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Building Support

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO HOUSEBUILDING, AFFORDABILITY AND THE COST OF LIVING

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02 Executive Summary

Few issues shape the cost of living more than housing. Yet it is rarely discussed in those terms. For most households, housing is their single biggest expense, and public attitudes towards affordability are clear. New polling for this report finds 53% of people want house prices and rents in their local area to fall, while only 8% want them to rise.

Despite this, the case for new homes is often made in abstract terms, focused on need, targets and supply, rather than as part of the answer to the high cost of living. This research explores that gap. Our findings point to a significant and underused opportunity for those who want to increase the delivery of new homes, from housebuilders and policymakers to pro-housing campaigners.

The public are not instinctively hostile to housebuilding. But many do not believe that building more homes will reduce housing costs. While there is clear demand for lower housing costs, people are more likely to think that increasing housebuilding in their local area would increase prices rather than reduce them, by 28% to 19%.

This “affordability belief gap” is shaped less by abstract economic reasoning than by concerns about who benefits from development and whether outcomes feel fair. Among those sceptical that housebuilding improves affordability, 40% say new homes are too expensive for local people, while 33% point to investors, second home owners and buy-to-let purchases as the real driver of high prices. As a result, support tends to gravitate towards policies that feel direct and visible, like reserving new homes for local people or introducing rent controls.

However, these attitudes are not deeply entrenched. Most people (54%) believe building more homes would have little impact on them personally, while only 14% think it would affect them negatively. When people are persuaded that new homes will make housing more affordable for local people, support for development rises significantly, even when it involves trade-offs such as increased traffic, pressure on services, or local change.

Affordability is also the single most important benefit people associate with housebuilding. Nearly half (46%) rank making local housing more affordable as the main potential benefit of new homes, far ahead of jobs, energy efficiency, or support for local businesses.

Support for housebuilding therefore depends less on abstract arguments about supply, and more on whether people believe it will reduce housing costs for people like them. The most persuasive messages are those that make affordability tangible and local, by showing how new homes help young people and families stay in the area, support first-time buyers and create jobs and opportunities locally

Economic arguments about supply and competition can also work, particularly with younger audiences, but are most effective when grounded in visible outcomes that people recognise in everyday life.

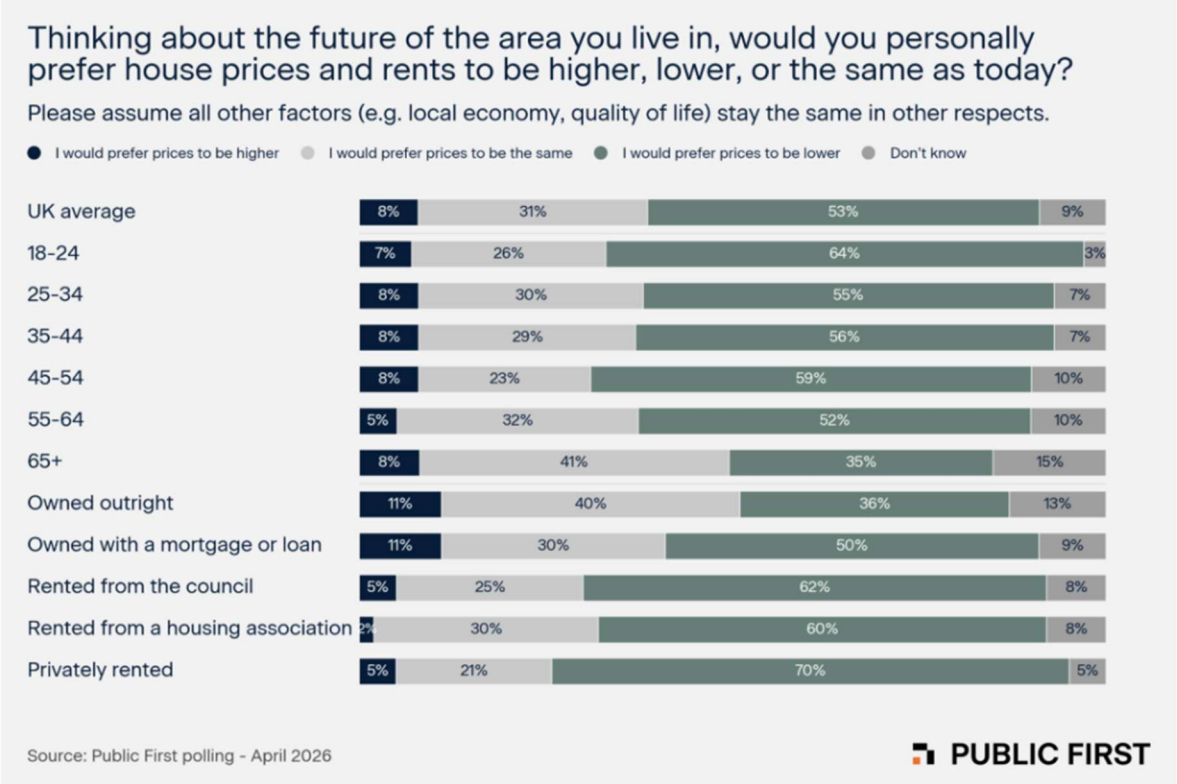
The findings also point to an important distinction between messages that reinforce support for housebuilding and those that broaden it. Economic arguments about supply and competition perform strongly among people already supportive of local development but are more divisive among opponents. By contrast, messages focused on apprenticeships, key workers and helping young people stay in the area are more effective at softening opposition to development itself.

