

The Quiet Yes

Why Listening to the Majority Could Unlock Development

Jack Airey, August 2025

Introduction

A more representative planning system is needed - one that gives equal weight to the views of all residents, regardless of their stance on development. Previous Public First research has found that many people who do not typically take part in consultations understand the need for new buildings in their area and are quietly in favour of local developments.¹ Yet, their views often go unheard by decision makers. Instead, local councillors mostly hear from those objecting to development. This selection bias means councillors rarely receive a balanced picture of local opinion. Low turnouts in local elections also reduce the political incentive to make decisions on development that reflect the broader public's preferences.

This research paper explores the views of those generally in favour of new local development (YIMBYs) and those generally opposed (NIMBYs) on both development and the planning process.² It finds that **a large portion of the population instinctively supports development - often for varied reasons - and that most people, regardless of their views, do not engage with the planning system**. Many who oppose development are concerned that local decisions are not being made with the views of normal people in mind.

We argue that councils should routinely engage a representative sample of local residents to inform their local plans and decisions - and that the Government should at least encourage, and potentially require, this to happen. This engagement should complement existing public consultation, using robust quantitative and qualitative research methods to capture the perspectives of those who do not usually take part.

The public engagement imbalance

Public engagement is a fundamental part of how development schemes are designed and considered. There is a longstanding legal requirement to consult local people on planning applications and local plans. Developers often refine their proposals based on public feedback.

However, few people make use of their right to have a say. Many lack the time or inclination to comment on applications, attend consultation events, or join planning committees. Those who do participate tend to be highly motivated, well-organised, and more often opposed to development.

While the YIMBY/NIMBY divide is not perfect - views are often nuanced, contradictory, and context-dependent (e.g., views can harden once sites are identified for development) - it is a useful

¹ [Public First \(2024\) - The Case For Inclusive Planning](#)

² The attitudinal research presented in this report is informed by a public poll of 2,005 UK adults conducted online by Public First between 11th-17th July 2025. The results were weighted to be nationally and regionally representative on age, gender and social grade.

shorthand for understanding instinctive positions and how the planning process could better reflect the local majority.

The public largely supports new development

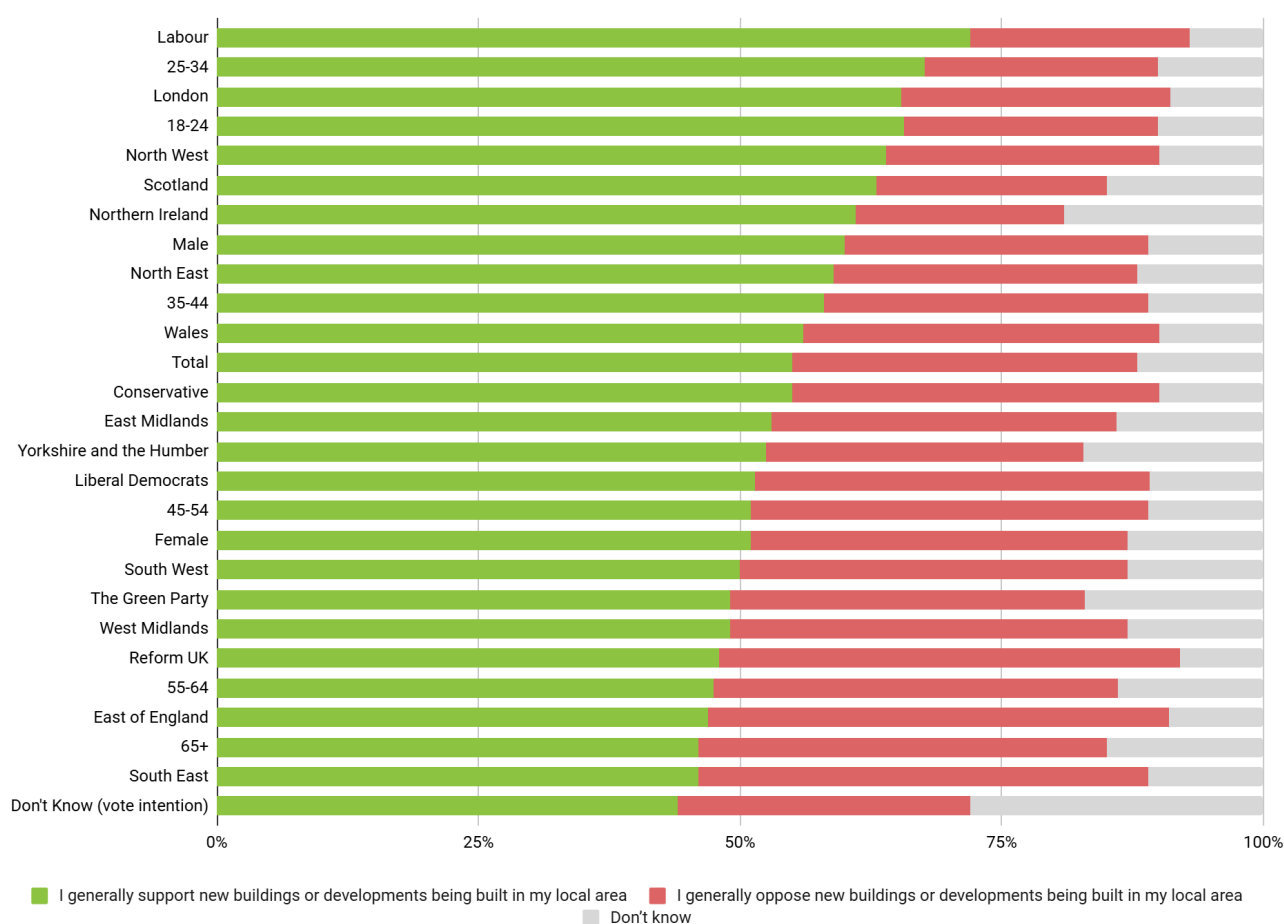
Despite appearances - such as negative local news coverage, anti-development placards, and political debates dominated by opposition - our research finds most people are more likely to be in favour of local development than against it:

