

DEMOS

**PEOPLE
POWERED
PLANNING:**

HOW TO BETTER INVOLVE
PEOPLE IN PLANNING TO
GET MORE HOMES BUILT

BEN GLOVER

SEPTEMBER 2019

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Ben Glover
September 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Britain faces its most severe housing crisis for decades. This report considers one potential solution: better involving people in the planning system to get more homes built.

We find engagement in the planning system is low and that people often feel shut out from decisions about housebuilding in their local area. This means housing developments too often fail to match the needs and desires of local residents, leading to opposition and conflict in the planning system. Furthermore, those that are engaged - retired homeowners, for example - are often the least likely to support new housebuilding in their local area.

This suggests that opposition to new homes could be reduced by housing developments better reflecting the wishes of local people. It also suggests that involving a broader range of people in the planning process could lead to pro-development voices being better heard. This report outlines a number of potential changes to the current planning system to achieve this.

It also seeks to overturn the view that people are intrinsically a barrier to getting more homes built. We find that local residents often support new homes in their local area, but that the planning system too often shuts them out of housebuilding decisions, leading to developments they are unlikely to support. Properly harnessed, people power can get more homes built and tackle our housing crisis. Achieving this may require new forms of decision-making - such as citizens' assemblies - which build consensus and can help overturn the oppositional nature of the planning system.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Engagement in the planning system is generally low - more than half of the public have never engaged with the planning system (56%).
- Generally people do not feel involved in decisions about housebuilding in their local area - a majority of people (54%) do not feel at all involved in planning and housing decisions in their local area and just 10% feel very well involved.
- People generally support new homes being built in their local area: almost half of the public (47%) support new homes being built in their local area with only around a quarter (27%) opposing such developments.
- However, engagement in the planning system is often dominated by those that are less supportive of new homes in their local area. Involving a broader range of people in decisions about housebuilding could therefore increase support for new homes.
- Consulting residents about a particular housing development could increase support for that development by roughly 10%.
- Too often objecting to a planning application is seen as the only means of influencing the housebuilding process, creating a culture of conflict in the planning system. New forms of decision making should be introduced to the planning system to encourage consensus not conflict, such as citizens' assemblies.

- Opposition to housing development is often driven by a wide range of concerns. These include: a failure to provide sufficient levels of affordable housing; a lack of provision for public services and infrastructure; a failure of the developer/council to properly engage local people; and poor design. This suggests that addressing these concerns could reduce local opposition to housebuilding.
- The most important feature of new housing developments for the public is the type of housing (e.g. semi-detached or detached) that will be built. Whilst important, the size of the development is only the fourth most important feature, after type of homes, existing land use of development site and tenure of homes. This suggests that better reflecting what the public wants from housing development sites - with respect to the types of home built, existing land use and tenure of new homes - could reduce opposition to housing development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To ensure that consultation happens at the earliest possible stage, allowing residents to meaningfully shape a proposed development, we recommend that:

Recommendation 1: Pre-application consultation should be mandatory for major housing developments in England.

To make it easier to engage in housebuilding decisions and to supplement offline engagement, we recommend that:

Recommendation 2: Central government should launch a digital planning innovation fund, enabling local planning authorities to develop innovative online consultation and engagement tools for planning.

To ensure that a wider range of voices are heard in the planning system and to allow for a more careful, considered debate about housebuilding decisions, we recommend that:

Recommendation 3: Local planning authorities should trial the use of deliberative decision-making methods - such as citizens' assemblies - as part of the local plan making process.

Recommendation 4: Research organisations, local planning authorities and wider civil society should collaborate to develop tools for online deliberation to support the local plan making process.

To encourage new models of housing development that can deliver new homes at scale whilst better involving local people, we recommend that:

Recommendation 5: Developers, civil society and researchers should work to further develop the concept of 'community-developer partnerships'.

To address the underfunding of planning departments, which affects housing supply and local authorities' ability to involve people in planning decisions, we recommend that:

Recommendation 6: Central government should provide ring-fenced emergency grant funding to local planning authorities.

INTRODUCTION

Politicians of all stripes now acknowledge Britain faces a housing crisis. A crisis of overcrowding and homelessness. A crisis of extortionate rents pushing people into poverty. A crisis of unfulfilled aspiration and families unable to put down roots in a community. Several factors are responsible for this, from sky-high land prices to an uncompetitive housebuilding sector. This report focuses on just one factor - the failure to build enough new homes - and one reason for this: local opposition to housing developments.

At first glance, local opposition might not appear a significant barrier to housebuilding. In the most recent period for which data is available, 75% of applications for residential development were granted.¹ However, this does not tell us about the number of proposals that were never submitted, or withdrawn, as a result of local opposition. Nor do we know how many of the 25% of housing applications were rejected due to local opposition.

As previous Demos research has identified, whilst there has been no attempt so far to quantify the impact of local opposition on housing supply, key stakeholders in the planning sector view local opposition as a major barrier.² For example, a Local Government Association survey of councillors in England found that 59% see local opposition as a barrier to housing developments.³ Furthermore, a survey of housebuilders by Knight Frank found 82% expect local opposition to have a moderate or sizeable impact on housebuilding in years to come.⁴

This suggests local opposition is likely to be having a considerable impact on housing supply in Britain today. Understanding how to turn this opposition

into support will be vital if we are to tackle our housing crisis. This report considers whether better involving people in the planning system is one way to achieve this.

But doing so is important not just for getting more homes built. Our planning system and housebuilding process is suffering a crisis of trust, as this report goes on to show. Given planning is one of local government's most important functions, this could be weakening trust in public institutions; deeply concerning when trust in such institutions is already threatened.

This failure also drives calls for citizen voice to be further removed from the planning system. This could be done by extending permitted development rights that allow building without planning permission, thereby reducing the scope for public influence over housing development.

Whilst such steps in the short-term may deliver more new homes, we believe these measures will only drive opposition to housebuilding in the long run. This is because homes built through such mechanisms are unlikely to reflect the needs of local communities - see the recent wave of tiny new homes built across England through the use of permitted development rights, some as small as 13 square metres.⁵ We doubt such developments will build support for new home: previous Demos research has indicated that the public's biggest worry about new housing developments is that they are too small.⁶

This report outlines a better alternative: putting people at the heart of the planning system to get more homes built. In doing so it draws on other

1. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019), Planning Applications in England: October to December 2018, p.10. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/787526/Planning_Applications_October_to_December_2018_-_statistical_release.pdf (accessed 19 August 2019).

2. Duncan O'Leary and Charlie Cadywould (2015), Community Builders, Demos. Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/project/community-builders-report/> (accessed 19 August 2019).

3. Local Government Association (2010), New Housing Developments Survey 2010. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/new-housing-developments-e98.pdf> (accessed 19 August 2019).

4. Knight Frank (2014), Building Momentum. Available at: <https://content.knightfrank.com/research/297/documents/en/2014-2075.pdf> (accessed 19 August 2019).

5. <https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2019/04/permitted-development-scandal-homeless-families-put-at-risk/>

6. Ben Glover (2019), Future Homes, Demos. Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/project/future-homes/> (accessed 19 August 2019).

recent attempts to achieve this, most notably Lord Raynsford's landmark review of the planning system.⁷ It consists of four chapters:

Chapter One outlines our findings from a series of semi-structured interviews with individuals that have opposed housing developments in their local community. We feel it is important to understand the views of this group - often labelled NIMBYs ('not in my backyard') - because winning them over will be vital for turning opposition to housebuilding into support.

We find good evidence that those that oppose housing developments in their local area are often not opposed to housing development per se but have legitimate objections to the type of development taking place in their community. These concerns often centre on the perceived lack of affordable housing provision of new developments. Addressing these concerns may help turn so-called NIMBYs into YIMBYs ('yes in my backyard').

Chapter Two examines national public attitudes towards the housebuilding process and planning system. Drawing on focus groups, polling and conjoint analysis, we find the public do not feel involved in decisions about housebuilding in their local area and that engagement with the planning system is low. We also find that engagement with the planning system is often dominated by those that are not likely to support new housebuilding, in particular retired homeowners.