The opportunity for housebuilders, policymakers and pro-housing campaigners is not simply to argue for more homes, but to make a more credible case that new homes will reduce housing costs for local people.

03 Introduction

The cost of living has dominated public concern for the past few years. It has decided elections and reshaped life for many. Yet one of the largest components of household outgoings – housing – is often treated separately to living costs. Policymakers spend far more time thinking about ways to reduce the cost of energy, food and tax than housing,

Despite this, public attitudes to the housing market are very clear. New Public First polling finds they want housing to be more affordable. Around half say they would prefer house prices and rents in their local area to fall, compared to 8% who would prefer them to rise and 31% who would prefer them to stay the same.



For many, the priority is improving affordability rather than protecting asset values. This is particularly true for younger people and those trying to get onto the housing ladder, but also for older generations and those that already own their home.

Yet this perspective is not always reflected in how housebuilding is discussed. The case for new homes is often made in terms of supply, targets and long-term need, rather than as part of the answer to the high cost of living.

This research sets out to explore that gap, and what can be done about it. Polling of over 2,000 adults in the UK examines how the public think about housing affordability,[1] why many are sceptical that building more homes will reduce costs, and what kinds of arguments are most effective in building support for new development.

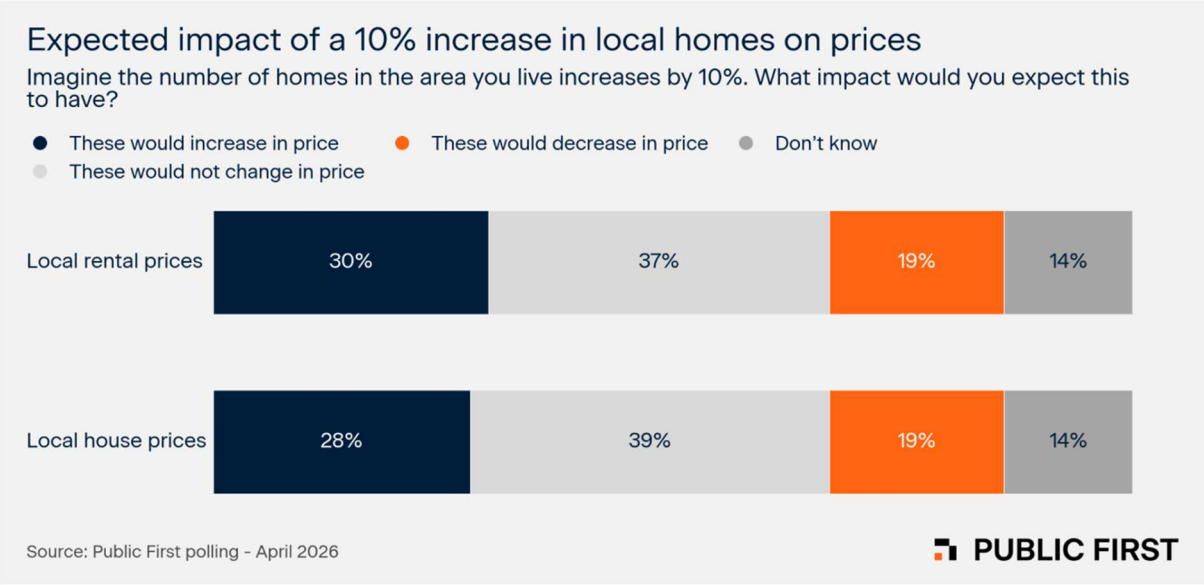
The evidence finds support for housebuilding depends less on abstract arguments about supply, and more on whether people believe it will deliver lower housing costs for people like them. There is an opportunity to more effectively present housebuilding as a response to the cost of living. Unlocking that potential depends on how the case is made.