- **55% of UK adults** say they **generally support new buildings or developments in their local area**.
- **33%** say they **generally oppose them**.

Support varies by demographic: younger people, Labour supporters, and Londoners are the most likely to back new building, while those in the South East and East of England, and Reform UK supporters, are the most likely to oppose it. Importantly, every demographic is still more likely to support than oppose, though there is always understandable opposition to building in areas of natural beauty.

The most supportive groups of new development

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,005 | Fieldwork: 11th Jul - 17th Jul 2025

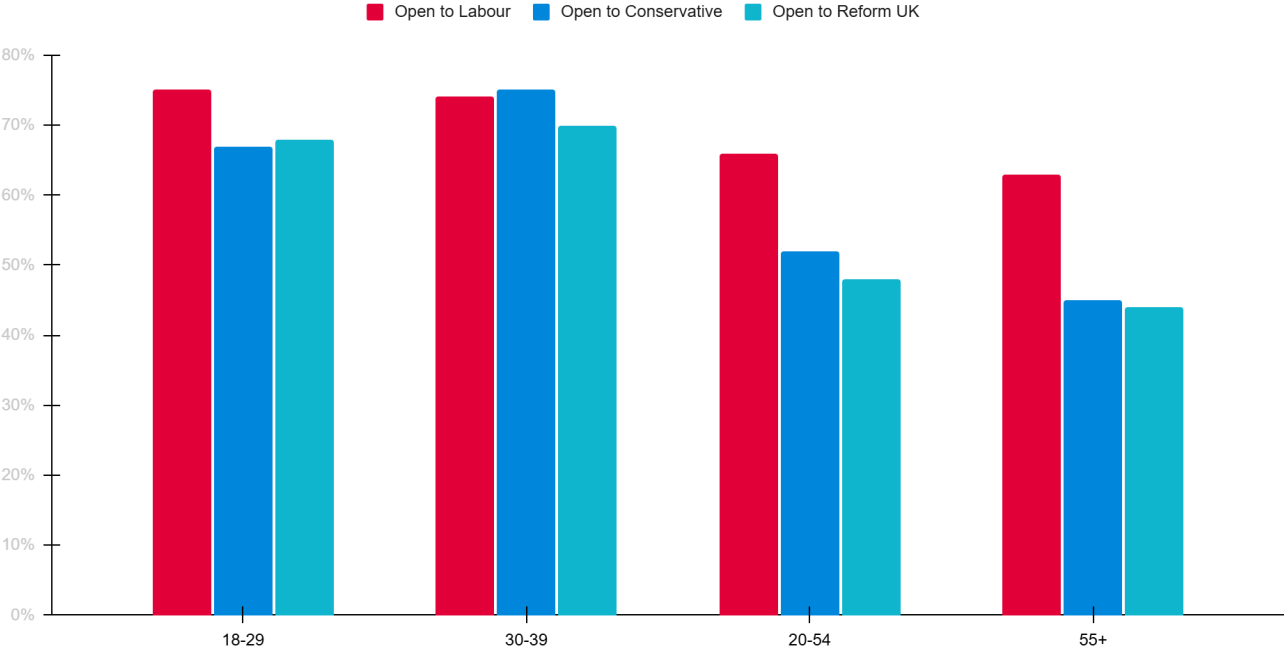