Chapter Three presents a best-practice community engagement model for developers. We outline four principles that should guide engagement:

1. Early
2. Accessible
3. Responsive
4. Representative

Chapter Four sets out a policy agenda to better involve people in the housebuilding process to reduce local opposition. We focus on encouraging early engagement in the consultation process; bringing the planning system into the digital age; boosting the representativeness of those that engage with the planning system; utilising deliberative methods to deliver representativeness and encourage conflict resolution; and new models of developer-community partnerships. Across each policy area our strategic objective is to bring about a people-powered planning system to get more homes built.

It is important to note that given planning is a devolved matter, this report focuses on the English planning system. However, many of our recommendations and insights will be relevant to the rest of the UK.

Methodologically, the report draws on:

- Desk-based research.
- A series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals that have been involved in opposing housing development in their local area.
- A series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with experts from across the housing and planning sectors.
- One focus group with ten people aged 18-34; one focus group with ten people aged over 55.
- An original Opinium polling survey of 1,000 UK adults, weighted to be nationally representative.
- An original Opinium conjoint analysis exercise with 1,000 UK adults, weighted to be nationally representative.

7. Lord Raynsford (2018), Planning 2020, Town and Country Planning Association. Available at: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=30864427-d8dc-4b0b-88ed-c6e0f08c0edd> (accessed 22 August 2019).

CHAPTER 1 VIEWS FROM THE FRONTLINE

“You don’t feel like you have been properly consulted. Just a tick on the list. ...It feels like a thing for show.”

Female participant, London

Understanding opposition to housing development is crucial for turning opposition into support. This includes listening to people that have been actively involved in opposing housing developments, those often labelled NIMBYs (‘not in my backyard’).

To that end, this chapter presents the findings from a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with adults from across England. Participants were selected on the basis of self-identifying as having been involved in opposing a housing development in their local area.

Whilst we do not claim those we spoke to are representative of the population as a whole, these interviews can help us better understand what motivates those that are often most likely to oppose new housing developments.

In summary, we found that many of our interviewees were in favour of more housing development but often held what we consider legitimate objections to the type of housing development that was proposed in their local area. Yes, sometimes participants were opposed to almost all forms of potential housing development in their local area. But more often than not we were presented with reasonable arguments against housing development that had been proposed or carried out in their local area. These often centred on:

- A perceived lack of affordable housing and a sense that new homes would be unaffordable for local people.

- The strain that new homes would put on stretched public services and infrastructure, in particular schools and transport infrastructure.
- A failure to engage or consult with the local community in order to listen to what it wanted from housing development.

We believe our findings provide evidence that NIMBY could be turned into YIMBY by better involving local communities in housebuilding decisions. In particular, developers could reduce opposition to housebuilding by building more of the types of homes local people wish to see in their communities.

AFFORDABILITY

We found objections to new housing developments often centre on the type of homes being built. In particular, concerns about the affordability of new homes were widespread and a lack of affordability was a strong motivating factor in opposing housing developments. The following comments from interviewees were typical concerns held by those who oppose housing developments in their local area:

“I felt awful [opposing the development] because we support a 100% affordable housing complex. Although I’m not sure how affordable these houses are.”

Female participant, London

"I do think a lot more housing needs to be built. It needs to be affordable housing."

Male participant, village, Cumbria

These concerns were often raised in relation to whether homes will be affordable for local people. We found this concern to be strongest in smaller villages and rural areas, perhaps because these places have a stronger fixed sense of 'local people':

"The shepherd who lives next door to us, a very nice bloke, ...His son, Paul... is now 27... He's never going to be able to afford one of these fancy, big houses in the new villages... It's all beyond stupid...People do not believe this housing development will do anything for them."

Male participant, village, Cumbria

"We are putting up houses...that start at £300,000. You know the type, a three-storied townhouse, which are way, way out of reach for local people."

Male participant, West Sussex

"It's [the proposed housing development] not providing what the village needs which is a place for young people to live here."

Female participant, coastal village, Hampshire

In rural and coastal areas we heard significant concerns about second homes and retirement homes. These housing types were often opposed for failing to cater to local needs:

"I can see there's a housing crisis, but the sort of houses that they're talking about putting on this site, it's big expensive houses, it's second homes."

Female participant, coastal town, Kent

"We do not think that doubling the size of Penrith by building a new town two and a half miles away from us and importing lots of people as retirees who come and live there in these expensive houses will help the local population get housed."

Male participant, village, Cumbria

PUBLIC SERVICE AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION

There were also significant concerns about a lack of additional public service provision and the strain that new homes would place on existing public services and infrastructure, which were often viewed as already extremely stretched. A lack of transport capacity was a frequent concern, in particular the impact of new homes on traffic.

"...One of those roads is a staggered junction... it's a pretty dangerous junction, you quite often see near misses. The additional number of houses will feed the passengers straight into that."

Male participant, village, Rutland

"... There's not enough school places, the local GP surgery, it's not easy to get an appointment."

Male participant, village, West Sussex

"These goons were going to put a primary school in each of their so-called villages and they weren't going to build a secondary school until right at the end."

Male participant, village, Cumbria

DESIGN AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

We also heard concerns that new housing developments often fail to build a sense of community or place. There were also significant concerns about the design of new homes, which were often viewed as small and cramped:

"I feel like the whole country is being covered with these really dreadful, unsustainable estates which don't actually build communities. There's no shop there for example, there's no centre of that community."

Female participant, coastal village, Hampshire

"They're two or three story properties, they're put together in such a way because of bad planning, obviously. The houses are very close, the plots of land, the plots of garden are very small... Big greens, proper gardens, and they were council [houses]. We don't have that, do we?"

Male participant, village, West Sussex

“But you go back to... the 50s and 60s, they were obviously state built and packed together, of course it was social housing, but there were some very nice areas where people have been for 40-50 years. But you look at these new estates they’re building where they are jamming so many houses together, no one is going to want to live there in 40 or 50 years - no one.”

Male participant, town, Hampshire

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

We explored attitudes towards engagement held by local authorities and housebuilders in our interviews. This is important for understanding how developers can better engage with local communities. In general, interviewees felt engagement and consultation was poorly carried out by developers.

However, we also found considerable variation in the level of engagement and consultation on offer for local communities. Those living in urban areas generally experienced more consultation and engagement than those living in rural areas or smaller towns, though there was still significant room for improvement in urban areas. The comment below is typical of the issues faced by those seeking to engage in decisions about housebuilding in rural areas:

“The developer in this case spoke to the Parish Council, and the Parish Council asked them if they were going to do a consultation, and they said no...What they did is they sent out a little document to people’s houses and told them that they could go on to a website to raise issues or concerns. But that was just a bit of a song so they could say they had taken part in community involvement. But they didn’t really have a meeting with anybody.”

Male participant, village, Rutland

There was a strong sense that early consultation would be better and that this is something developers generally fail to do. Throughout, interviewees stated there was little sense that the local community had ever been asked what it wanted. New homes were often felt to be a reflection of the developer’s interests, not the local community’s:

“There’ll be public displays of their plans and meetings and so on, the developers go through all the right motions, but by that stage in a way, it’s too late, you’re going to now be talking about the colours of the front doors.”

Male participant, town, Hampshire

“What would be good is if people could have had more input at the design stage, if the developer had engaged us at the point of planning the development and how they’re planning to build it...”

Female participant, coastal village, Hampshire

As a result, it is unsurprising we often found deep scepticism about any form of consultation, which was often viewed as a tick box exercise:

“I don’t think they wanted our input, but I think they wanted to see what our objections would be so that they could arm themselves against them...of course they are totally sham exercises...Yes, completely pointless.”

Female participant, London

“You don’t feel like you have been properly consulted. Just a tick on the list. We showed up and chatted to some people. No communication from the council about why it’s put through. It feels like a thing for show.”

Female participant, London

“What happened was you [the developer] arrived in a local community with your plan, with the development, and that’s pretty much the way it’s going to be.”

Male participant, village, West Sussex

We also heard significant concerns about the accessibility of consultation exercises and the accessibility of engagement with the planning system altogether. This related to both physical accessibility - e.g. holding events at suitable times - but also difficulty understanding the planning system due to its highly technical nature:

“Attendance wasn’t great, they did them a week before Christmas with a week’s notice. They used the kind of language which is only accessible if you’re already involved in the process of public planning - if you’re Joe Bloggs from down the road you’re not going to understand the proposal for 12 or 18 tower blocks over the road from you.”