[1] *Online survey of 2,061 UK adults, fieldwork conducted from 23 Apr 2026 - 30 Apr 2026. Data weighted to nationally representative proportions by Education, Gender, Age, Region, SEG.*

04 The affordability belief gap

What do people believe will bring costs down?

While there is a clear desire for lower house prices and rents, there is widespread scepticism that building more homes will achieve this. People are more likely to think that increasing housebuilding in their local area would increase prices rather than reduce them.



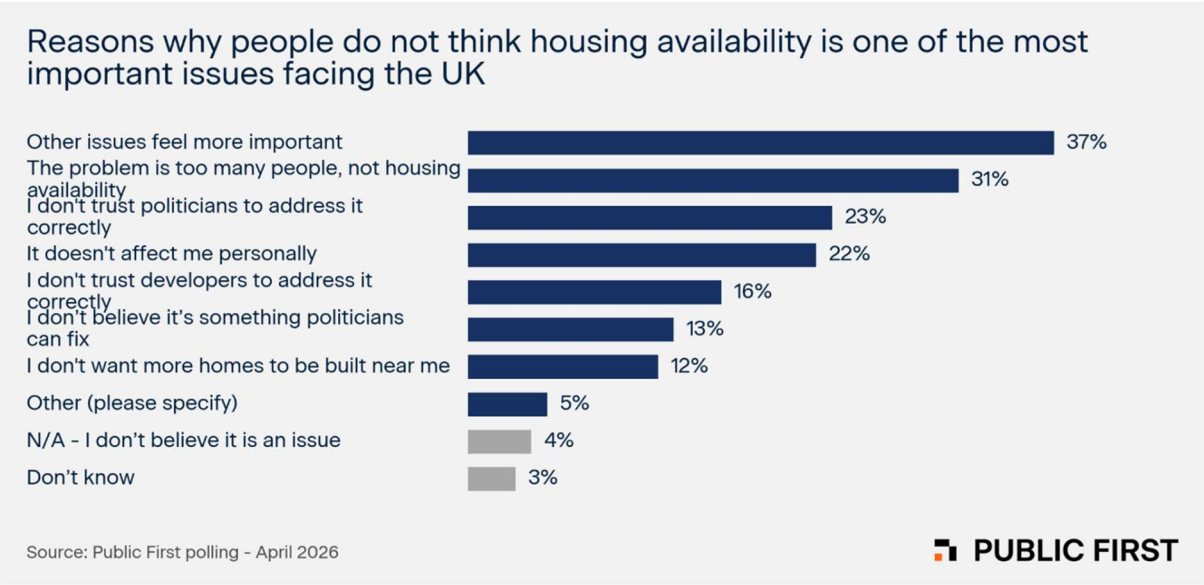
This scepticism is not confined to any one group. It is visible across age groups, tenures and regions.

It sits uneasily alongside a growing body of real-world evidence that increasing housing supply can ease pressure on costs. In Austin, Texas, one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States, a sustained surge in housebuilding led to a significant increase in supply, followed by a marked fall in rents from their peak.[2]

Yet this is not how much of the public understands the issue. The vast majority (84%) do not see housing as a top tier issue for the country. When asked why, people most often point to other issues feeling more

[2] https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2026/03/18/austins-surge-of-new-housing-construction-drove-down-rents

immediate, but also to a belief that the problem is not a lack of homes, but too many people, along with a distrust in it being fixed by politicians.