It is notable that younger generations are supportive of development regardless of who they support politically. Among 30-39 year olds, those open to voting Conservative are most likely to be YIMBY, marginally ahead of those open to voting Labour or Reform UK. Among older generations, those open to voting Labour are more likely to be YIMBY than those open to voting Conservative or Reform UK.



Percentage of age band who are YIMBY by vote intention

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,005 | Fieldwork 11th - 17th July 2025



Why YIMBYs support new building

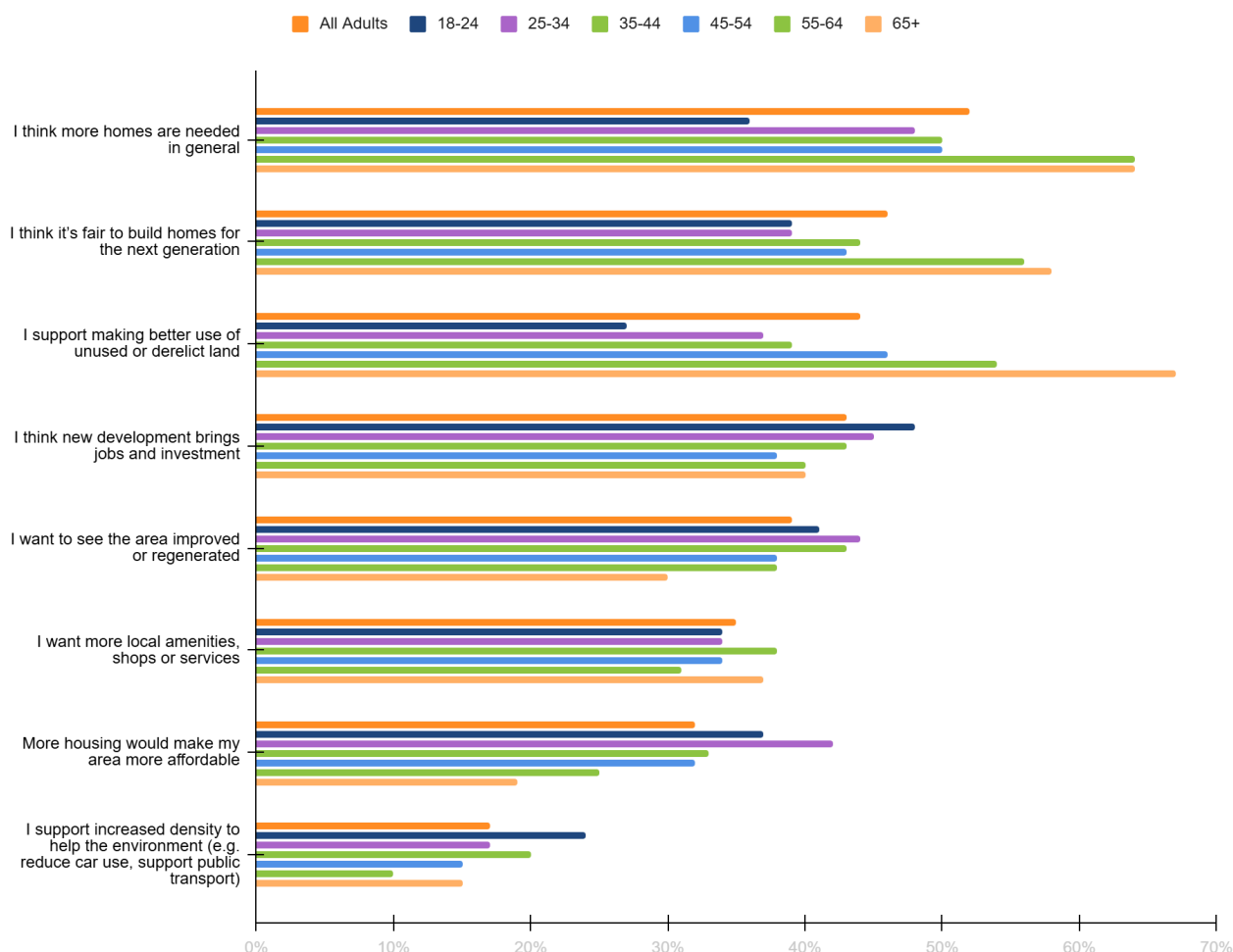
YIMBYs mainly support new homes to address the long-standing imbalance between housing supply and demand. Many also see benefits for the local economy and the productive use of unused land.

