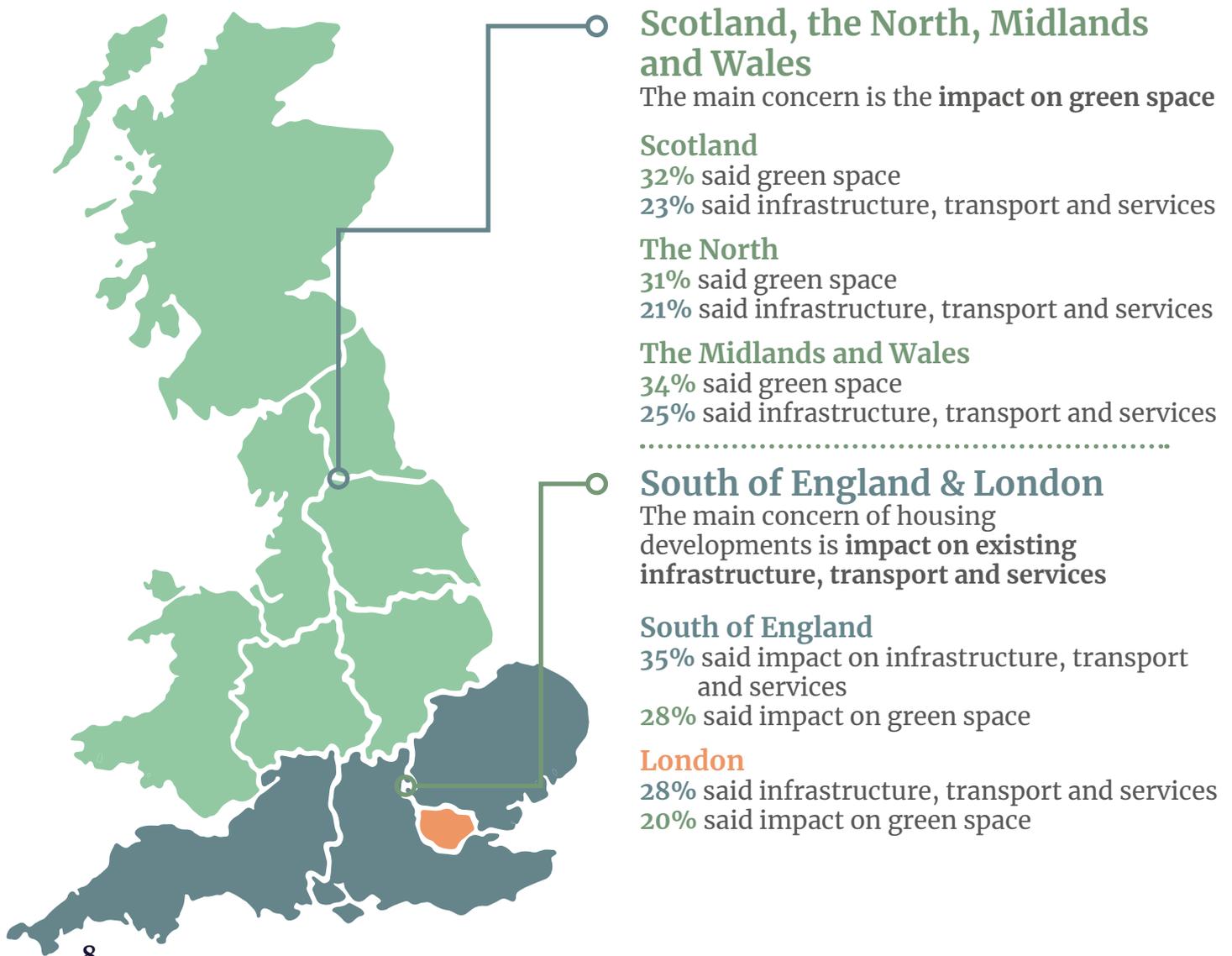
When specifically asked about increased housebuilding in people's own local area there was an average support across all age ranges of 55%. Conversely opposition increased. Interestingly, nearly a quarter of those aged 18-24 said 'Don't Know' to the question above, compared to just 4% among those aged over 65.