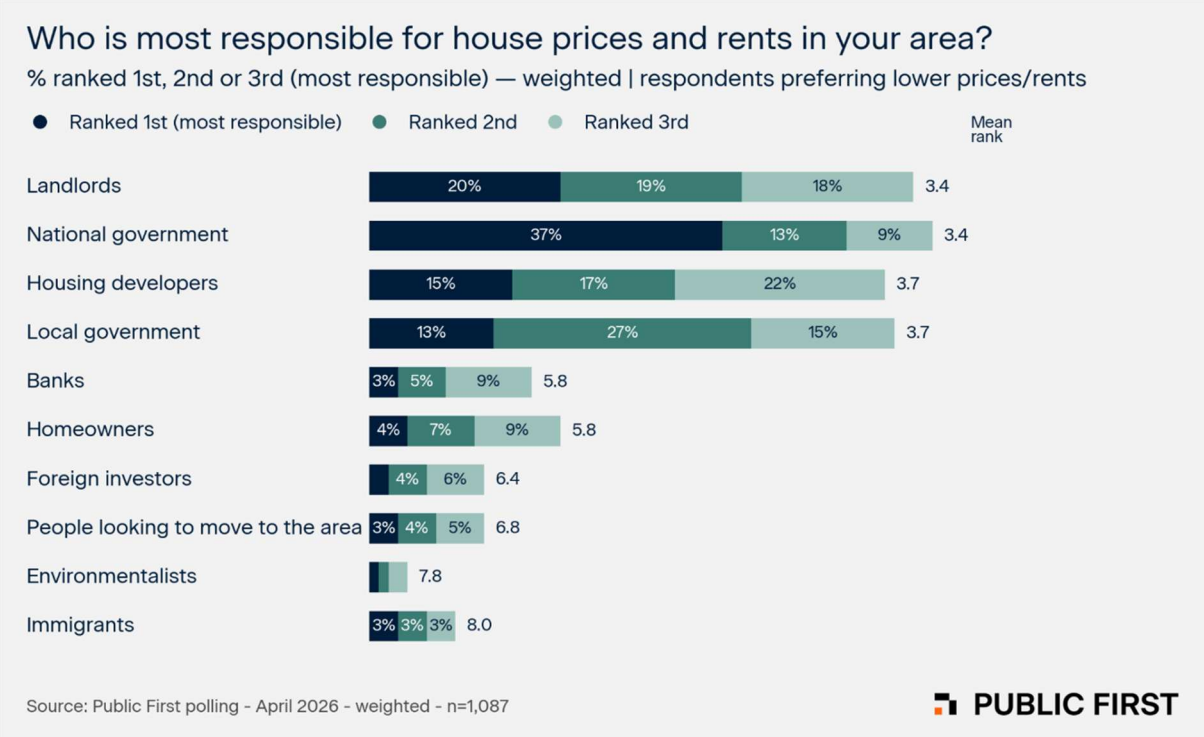


A central challenge for those who want to increase the delivery of new homes is therefore building a credible and persuasive case that they will make housing more affordable – and in doing so, addressing one of the most important drivers of the cost of living.

05 Why people are sceptical

Public scepticism about housebuilding and affordability is rooted partly in how people understand the housing market.

Research from the United States has shown that people tend to rely on what is sometimes described as "folk economics" when thinking about housing – intuitive, experience-based ways of understanding how markets work.[3] The public does not naturally apply supply and demand logic to housing in the way they might for other goods.



Among those who do not believe building more homes would improve affordability, the most common explanations are about who those homes are for. Four in ten (40%) say that new homes would simply be too

[3] https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.20241428

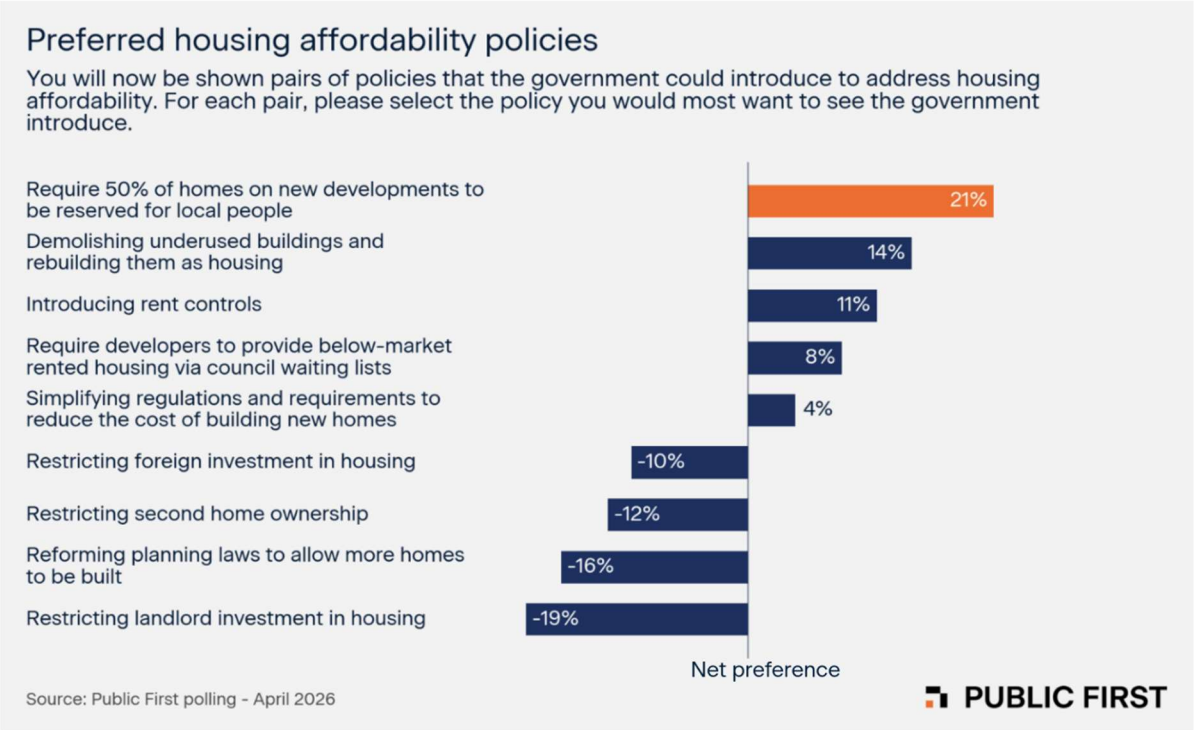
expensive for local people, while a third (33%) point to investors, second homes or buy-to-let purchases as the real driver of high prices. Others (23%) believe that new homes would attract people from outside the area, limiting any impact on local affordability.