Motivations vary by age:

- **Younger YIMBYs** are more likely to **value new jobs, investment, and improved affordability**.
- **Older YIMBYs** are more likely to **think more homes are needed in general and for the next generation**, as well as prioritising better use of derelict or unused land.

You said you tend to support new buildings or developments being built in your local area, which of the following reasons explain this? Select all that apply

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,005 | Fieldwork 11th-17th July 2025



Why NIMBYs oppose new building

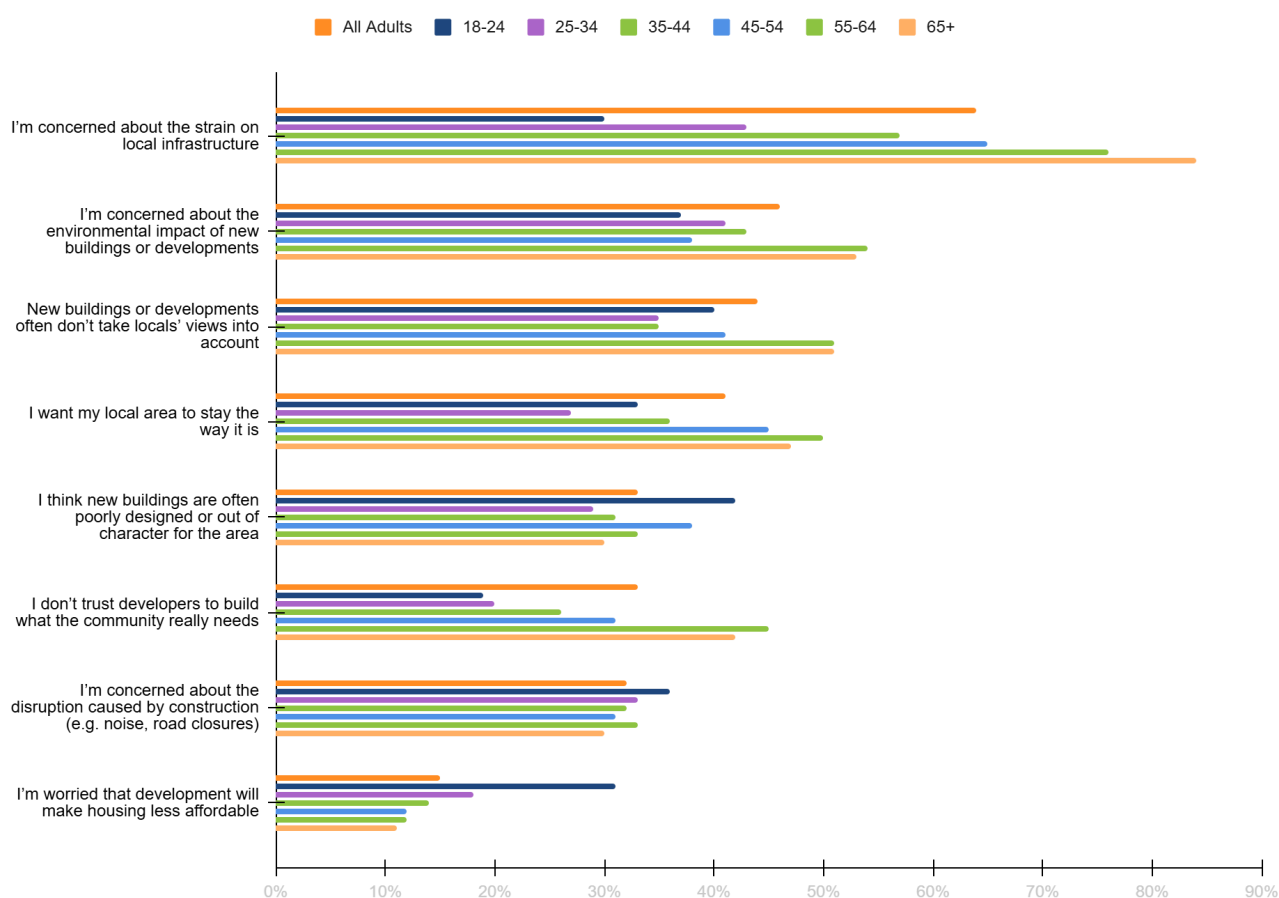
NIMBYs' primary concern is the perceived strain on local infrastructure - such as roads and public services - with 64% citing this as a reason.