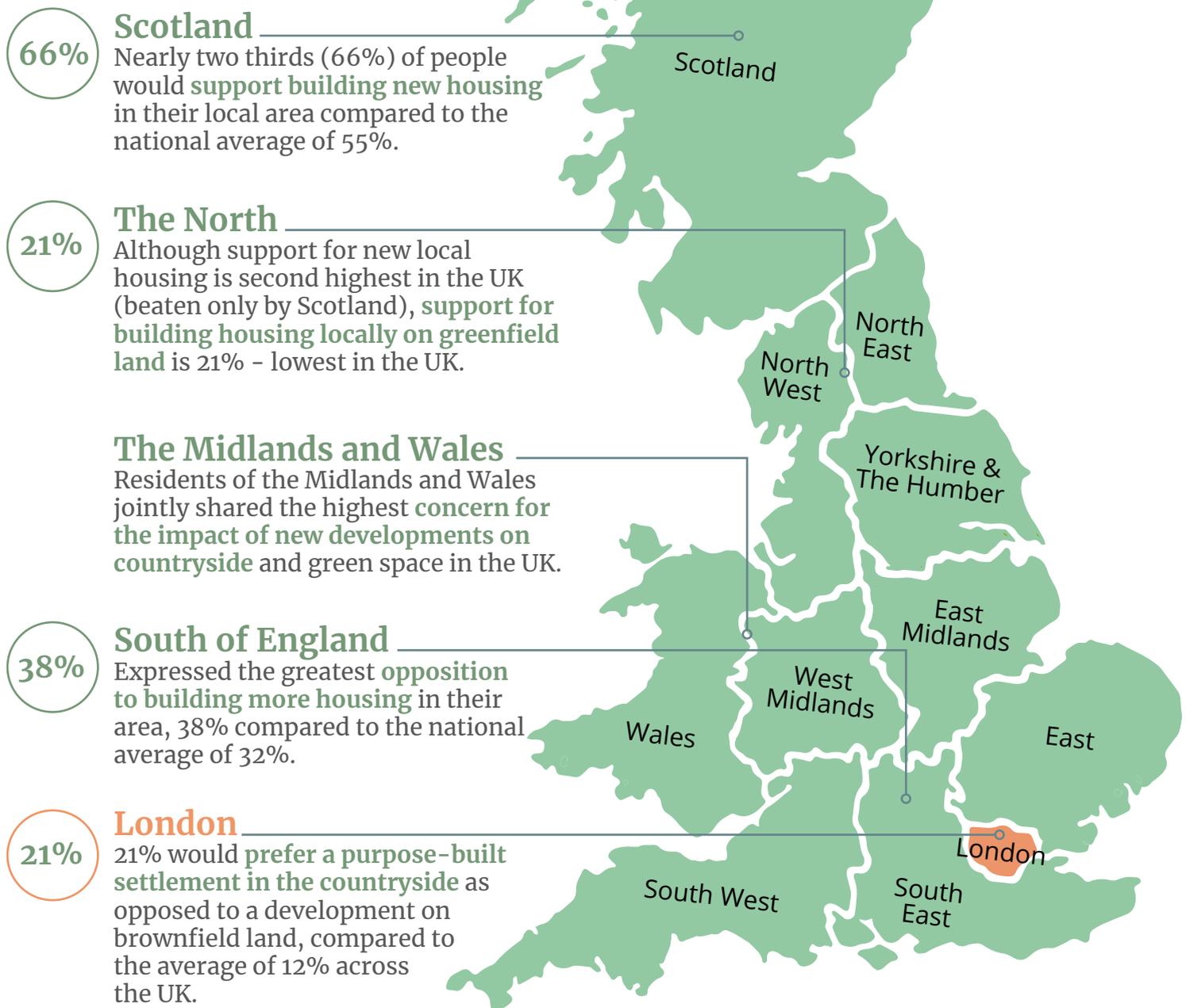
Geographical location can also play a role in people's views and concerns

Question: Which ONE, if any, of the following are why you feel worried about a new housing development being built in your local area?

Answer 1: Impact on countryside and green space

Answer 2: Impact on existing services, infrastructure and facilities





Conclusion

When building new housing, developers need to offer tangible benefits as part of a housing scheme. While gaining local support for developments will likely continue to be a challenge, offering benefits such as affordable housing and improved transport links could help to reach a point of compromise with communities and generate advocacy for schemes.

In essence, the question facing developers is how can they identify, include and demonstrate tangible benefits for local communities, so that new housing is seen as delivering for people already living locally, rather than just for people who wish to buy a new home.

However, community wants and needs can't be assumed as there is no 'silver bullet' on what each area wants, which ranges from affordable housing to improvements in infrastructure and services.

The different housing priorities across the country and demographics demonstrates the need for proactive engagement with stakeholders, to identify the community's priorities, and ensure that their concerns and desires are considered early on in the planning process.



Engage and respond

Conclusion

Proactive engagement early on in development is crucial to ensure local priorities and concerns are met with tangible benefits for communities.

Recommendation

Gain insight into community priorities to ensure conversations address local needs and earn public buy-in. Act upon feedback from the community and offer benefits such as affordable housing or improved transport links and services.

Mitigate local concerns

Conclusion

Developers could be more effective at focusing their efforts to combat local concerns, for instance by mitigating the impact on green spaces, to ensure that communities feel as if they have been listened to.

Recommendation

Demonstrate a mitigation plan, which identifies specific measures to address concerns expressed by local communities, allowing communities to understand how their input has been used to shape the designs.

Demonstrate a housing plan that delivers meaningful benefits – both in the long term and on a day-to-day basis for locals. This will allow communities to understand what housing investments would mean for them and how the developer will tackle local issues.

Develop the narrative

Conclusion

There is a need to capture and explain the benefits of a project from the outset to secure buy-in from the local community.

Recommendation

Communicate the benefits of developments and articulate how they line up with the specific local objectives identified through effective engagement. Express how the benefits, such as improving local transport connections, would not be possible without the development.



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