This focus on visible actors is also reflected in how people who want lower prices and rents assign responsibility for housing costs in their local area. National government is most commonly seen as responsible, followed by landlords, housebuilders and local government.

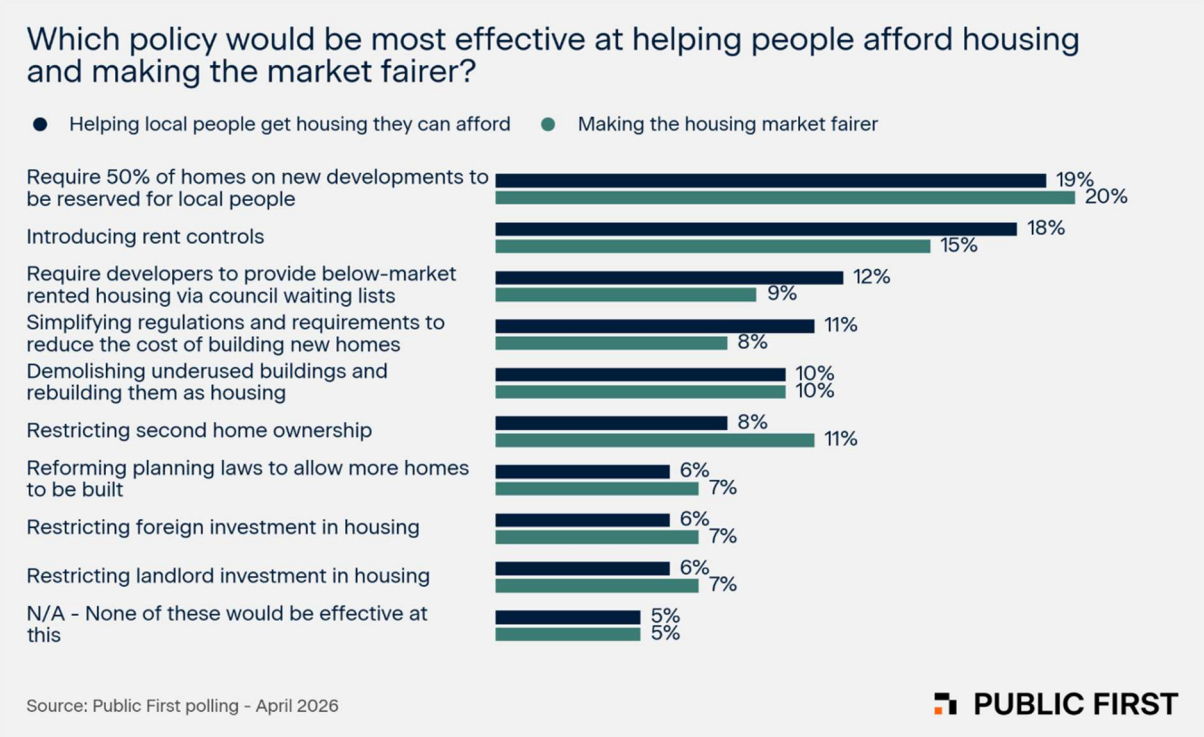
This helps explain why increasing supply is not widely seen as a solution. If new homes are perceived to be unaffordable, or to benefit people from elsewhere, then building more of them does not appear to address the underlying issue.