Female participant, London

"I think a lot of people are on short term rents and not as invested. Also working very long hours. They ran two consultations from 4-8pm so they couldn't make it. There were quite a few people there who were very angry about it, and I know there's a lot of discussion about it on the local Facebook group."

Female participant, London

Interviewees often flagged the high level of technical knowledge required to properly engage with the planning application and how they were often not properly equipped to do this:

"From what I understand it's all about planning law rather than what people feel. And none of us were equipped to do that."

Female, coastal village, Hampshire

"They're all 30-90 page PDFs and there's a lot of technical detail in them...It's a huge amount that you have to try and take on board...Quite a lot of time and research went into that, which not a lot of people have time to do."

Female participant, London

Participants often noted there were significant financial barriers to engaging with the planning system. It was extremely common for participants to have been helped by their connections to those with specialist knowledge. The following comments illustrate the importance of social and financial capital to effectively engaging in the planning system:

"I think finance is one of the big problems because ultimately we're going to have to do a judicial review, which is going to be hugely expensive, and that is our problem."

Female participant, town, Kent

"We went to the high court...and that cost £15,000 for local residents..."

Male participant, village, West Sussex

"We got the help of a local solicitor... Fortunately, one of our members is an old hand at these kinds of things...This is an old middle-class area and we were able to pour in help"

Male participant, Liverpool

In addition, participants noted the amount of time required to properly engage in the planning system and that they were often able to do this because they were retired:

"I think the benefit of being someone who is retired meant that I had the time to do quite a lot of studying. I went to a couple of seminars to try and see what the process was."

Male participant, village, Rutland

There were concerns about whether those engaging in the planning system were representative of wider society. In particular, this was related to the age and ethnicity of those that engage in the planning system:

"So obviously 54% of the population here are not white. Almost everybody in the mock up pictures in the published materials, almost everybody was white. Almost everybody at the meetings was white, and everybody who worked for the firms was white....There is a West African church next to the site that is very well used by the local community, they weren't spoken to or engaged with in any of the meetings. Why not? Why weren't they part of this consultation process that's right on their doorstep?"

Female participant, London

CHAPTER 2

A NATIONAL PICTURE

“I get letters saying they’re planning this, planning that. I throw them in the bin because I don’t think no one’s going to bother listening.”

Female participant, aged 65

The previous chapter presented an overview of findings from interviews with individuals that have opposed housebuilding in their local area. This allowed us to better understand the motivations and concerns of those likely to be highly engaged in the planning system and oppose housebuilding.

This chapter presents an analysis of public attitudes from a broader sample of the population, across three methodologies:

- A nationally representative poll of 1,000 UK adults.
- A nationally representative conjoint analysis exercise with 1,000 UK adults.
- Two qualitative focus groups in London with young adults (aged 18-30) and older adults (aged over 60).

In summary, we found that:

- Engagement in the planning system and decisions about housebuilding is low - more than half of the public (56%) have never engaged with the planning system.
- A majority of people (54%) do not feel at all involved in housebuilding decisions in their local area; just one in ten feel very well involved.
- Consulting residents about a housing development could increase support for that development by roughly 10%.

- There is significant overlap between those that are most likely to oppose new homes in their local area and those that are most likely to be engaged with the planning system.
- Almost half of the public (47%) support new homes being built in their local area with around a quarter (27%) opposing such developments.
- The most important feature of new housing developments is the type of housing that will be built (e.g. detached housing). Whilst important, the size of the development is only the fourth most important feature (after type of homes, existing land use of development site and tenure of homes). However, the public’s preference was for the second smallest number of possible homes (30 homes) from the options available to them.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS - CONJOINT ANALYSIS EXERCISE

This section provides an overview of our findings from a conjoint analysis exercise with 1,000 UK adults carried out by Opinium on Demos’ behalf between 14 - 17 June 2019.

Conjoint analysis is an established statistical technique for deriving implied consumer preferences for different characteristics of particular products and services. It is widely used in the private sector to determine the value that consumers place on a particular product or product characteristic.

Participants choose between two scenarios or bundles of characteristics, each defined by a particular set of attributes. Altering the value assigned to an attribute and asking participants to choose a preferred option in multiple scenarios allows us to better understand the underlying preferences of the public and assign values to the degree of preference.

We were interested in using conjoint analysis to better understand the type of housing development the public would prefer to see in their local community. Participants in the conjoint analysis exercise were presented with a hypothetical scenario in which a housing development has been proposed on the road next to the one that they live on. They were informed that the exercise had been designed to understand what the best form of housing development would be. To determine what type of housing development people would like to see in their local area we asked participants to choose between three hypothetical housing developments across multiple scenarios.

The housing development attributes we tested in the conjoint survey were:

- Development site’s existing land use (e.g. greenfield or brownfield).
- Type of homes (e.g. detached housing).
- Tenure (e.g. owner-occupied or social rent).
- Number of houses/size of development (i.e. the number of dwellings).
- Provision of new public services, amenities and infrastructure (e.g. if new shops or schools are being provided alongside the housing development).
- Level of public consultation (e.g. extensive consultation and engagement with the local community).
- Type of developer (e.g. a local housebuilder).

Standard econometric techniques were then used to explore the implied trade-offs between the various bundles of options. Initial results for the attributes tested in this way yielded the following weightings:⁸

ATTRIBUTE	IMPORTANCE
Type of homes	38%
Development site’s existing land use	18%
Tenure of homes	13%
Number of houses/size of development	12%
Provision of new public services, amenities and infrastructure	8%
Level of public consultations	6%
Type of developer	6%

It is clear that the most important feature of new housing developments is the type of homes being built, followed by the development site’s existing land use. Perhaps surprisingly, the size of the development is only the fourth most important feature in the eyes of the public – some way behind the type of housing.

We find this result encouraging: it suggests the public’s first priority is not to limit the number of homes to be built but to have control over the type of homes that are to be built. This is especially the case given that the scenario we presented to respondents states that the housing development will take place close to where respondents live (on the road next to where they live).

However, it is important to note that the largest potential housing development (150 homes) was the least popular option, with the second smallest size offered (30 homes) the most popular option. So, whilst the public are not necessarily always most concerned with restricting the size of development, we still - in general - prefer smaller housing developments to larger ones.

8. Attribute Importance measures respondents’ sensitivity towards the change between the most and the least preferred levels within an attribute. The higher the preference gap between the most and the least preferred levels, the more important that attribute is. The importance scores therefore are subject to the range tested.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS - NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY

This section provides an overview of our findings from a nationally representative poll with 1,000 UK adults carried out by Opinium Research on Demos' behalf between 14 - 17 June 2019. We tested the public's attitude towards a number of different dimensions of the housebuilding process and planning system.

Engagement and involvement in the planning system

We found engagement with the planning system is extremely low – more than half of the public (56%) have never engaged with the planning system.⁹ We also found that:

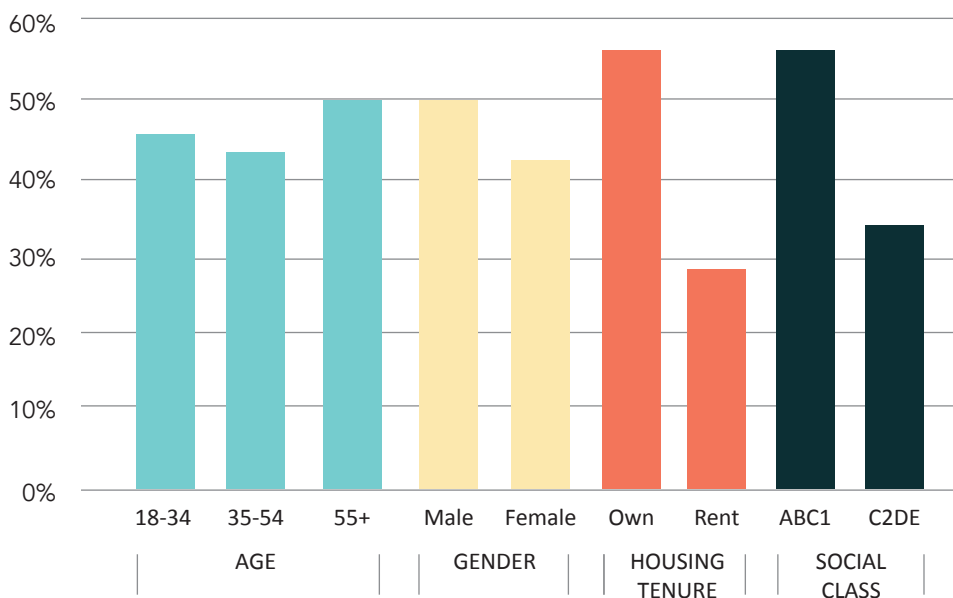
- Whilst those over the age of 55 are more likely to have engaged with the planning system than

18-34 year olds (50% versus 46%), 35-54 year olds are least likely to have engaged – just 43% had engaged.