Age again shapes priorities:

- **Older NIMBYs** are especially **concerned about infrastructure, environmental impacts, and changes to the character of their area**.
- **Younger NIMBYs** are **less concerned about infrastructure and local change**, though still wary of certain impacts.

You said you tend to oppose new buildings or developments being built in your local area, which of the following reasons explain this? Select all that apply

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,005 | Fieldwork 11th-17th July 2025



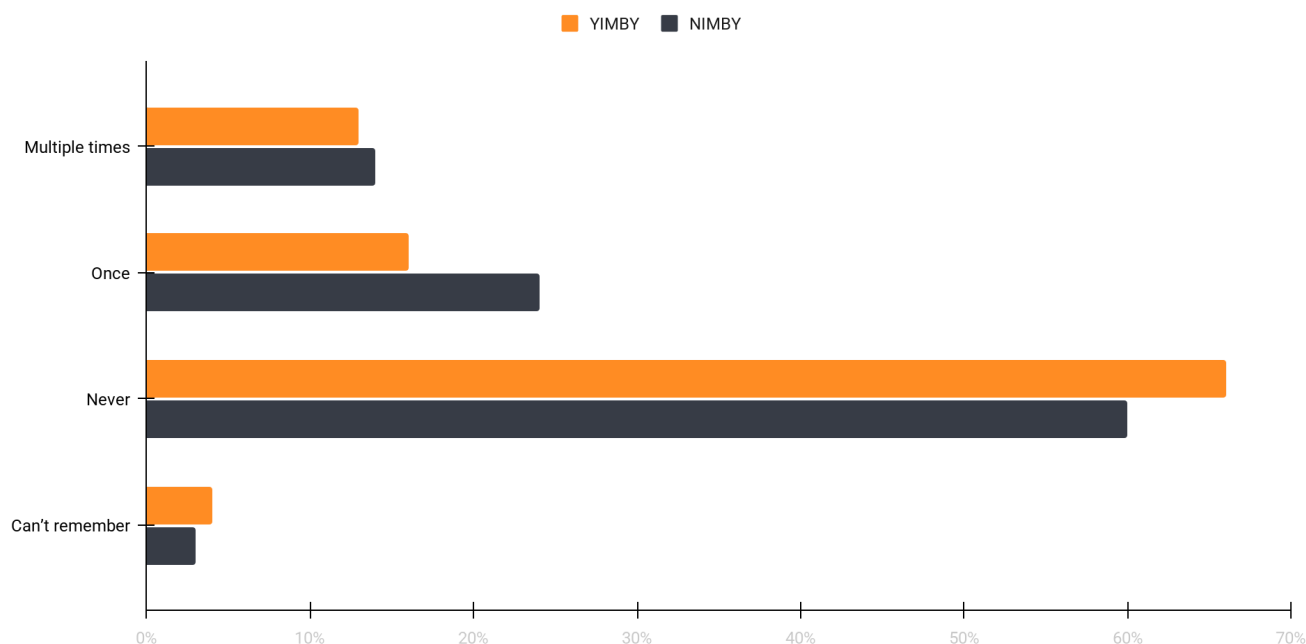
Few have a say in the planning process

Engagement levels are low across both groups:

- **29% of YIMBYs and 38% of NIMBYs have ever commented on a planning application—most only once.**

How many times have you been involved in the planning process for a construction or development project in the following ways?: Commenting on a planning application