06 What this means for support

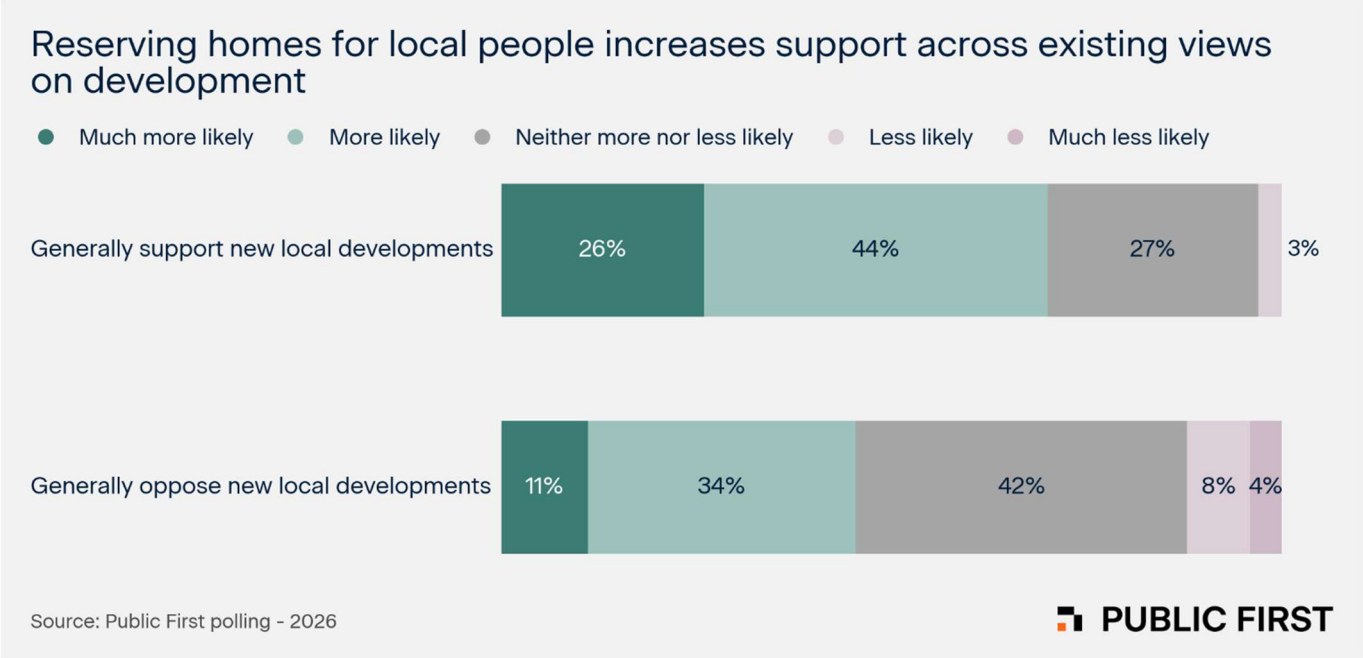
A large part of the public think about housing affordability in terms of who gets homes rather than whether there are enough of them. This is reflected in strong public support for solutions that appear to address that problem directly.



Measures such as reserving a proportion of new homes for local people, or introducing rent controls, are among the most popular approaches for improving affordability. These policies are targeted at outcomes people can see, not least the affordability of housing for local people – and so offer reassurance that existing communities will benefit. They are seen to make housing more affordable for local people and to make the housing market fairer.



While rent controls are proven to be counterproductive as a policy aimed at improving affordability – as they, for example, lead to sharp rent rises between tenancies, deter investment in new and existing supply and reduce the incentive to put homes up for let – the popularity of reserving homes for local people highlights a potential opportunity to better sell the case for new development. In practice, many new homes are already bought by people from the local area. Housebuilders could be more explicit about who benefits from new homes, centring on the "homes for local people" message.