- Homeowners are significantly more likely to have engaged in the planning system than renters - 56% versus 29%.
- Those from a higher social grade (ABC1) are significantly more likely to have engaged than those of a lower social class (C2DE) - 56% versus 35%.
- A majority of people (54%) do not feel at all involved in housebuilding decisions in their local area and just 10% feel very well involved.
- Residents in London are vastly more engaged in the planning system than anywhere else – 75% have engaged compared to a national average of 44%.

FIGURE 1.
PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS THAT HAVE ENGAGED WITH THE PLANNING SYSTEM

Source: Opinium for Demos



9. We defined engagement with the planning system as having ever done at least one of the following: searched the local council register for planning decisions in your local area; objected to a planning application in your local area; commented on planning applications in your local area; submitted a planning application; taken part in a campaign to stop a development in your local area; supported a planning application in your local area; spoken at a committee/meeting about planning applications.

The chart below demonstrates the close relationship between income level and engagement with the planning system. Indeed, the proportion of people that have engaged increases significantly

amongst those that earn over £60,000 – a clear sign higher earners are much more engaged in the planning system than everyone else.

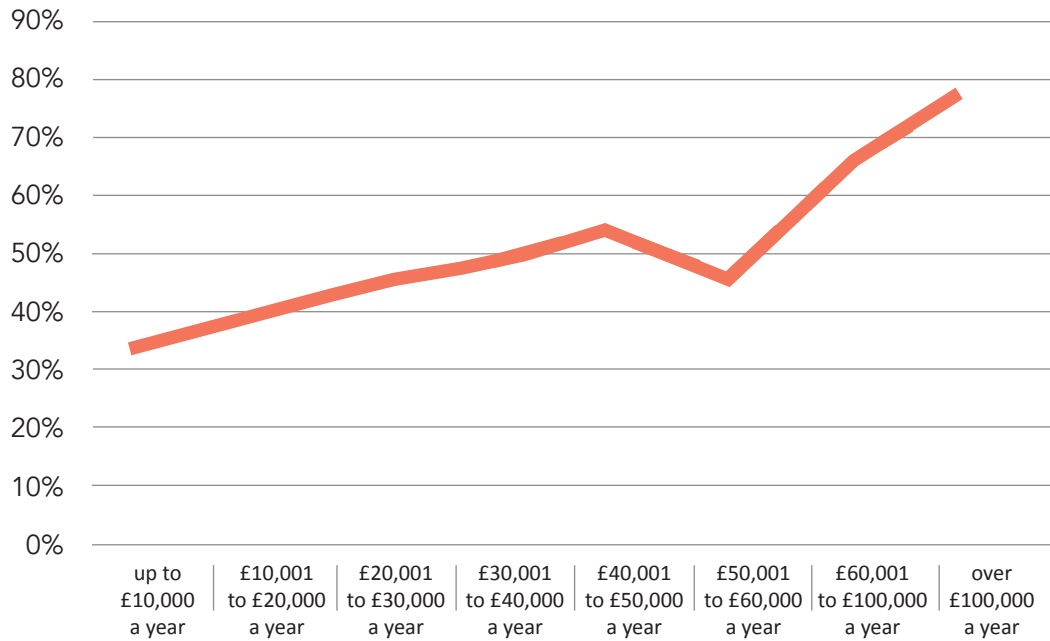


FIGURE 2.
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCOME AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PLANNING SYSTEM

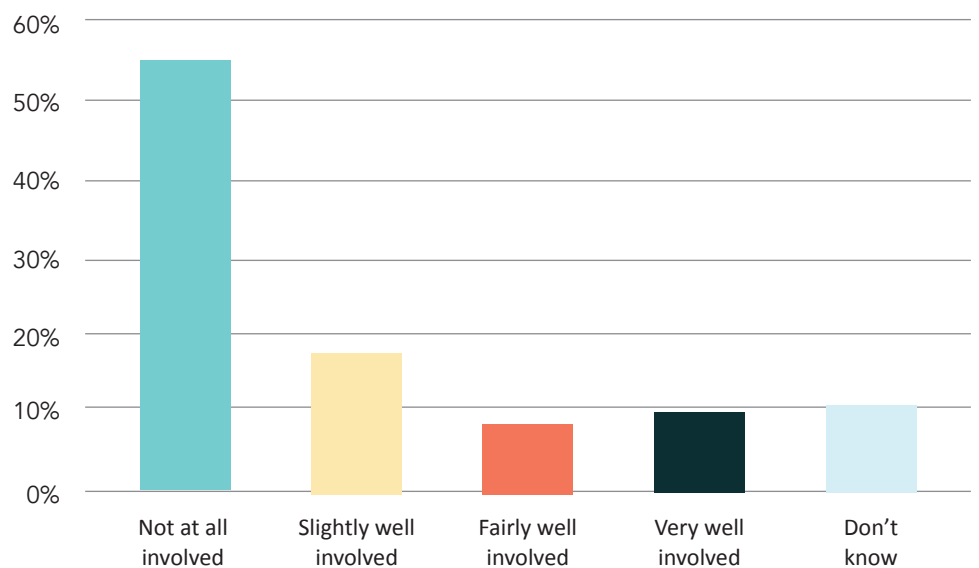
Source: *Opinium for Demos*

As noted above, the level of engagement in the planning system varies significantly between regions. More precisely, the level of engagement in London eclipses that seen anywhere else: three quarters (75%) of Londoners have engaged with the planning system compared to a national average of 46%. The North East has the lowest level of engagement - just 29% of respondents in the North East have ever engaged with the planning system.

Given these findings it is perhaps unsurprising that people do not feel involved in decisions about housebuilding. We found that more than half of people (54%) do not feel at all involved in planning and housing decisions in their local area and just 10% feel very well involved. This suggests that the housebuilding process is currently doing a poor job of involving local people in its operations.

FIGURE 3.
HOW WELL INVOLVED DO YOU FEEL IN HOUSEBUILDING DECISIONS TAKEN IN YOUR LOCAL AREA (ALL RESPONDENTS)?

Source: *Opinium for Demos*



We also found significant appetite for greater involvement in decisions about housebuilding - more than a third (35%) say they want to be more involved and just 5% said they want to be less

involved. However, it is important to note that there is a significant degree of apathy - around half (48%) of respondents said they would like to be neither more nor less involved.

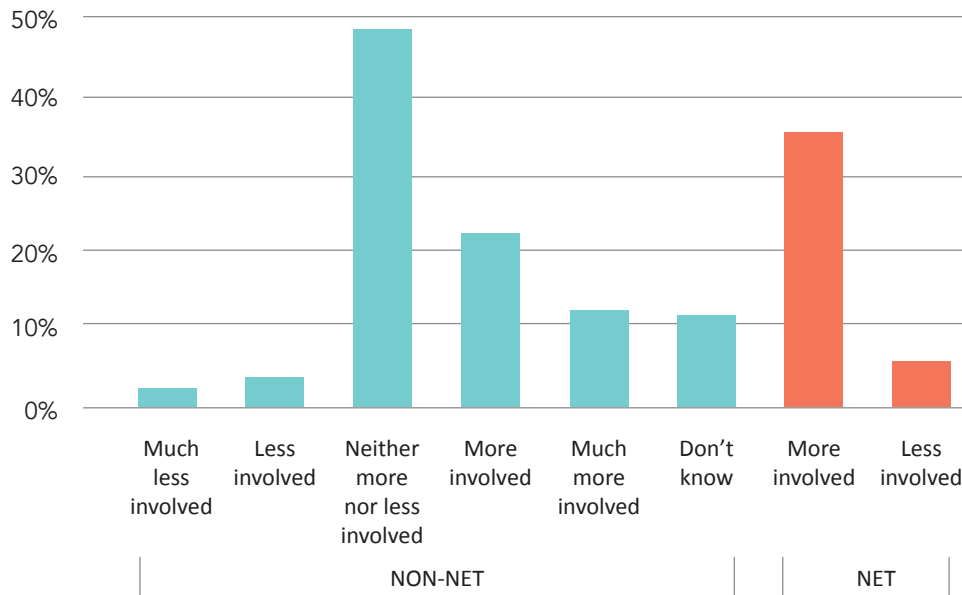


FIGURE 4. AND WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE MORE OR LESS INVOLVED IN PLANNING AND HOUSING DECISIONS TAKEN IN YOUR LOCAL AREA THAN YOU CURRENTLY ARE (ALL RESPONDENTS)