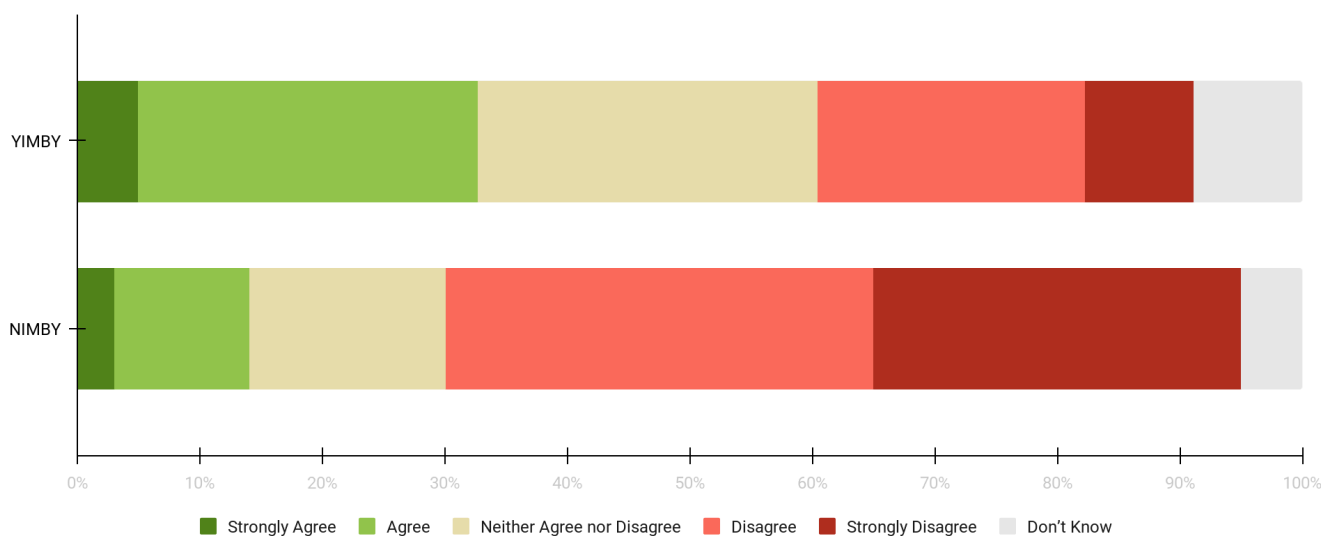
Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,005 | Fieldwork 11th-17th July 2025



Their perceptions of decision-making differ sharply: YIMBYs are split on whether local decisions reflect “normal people’s” views, while NIMBYs are far more likely to believe they do not.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?: Planning decisions by local councils are made on the basis of normal people’s views

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,005 | Fieldwork: 11th Jul - 17th Jul 2025



Ensuring the planning system reflects the real balance of local opinion

For anyone wanting to build, this research shows the value of proactively engaging a broader and more representative part of the population. Most people are instinctively supportive of new development but different messages will resonate with people depending on factors like their age and the strength of their general support. Similarly, understanding the varied reasons behind opposition can help address concerns. Through research on local attitudes, developers can find out what messages cut through with the public and demonstrate whether those shouting loudest against their schemes are speaking for local people or just for themselves.

For policymakers, the findings highlight that the planning process is not fully taking account of the balance of local opinion. A more representative process could:

- Reassure sceptical residents that decisions reflect local views.
- Encourage more positive decision-making on new developments.
- Improve councils' communications around planning and development.

Policy recommendations

1. **Representative engagement for local plans.** Councils should engage a representative sample of the population through quantitative and qualitative research (e.g. representative surveys) to complement traditional forms of consultation. It is essential this research is conducted with a sample that is large enough (minimum 500 people, larger in bigger areas) and weighted to be truly representative of local people (e.g., by gender, age, location). It is also essential that survey respondents are required to consider actual trade-offs that will occur in local plan making, like where new development should go (e.g., proportion in towns, villages or new settlements), to produce principles that can underpin local plans.
2. **Engagement on developer contributions.** Councils should also test public opinion on how locals would like to 'spend' Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funds (e.g., on transport provision, schools, Affordable Housing, parks, etc.). This would be particularly helpful for addressing the concerns of those that are generally against new local developments.
3. **Encouraging councils to prepare local plans on the basis of local opinion.** The Government should update the online Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) section on Plan Making to say they expect councils to consult with a representative sample of local people as part of the consultation process. As a result of a recent decision by the High Court, the PPG has the same status as Government policy as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). As an online resource, officials can amend the PPG quickly and effectively, far faster than the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which takes many months to update.
4. **Statutory requirement if effective.** If proven effective, representative engagement should become a legal requirement. Both YIMBYs and NIMBYs strongly support decisions being based on the views of all residents (see chart across the page), not just those responding to planning applications.
5. **Reforms to the National Scheme of Delegation.** Once local plans truly reflect representative opinion, planning applications for sites allocated in them should not require further committee approval, avoiding unnecessary duplication.



To what extent would you support making it a requirement for planning decisions to be taken on the basis of the views of all local residents, not just those who respond to planning applications?

Public First | UK Adults | Sample Size: 2,005 | Fieldwork: 11th Jul - 17th Jul 2025