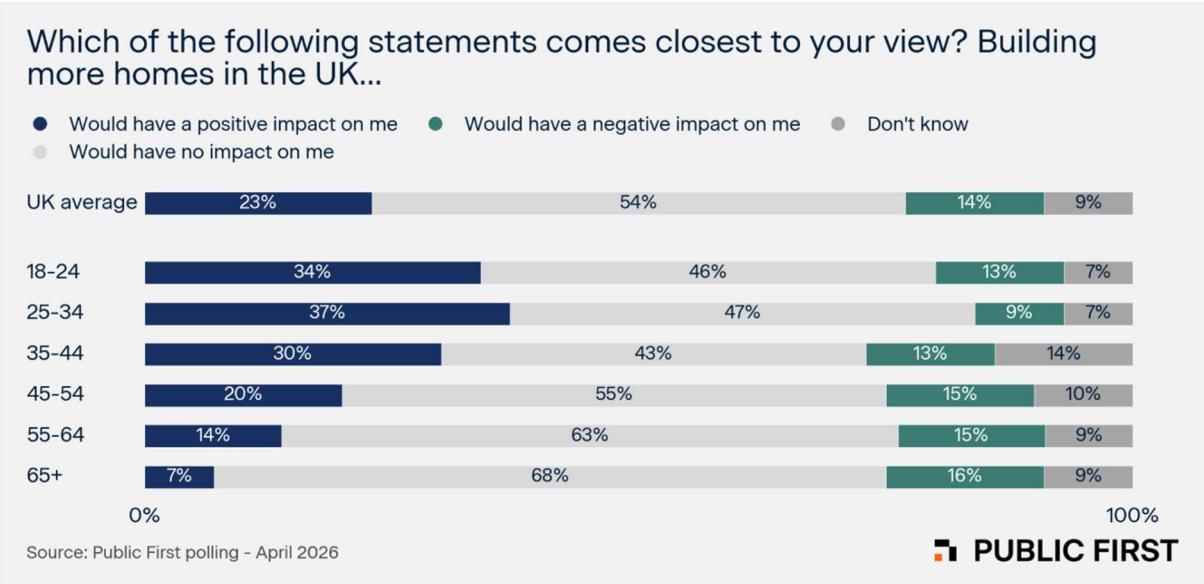
Policymakers could also introduce rules requiring a certain proportion of new homes to be available to locals. Six in ten people (60%) would be more likely to support new developments in their area if half of new homes

were reserved for locals, including 45% who generally oppose new local developments. It increases support for new homes by at least 50% across every age group and for both homeowners and renters. If designed carefully, with clear definitions of what counts as 'local' and provisions allowing homes to be sold more widely after a fixed period, such a policy could help build public confidence that development will improve affordability for existing communities, while avoiding unnecessary constraints on demand.

Framed in this way, local benefit is not just a way of addressing concerns about development. It is a way of making the case that housebuilding can reduce the cost of living for existing communities.

07 Attitudes can be shifted

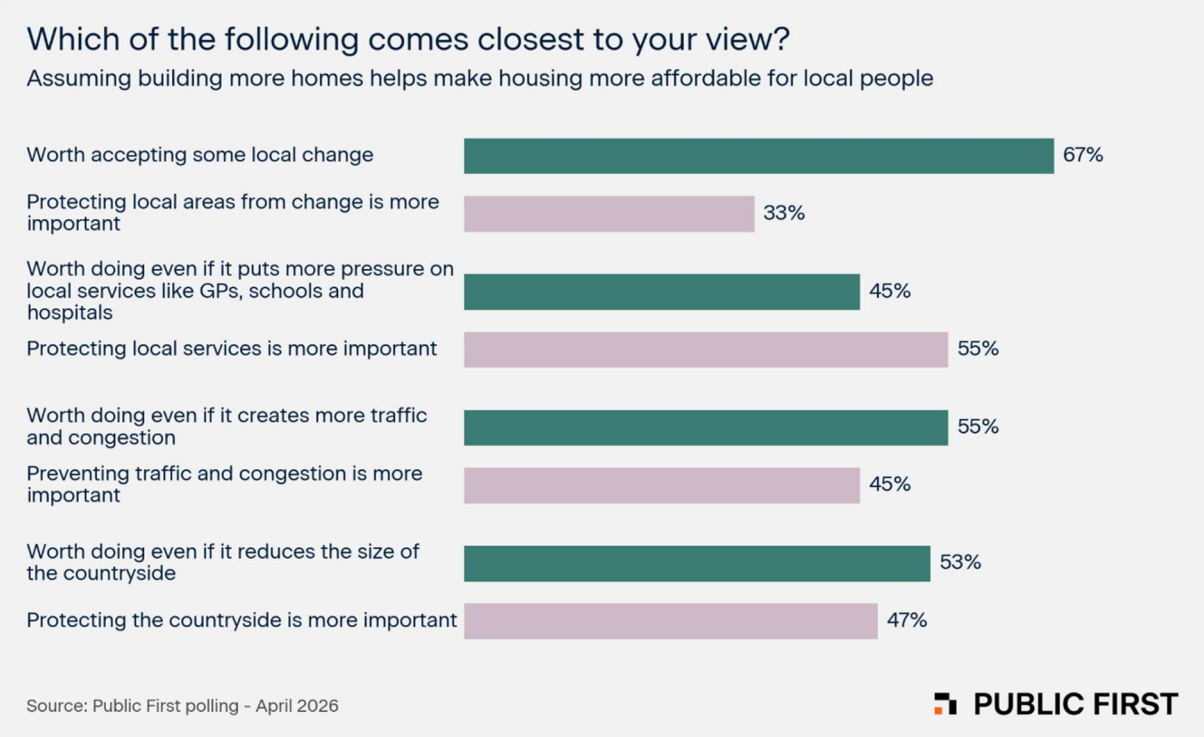
Despite widespread scepticism about the impact of new homes on affordability, public attitudes are not strongly entrenched. Most people (54%) do not expect new housing to have a significant impact on them personally. A majority say it would make little difference, while only a small minority (14%) believe it would have a negative effect.