Source: Opinium for Demos

Support for housebuilding

We found that almost half of the public (47%) support new homes being built in their local area, with around a quarter (27%) opposing. Within this, however, there is significant variation between various characteristics. We found that:

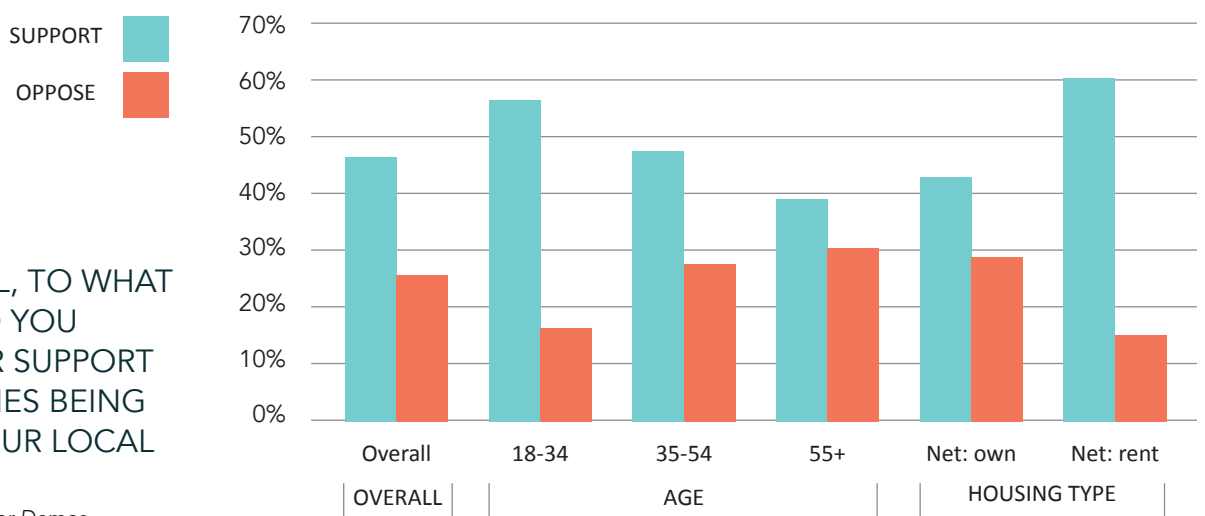
- Young people are significantly more supportive of housebuilding than older people: 57% of 18-34 year olds support the building of new homes in

their local area, compared to just 39% of those aged over 55.

- Renters are more supportive of housebuilding than home-owners. 60% of renters support new housing compared to just 42% of home-owners.
- People that live in London are significantly more supportive of new housing than people that live anywhere else in England or Wales.

FIGURE 5. IN GENERAL, TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU OPPOSE OR SUPPORT MORE HOMES BEING BUILT IN YOUR LOCAL AREA?

Source: Opinium for Demos



Lower earners are more supportive of housebuilding than middle-income earners, but higher earners are the most supportive. However, this could be driven by the fact that residents in London typically earn more than the rest of the country and – as discussed further below – are significantly more supportive of new housing than residents in the rest of the country.

There are also stark geographical differences in the level of support for new homes. Likely reflecting the scale of the capital's housing crisis, Londoners are vastly more supportive of new housebuilding than residents from anywhere else in the country. As with the level of engagement in the planning system, again we see that London is a regional outlier - three quarters (75%) of respondents from London would support new homes in their local area. No other region comes close to this level of support for new homes; in most regions the level of support for new homes is between 40-50%.

Impact of consultation on support for housebuilding

We also found evidence that involvement in housing development decisions could increase support and decrease opposition to housing development. Before completing the conjoint analysis exercise described above, half of our sample were asked to state their support for the following statement:

“A development is being built with a mixture of standard owner-occupied houses and affordable/social rent properties. It will be comprised of 30 dwellings in total and there will be a moderate amount of new public services to support the new homes.”

Just more than half (52%) of the sample supported this statement, whilst 18% opposed it. The other half of the sample were shown the same proposition after completing the conjoint exercise and being informed that the development was taking place after consultation with local residents. After taking part in the conjoint analysis, support for the development amongst this sample increased to 61% and opposition decreased to 8% - two fairly significant changes.

This suggests involving people in decisions about housebuilding and giving them a voice over the shape of the development, as we did through

the conjoint analysis exercise, could help reduce opposition to housing development.

Correlation between those least likely to engage and support

We found that many of those that are most engaged with the planning system are least likely to support new housing developments. As illustrated by the charts below:

- Just 42% of homeowners support new homes (compared to 60% of renters), but 56% of homeowners have engaged with the planning system (compared to just 29% of renters).
- Just 39% of those aged over 55 support new homes (compared to 57% of 18-34 year olds), but 50% have engaged in the planning system (compared to just 45% of 18-34 year olds).

It often appears that the planning system has been captured by those most opposed to new housebuilding. This is of great concern and could help explain why the planning system is seen by many as a barrier to new development. It suggests that including a broader set of people in the planning system - in particular those who are more likely to support new homes such as renters and the young - could lead to a more permissive planning system.

However, it is important to note that this is not a universal law and there are certain groups that do not fit this trend. For example, those of a lower social grade are less likely to have engaged with the planning system than those of a higher social grade (C2DE versus ABC1) but are less supportive of a new housing development than those of a higher social grade.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

We held two focus groups in London with younger adults (aged 18-30) and older adults (aged over 60). Participants were selected to be broadly representative of demographic characteristics and, unlike participants in the previous chapter, were not selected for having previously engaged with decisions about housebuilding. However, we found many of the same themes emerged, suggesting widespread dissatisfaction with the housebuilding process.

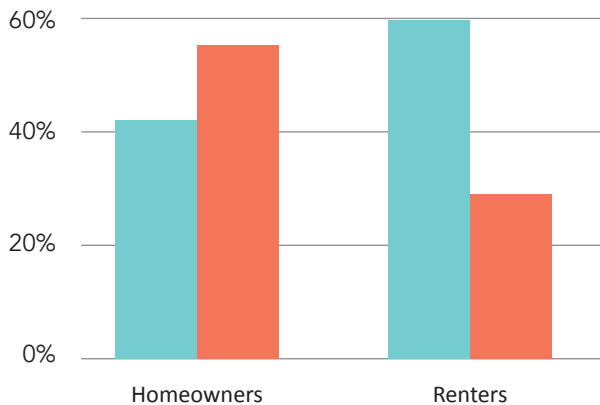


FIGURE 6.
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT IN THE PLANNING SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR NEW HOMES - HOMEOWNERS/RENTERS

Source: *Opinium for Demos*

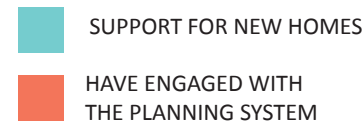
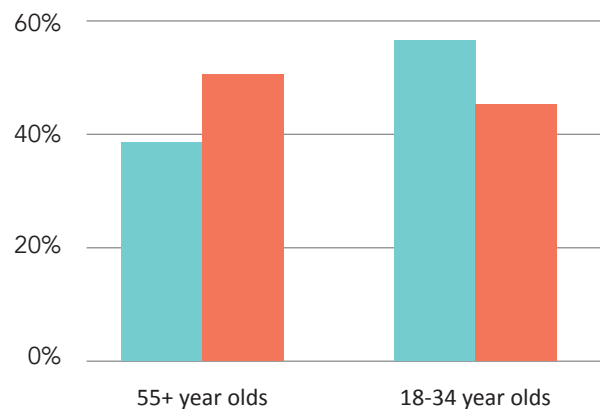
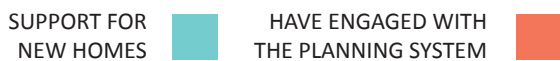


FIGURE 7.
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT IN THE PLANNING SYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR NEW HOMES - AGE

Source: *Opinium for Demos*



Perhaps unsurprisingly, engagement with the planning system of participants across both focus groups was low, particularly in the focus group with younger adults. Indeed, where engagement had occurred, it was often fleeting and had not been a positive experience. This was often due to not hearing back from planning objections they had submitted, for example:

"I'm pretty sure that the plans got approved, but I haven't heard anything back. It was, as far as I know, just falling on deaf ears..."

Female participant, aged 25

"I wrote to the council about it. I don't remember getting much response, if any."

Female participant, aged 29

However, despite a low level of engagement with the planning system, participants across both focus groups held relatively strong views about the dynamics of the housebuilding process. In particular, participants conveyed a strong sense that

responding to and participating in a consultation exercises was meaningless, unlikely to make any difference. Consultation was often seen as only 'for show' and decision makers were perceived to have no intention of changing their plans in response to the feedback they received from local people. The comments outlined below suggest that a feeling of powerlessness is an important driver of disengagement in the planning system:

"I'm very sceptical about it. I get letters saying they're planning this, planning that. I throw them in the bin because I don't think no one's going to bother listening."

Female participant, aged 65

"In objecting it didn't really amount to anything because I used to get the impression that these decisions already may have been made, and in asking the community or residents it's more just like a formality rather than actually wanting to take peoples' opinions."

Female participant, aged 25

"I think they're acting as if they're giving you a choice, an invisible choice. It's literally just there for show, but really there's no choice."

Male participant, aged 27

Attitudes towards developers and councils

As in the previous chapter, attitudes towards developers were generally fairly negative. Developers were seen as extremely powerful and able to get their own way, even if it was against the wishes of local communities. They were not perceived to take the interests or desires of local communities into account in their behaviour or actions:

"It doesn't ever come from community it comes from a developer...feels like a big developer has come in, they're the corporate body. It doesn't have any relation to what the community wants or needs. It's just being imposed rather than it's been fed up from the community voice."

Female participant, aged 29

There was also a strong sense that the developer held a lot of sway over the council and that the council was often powerless to stand up to them:

"They have a lot of power, the developers, to just pull the plug on developments."

Female participant, aged 29

"I feel like they (councils) need to meet quotas. To meet those quotas, they'll do whatever they need to do to get them."

Male participant, aged 30

Engagement and consultation methods

We explored methods of engagement and consultation for housebuilding decisions in both focus groups. Amongst the young adults we spoke to there was a strong sense that the current tools and approaches used by councils and developers were outdated:

"They did have some plans online as well that you could look at. Then to look at the biggest set of plans you had to go to the town, travel to the council's office and look at them in person, which seemed so old-fashioned. They're only open at certain hours. It seems a bit archaic really."

Female participant, aged 29

In the younger focus group there was a strong sense that a more digitally-focused approach could be useful. This was favoured because it did not require going to a particular place at a particular time, providing much more flexibility to engage as and when the individual was able to:

"Yes, have an app for it and then it's around the clock stuff isn't it. If you want to have a view on what's going on, you should always be security checked as well. You should be a verified member of it also and then you would be able to have your say."

Male participant, aged 27

There were differing views about the most effective form of digital engagement. Some participants felt social media would be preferable to an app-based system as the use of social media is already widespread:

"I think maybe Facebook, because more young people are more likely to be on there in the first place, whereas if it's an app, first you need to know about the app in the first place. For you to install it in the first place. I think that's why social media [should be used] at the beginning."

Female participant, aged 26

Representativeness

Both focus groups shared a strong sense that engagement with the planning system is dominated by certain groups, in particular more elderly residents. The reasons given for this were varied, but common reasons highlighted included were older people are more likely to have 'time on their hands' and with a natural inclination to get involved in 'this sort of thing':

"People with nothing better to do. Yes, people our age."

Female participant, aged 65

"I just think that people that take part in that in the local level just had to be middle-aged white people. [laughter]...They've got the time to go down to the council's offices during the day, they're not in work."

Female participant, aged 29

"...they've got more time on their hands. They get more involved in the community. They've been there for ages."

Male participant, aged 27

In a discussion about holding more open meetings, there was a recognition that these were likely to become dominated by a small number of people:

"We young people we wouldn't go ourselves. It would be middle-aged people going on their own time. We wouldn't get a say."

Male participant, aged 25

Referenda

We explored the role that referenda could play in supporting greater engagement in the planning system. Broadly, we found significant scepticism towards this approach, though there was some support for using public votes for large, controversial development sites.

Participants were concerned that determining who would be able to vote would be difficult, given that housebuilding projects are likely to affect those beyond a particular local neighbourhood:

"Classic is the border ones, so who can vote on that? North-West London, Brent Council? Which border?"

Male participant, aged 64

There was also a sense that those who are already residents in a neighbourhood would be more likely to vote against new housing developments because they would have less motivation to support it, unless it would increase the value of their property. Therefore, the use of local referenda was not viewed by participants as necessarily a route to increasing housing supply.

Deliberative decision-making

We also explored in the focus group with young adults the concept of using deliberative methods - such as citizens' assemblies - for decisions about housebuilding. Participants believed that one of the benefits of this approach is that it would allow for a considered discussion:

"It's a good idea. It means that those people have that dedicated amount of time to really invest in what's being proposed, and not just seeing things in silos, as if you were just entering into the discussion at different bits. You'd be there the whole time. I think that's quite good in how involved you can get."

Female participant, aged 29

There was also a keen sense that any assembly would need to be representative of the local community, to prevent it from being captured by a particular set of vested interests:

"It would need to be like a demographic that as accurately as possible, represented the constituents of that area, and was not leaning one way or another."

Female participant, aged 25

There was some disagreement regarding whether a small group could ever be truly representative of the local community when exploring the potential for a citizens' assembly of 30 people:

"30 people can't represent an entire community. I think it has to be a bigger number. Way bigger. That's the only thing about that."

Male participant, aged 30

"If there's thousands of people living in one borough. 30 people can never represent that number."

Male participant, aged 27

As a result, it is important to ensure that any use of citizens' assemblies is perceived to be representative, perhaps by using a relatively large number of participants. We explore how this could be achieved in the final chapter of this report.

CHAPTER 3 A BEST PRACTICE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL FOR HOUSING DEVELOPERS

“There’ll be public displays of their plans and meetings and so on...but by that stage in a way, it’s too late, you’re going to now be talking about the colours of the front doors.”

Male participant, Hampshire

The previous chapter explored what the public wants from housebuilding and how involved they currently feel in decisions about housebuilding. We found good evidence that better involvement in decisions about housebuilding can help turn NIMBYs into YIMBYs.

Increasing the level of engagement in decisions about housebuilding will require action from a wide range of actors involved in the housebuilding process; this chapter focuses specifically on the change required from housing developers. Instead of recommending specific activities for developers we focus on the overarching principles that should guide community engagement.

These principles are informed by the qualitative and quantitative research outlined in the previous chapters and semi-structured interviews with

housing sector and planning experts. In summary, we believe community engagement by developers should be:

1. Early
2. Accessible
3. Responsive
4. Representative

It is important to note that each principle alone is insufficient for a genuinely engaging approach: all four principles are necessary for meaningful, proper engagement. For example, early engagement is largely pointless unless the developer is willing to adapt their proposals in response to feedback received from local residents.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT

Throughout our qualitative research we heard that engagement and consultation in the housebuilding process doesn't happen at a sufficiently early stage. This means residents often feel the most important decisions about a development have been taken before they are invited to comment, leaving them powerless and unable to influence the shape of the development. Residents then often feel the only option they have is to object to the planning application, laying the foundations for confrontation in the housebuilding process.

Engagement would ideally happen at the earliest possible stage. This would allow for the developer's

approach to be responsive (see our second principle) to the demands of local people; if left too late there is inevitably less room for amendment.¹⁰

Early engagement may also improve relations between the developer and local community. As described by a local authority planning officer to the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), "Early and appropriate engagement can...help people make a positive impact on schemes rather than just sniping from the sidelines".¹¹ Rarely are communities asked 'what do you want?' by housing developers. We expect if developers did this – and genuinely listened and acted on what they heard – they would likely face significantly less local opposition.

CASE STUDY: OAKFIELD, SWINDON

In 2017 Nationwide, the world's largest building society, identified a potential piece of land for a housing development site in Swindon.¹² The land had been left unused by potential developers for ten years.

Nationwide hired a community organiser to consult local people about what kind of housing they wanted for the site. The organiser spoke to people face-to-face across the local neighbourhood, knocking on 600 doors in total. The consultation aimed to better understand exactly what local people wanted from the housing development and what were the most important features of a potential new home for them.

The community organiser heard that parking space and recreational areas were the most important features of the new development for local residents. As a result, the new homes are designed with a relatively high number of parking spaces (1.7 per property) and the development includes routes for dog walking and safer roads.

The consultation period lasted for 18 months and only when this process was complete did Nationwide apply for planning permission. The community organiser will continue to be active throughout the development of the site.



10. Planning Aid, Good Practice Guide to Public Engagement in Development Schemes. Available at: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/6312/Good-Practice-Guide-to-Public-Engagement-in-Development-Scheme-High-Res.pdf> (accessed 20 August 2019).

11. Ibid.

12. The author wishes to acknowledge that Nationwide provided financial support for this project.

RESPONSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Throughout our interviews and focus groups we regularly heard residents felt consultation exercises were 'a sham'. This is often because little or no changes to the proposed development are made in response to feedback received during the consultation period.

It is clear then that for early engagement to have any real world impact, developers must have a reasonable willingness to amend their initial plans. Furthermore, developers should take steps to clearly communicate how they are being responsive, setting out to the local community what changes have been made in response to feedback received.

CASE STUDY: MARKLAKE COURT, LONDON¹³

The Leathermarket Joint Management Board, a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO), runs the Kipling Estate in Bermondsey, London. In 2014 it established the Leathermarket Community Benefit Society to build more genuinely affordable housing in the local area.

This resulted in the Marklake Court scheme, a redevelopment of 12 unused garages on the estate into 27 flats and maisonettes of varying size. Designed by Bell Phillips Architects and Igloo Community Builders, the development was conducted in a community-led manner.

Based around resident meetings and workshops, plans were shared at each stage with residents and feedback was taken onboard. For example, residents were clear they did not want metal cladding but instead brick buildings that matched the local area. They were able to also contribute to other aspects of design: layout, size, window sizes, what they wanted from communal spaces, brick colours, open or closed plan

kitchens and the interior of the flats. They could also choose the finishes for their own bathrooms, kitchens, floors and walls.

The scheme has widely been praised as an example of delivering community-led housing for social rent in an area with typically high housing costs. As described by the resident Chairman of Leathermarket CBS, "Residents are much happier than with the traditional development approach, because they've shaped the design."



"Residents are much happier than with the traditional development approach, because they've shaped the design."

13. This case study is drawn from the following sources (all accessed 20 August 2019):

<http://www.leathermarketcbs.org.uk/marklake-court/>
<https://www.southwark.gov.uk/news/2018/jul/new-council-homes-delivered-through-pioneering-local-community-partnership>
http://www.iglooregeneration.co.uk/portfolio_page/kipling-garages-leathermarket-community-benefit-society-bermondsey/
<https://www.dezeen.com/2018/10/25/bell-philips-marklake-court-kipling-estate-london-social-housing-architecture/>
<https://www.onlondon.co.uk/southwark-the-happy-housing-story-of-marklake-court/>
<https://nacsba.org.uk/news/leathermarket-community-benefit-society/>

ACCESSIBLE ENGAGEMENT

The need to make engagement with the planning system more accessible was a key theme across our interviews and focus groups. There were significant concerns that full participation in developers' engagement activities requires vast technical knowledge and understanding. A lack of accessibility is likely to reduce the scope for involvement by a broader cross-section of society and could explain why the planning system – as we saw in the previous chapter – is dominated by a particular cross-section of society.

Therefore, developers and local authorities must do all they can to make it easier to engage. This includes simple steps such as holding consultation events at times that everyone can make, and holding several events if necessary. It also demands a consideration of the type of language that is used when communicating with the public: too often the language of planning is dense and technical.

REPRESENTATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Participants in our interviews and focus groups were concerned that only a narrow cross-section

of society are engaged in decisions about housebuilding. This is supported by our findings in the previous chapter: our survey found that engagement in the planning system is dominated by elderly, well-off homeowners. This is not surprising - other research has indicated that typical participants in local decisions "are more likely to be white, older, better educated, middle class males".¹⁴

Developers must therefore do much more to ensure they engage with a truly representative cross-section of society. This will be achieved, in part, by the other principles in this chapter; making engagement more accessible, for example, should help boost its representativeness.

Boosting the representativeness of planning engagement is likely to benefit those in favour of building more homes. This is because many of the groups currently the least engaged – for example renters – are most likely to support new housing development, as the previous chapter demonstrates. Properly representing their voice in the planning process, we believe, will create a more permissive planning culture – something developers would surely welcome.

CASE STUDY: ASTRY CLOSE, BRISTOL

Lawrence Weston is a post-war housing estate in North-West Bristol. In 2012 a group of residents formed Ambition Lawrence Weston, a local community group to make their local area a better place to live in the face of worsening public services.

In 2018 the organisation appointed Barefoot Architects to 'co-design' with local residents 40 new homes on a site of council-owned land. In an area of high affordable housing need, the development will make an important contribution to easing housing pressure locally.

Residents have been engaged throughout the process in a series of workshops to best understand local residents' needs and concerns. These have included innovative engagement techniques such as virtual reality 3D computer design, alongside physical models of the proposed development. The project has been submitted to the local council for pre-application advice and aims to be completed in 2020.¹⁵



14. NCVO, IVR and Involve (2009), Understanding Participation: A literature review.

15. This case study is drawn from the following sources (all accessed 20 August 2019):

<http://barefootarchitects.co.uk/astry-close-housing-1>

<https://www.ambitionlw.org/planning/community-led-housing-development-astry-close/>

CHAPTER 4

TOWARDS PEOPLE-POWERED PLANNING

“I think there seems to be quite a big notion of disconnect between people and decisions being made, either in big government or local government, and I think anything that can narrow or make that gap a bit smaller is a positive thing.”

Female participant, aged 25, London

Throughout this report we have seen that few are engaged in the planning system and those who do engage are often those with strong motivations to oppose the building of new homes. It is therefore unsurprising that our planning system fails to deliver enough new homes. We have also seen that people often feel the only way to influence the planning process is to object, creating the conditions for conflict. This shows the need for new forms of decision making which can better build consensus about housebuilding decisions.

We firmly believe that we can help overcome local opposition and increase housing supply by putting people at the heart of the planning system. In this chapter we set out six recommendations to achieve this.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Our interviews and focus groups show that there is significant appetite for developers to consult and engage with local communities at an earlier stage of the housebuilding process. This may help to address a strong sense that consultation exercises are often a ‘sham’.

Nationally significant infrastructure projects and certain developments, such as onshore wind farms, require consultation with the local community before a planning application is submitted.¹⁶ Pre-application consultation brings a number of benefits, as outlined in the government’s National Planning Policy Framework:

*“Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality preapplication discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community”.*¹⁷

Whilst Demos is generally wary about top-down policy directives, there is a real need to ensure the housebuilding sector better engages local communities. We therefore recommend that:

Recommendation 1: Pre-application consultation should be mandatory for major housing developments in England.

16. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/before-submitting-an-application#parties-involved-at-the-pre-application-stage> (accessed 20 August 2019).
17. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019), National Planning Policy Framework, p.13.

It is important to note that pre-application consultations are already mandatory for major housing developments in Scotland,¹⁸ Wales¹⁹ and Northern Ireland²⁰; this recommendation would therefore simply bring England in line with the rest of the UK. The government should consult before adopting this measure to gather views on the appropriate definition of a major housing development.

However, it is important to ensure this consultation is carried out to a high standard and is not simply an exercise to promote the benefits of the scheme. To achieve this government may wish to consider setting out a fairly detailed set of principles that the pre-application consultation should follow. It may also wish to specify that pre-application consultation should be undertaken by an independent organisation. This may go some way to mitigating concerns within the local community that the consultation is a 'sham'.

DIGITAL PLANNING

The planning system's use of technology so often resembles that of the last century. This is typified by the sign strapped to a lamppost, the planning system's most ubiquitous form of communication despite enormous technological advances in recent decades. Whilst this serves an important purpose, particularly when digital literacy is still low for many, there is the opportunity to go a lot further today.

Researchers at Lancaster University have already shown the promise of such approaches, designing an app that displays planning information on a map and notifies residents of any changes.²¹ Users are able to leave comments and engage with others in discussion. To encourage the further development of similar tools we recommend that:

Recommendation 2: Central government should launch a digital planning innovation fund, enabling local planning authorities to develop innovative online consultation and engagement tools for planning.

DELIBERATIVE PLANNING

However, whilst steps can be taken to increase public consultation and engagement in the planning system, we are not hopeful the planning system in its current guise will ever involve a substantially more representative cross-section of society. Achieving this is essential if the planning

system is to be rescued from the capture of those most opposed to new housing development.

First, as we have seen repeatedly throughout this project, the sense of disillusion with consultation and engagement exercises runs deep. Yes, efforts should be taken to improve their operation and to prove to the public that this is not the case, but this will not happen overnight. This means that those that are already disengaged are likely to continue to be disengaged, even if substantial steps are taken to address this.

Second, as political scientist Archon Fung has argued, when participation is open to all - as is broadly the case with the planning system today - those that self-select to engage are more likely to be wealthier, better educated and with more strongly held views or vested interests.²² This appears to be the case in today's planning system, which is dominated - as set out in chapter two - by more elderly homeowners.

So however how hard we try to boost engagement it seems likely that the planning system will, to a greater extent, continue to be dominated by certain types of people. Therefore, we may need to consider the merits of decision making systems based not on open participation - which too often becomes dominated by a privileged few - but on the selection of participants designed to ensure representativeness, perhaps by choosing participants through a random ballot.

Citizens' assemblies - decision making forums that come together to deliberate on an issue - utilise this approach to ensure participants are representative of society. If this approach was used for decisions about housebuilding we would expect to see the influence of renters and the poor - groups that typically engage less with the planning system - increase, whilst the influence of the retired and homeowners - groups that typically engage more with the planning system - decrease. This could help to get more homes built, given that engagement with the planning system is often dominated by those that are opposed to new housing development, as illustrated in chapter two.

But ensuring representativeness is not the only desirable feature of citizens' assemblies. Deliberation is well-suited to resolving complex disagreement and the planning system is certainly littered with complex disagreements. As described by James Fishkin, "the root of deliberation is

18. <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/8201/guidancenote-preapplicationdiscussionacsef.pdf> (accessed 20 August 2019).

19. <https://www.planningaidwales.org.uk/pre-application-consultation/> (accessed 20 August 2019).

20. https://www.planningni.gov.uk/pre-application_community_consultation_guidance_-_june_2014.pdf (accessed 20 August 2019).

21. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/civic-exchange/open-planning/> (accessed 20 August 2019).

22. Fung, A. and Warren, M.E. (2011), The Participedia Project: An Introduction, in *International Public Management Journal*.

Quoted in: http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/The-Community-Paradigm_FINAL.pdf

‘weighing’, which could be collective, individual or both²³ - involving discussion, rumination, or both”. In summary, deliberative debates are:

- Informed and balanced, with evidence deployed and arguments met by counter-arguments.
- Conscientious, with participants willing to listen and talk, “with civility and respect”.²⁴
- Comprehensive, representing a broad range of opinions on the matter.

These principles seem well-suited to difficult decisions about housebuilding, which are inherently controversial and challenging. Reaching a sensible conclusion is likely to require extensive consideration of the evidence, challenge and debate. This suggests citizens’ assemblies could be well-suited to resolving conflict in the planning system, moving us away from a situation where the public’s only means of influencing the housebuilding process is by objecting to planning applications.

However, it would clearly be impractical for all planning decisions to be referred to a citizens’ assembly: this would likely bring the planning system to an unacceptable standstill. It is therefore more sensible to look at how deliberative methods can be utilised at a more strategic level.

We believe that this is likely to be best done when a local plan is being formed by a local planning authority. Deliberative methods, such as citizens’ assemblies, could be used - following consultation with the wider public - to make key decisions relating to, for example, housing allocations within the local plan. We therefore recommend that:

Recommendation 3: Local planning authorities should trial the use of deliberative decision-making methods - such as citizens’ assemblies - as part of the local plan making process.

It is important to flag that this recommendation will only function as well as the local plan making process itself, the process by which a local planning authority sets out a vision and framework for the future development of an area. As of December 2018, just 44% of local authorities have an up-to-date local plan.²⁵ Central government has challenged just 15 local authorities that do not have a plan; more must be done to hold councils to account for producing and keeping up-to-date

local plans, providing additional financial resources where necessary to assist this process.²⁶

However, there are two very real limitations to citizens’ assemblies. First, given their face-to-face nature they are likely to be costly to run. Second, there is a limit to the number of people that can be engaged in face-to-face deliberative discussions. Online deliberative discussions could overcome these challenges, being cheaper to hold than face-to-face discussions and with the potential to involve more people. We therefore recommend that:

Recommendation 4: Research organisations, local planning authorities and wider civil society should collaborate to develop tools for online deliberation to support the local plan making process.

COMMUNITY-DEVELOPER PARTNERSHIPS

Demos has previously espoused the benefits of promoting community-led housing, through schemes such as community land trusts (CLTs).²⁷ We remain committed to this approach and believe the government should take steps towards encouraging the sector’s development, for example by allowing community land trusts to purchase land for co-housing schemes at a discounted price.²⁸

We also recognise that boosting community involvement in planning will not come from more community-led housing alone. Developers will remain central to housebuilding and therefore it is vital that we consider how to better involve local people in their operation.

Just as the interests of employees can be advanced by placing workers on the boards of companies, placing residents on a board responsible for a housing development – alongside representatives from the developer – could advance the interests of residents in the housebuilding process.

This model – which we call a ‘community-developer partnership’ – could be formed before a developer makes a planning application. The community-developer partnership would then submit a planning application. If permission were granted the partnership would then become a community-development board, with a set number of community representatives appointed, alongside representatives from the developer, to oversee the delivery of new homes. This would provide citizen voice to the top of housing development projects,

23. James S. Fishkin and Robert C. Luskin (2005), Experimenting with a Democratic Ideal: Deliberative Polling and Public Opinion, *Acta Politica*, 40 (284-298).

24. *Ibid.*

25. <https://www.nao.org.uk/press-release/planning-for-new-homes/>

26. *Ibid.*

27. Duncan O’Leary and Charlie Cadywould (2015), *Community Builders*, Demos. Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/project/community-builders-report/> (accessed 19 August 2019).

28. Ben Glover (2019), *Future Homes*, Demos.

helping to ensure that developments better reflect the wishes of local residents. This hybrid model would occupy a space in between a traditional developer approach and a community-land trust, combining the benefits of the former - extensive financial resource and technical expertise - with the local representation and legitimacy provided by the latter.

We believe developers would be incentivised to engage with this new model because local authorities may look more favourably upon applications from community-developer partnerships than those from developers working alone. So, in losing some degree of control over the development the chances of overall success for the developer are likely to be increased. We believe this is a trade-off more forward-thinking developers will be willing to make. To develop this concept further, we recommend:

Recommendation 5: Developers, civil society and researchers should work to further develop the concept of 'community-developer partnerships'.

FUNDING PLANNING AUTHORITIES

It would be wrong to discuss planning in England today without considering local government finances. This is because local authority planning departments have been particularly affected by cuts to local government since 2010; spending in real terms on planning functions by local authorities fell 15% between 2010-11 and 2017-18.²⁹ This has resulted in the number of local authority planning staff falling by 15% between 2006 and 2016, at a time when more is expected of these departments as we try to significantly expand housing supply.³⁰

Against this backdrop it is quite clearly unreasonable to expect local authorities to take on new planning responsibilities - such as those outlined earlier in this report (e.g. citizens' assemblies to support local plan-making) - without additional funding. Therefore steps must be taken to put the financing of local authority planning departments on a much more sustainable basis. We recommend that:

Recommendation 6: Central government should provide ring-fenced emergency grant funding to local planning authorities.

29. National Audit Office (2019), Planning for new homes. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Planning-for-new-homes.pdf> (accessed 22 August 2019).
30. Ibid.

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