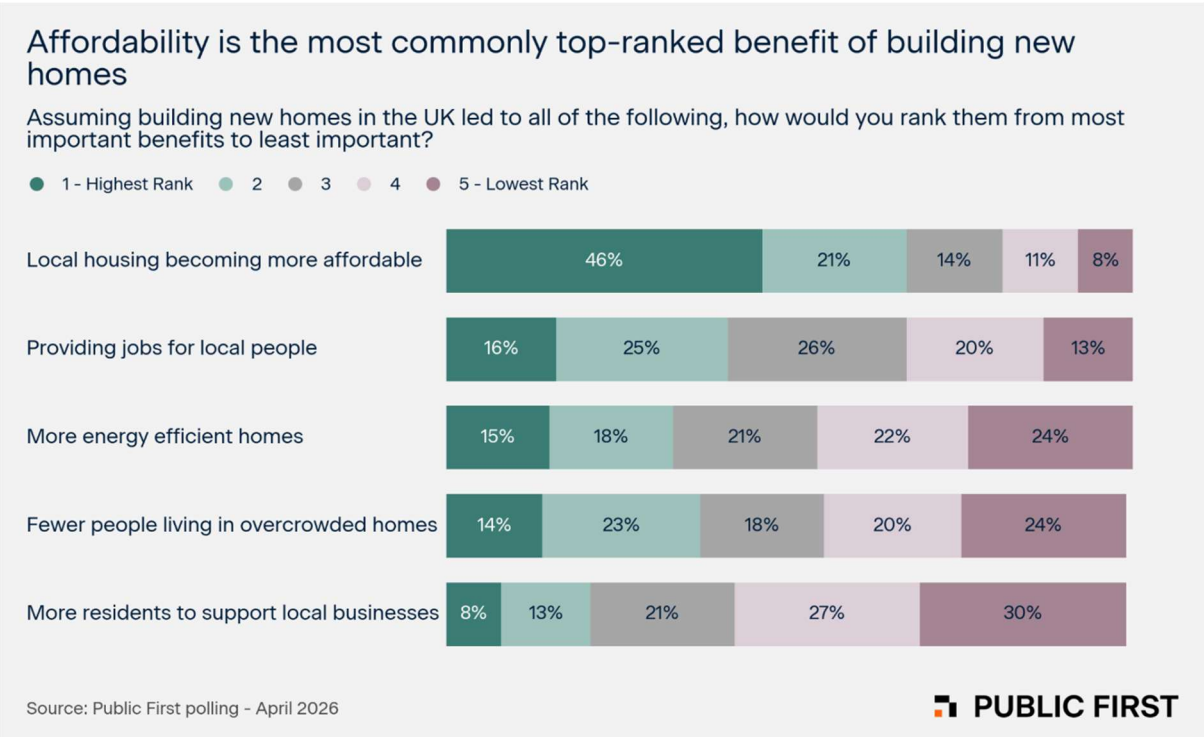
This points to a set of views that are not firmly held. People have clear preferences about outcomes – particularly the desire for more affordable housing – but are less certain about how those outcomes are achieved.

Crucially, when the link between housebuilding and affordability is made more explicit, attitudes begin to shift.

When people are persuaded that building more homes would make housing more affordable for local people, they are willing to accept trade-offs that might otherwise generate resistance. This includes changes to the local area, increased traffic, and additional pressure on services.



At the same time, affordability stands out as the single most important benefit people associate with new homes. By some distance, it is more likely to be seen as the primary advantage of development than jobs, energy efficiency, or supporting local businesses. When people think about the benefits of housebuilding, they primarily see it through the lens of the cost of living.



The data shows that more people are open to new homes when they believe those homes will make housing more affordable for people like them. Public opinion is not fixed and people can be persuaded with the right messages.

The opportunity is to make housebuilding part of the cost of living conversation by showing clearly and credibly how new homes reduce pressure on housing costs.

08 What builds support for housebuilding

For housebuilding to be seen as a response to the cost of living, the case must be made in a way that feels credible to the public.

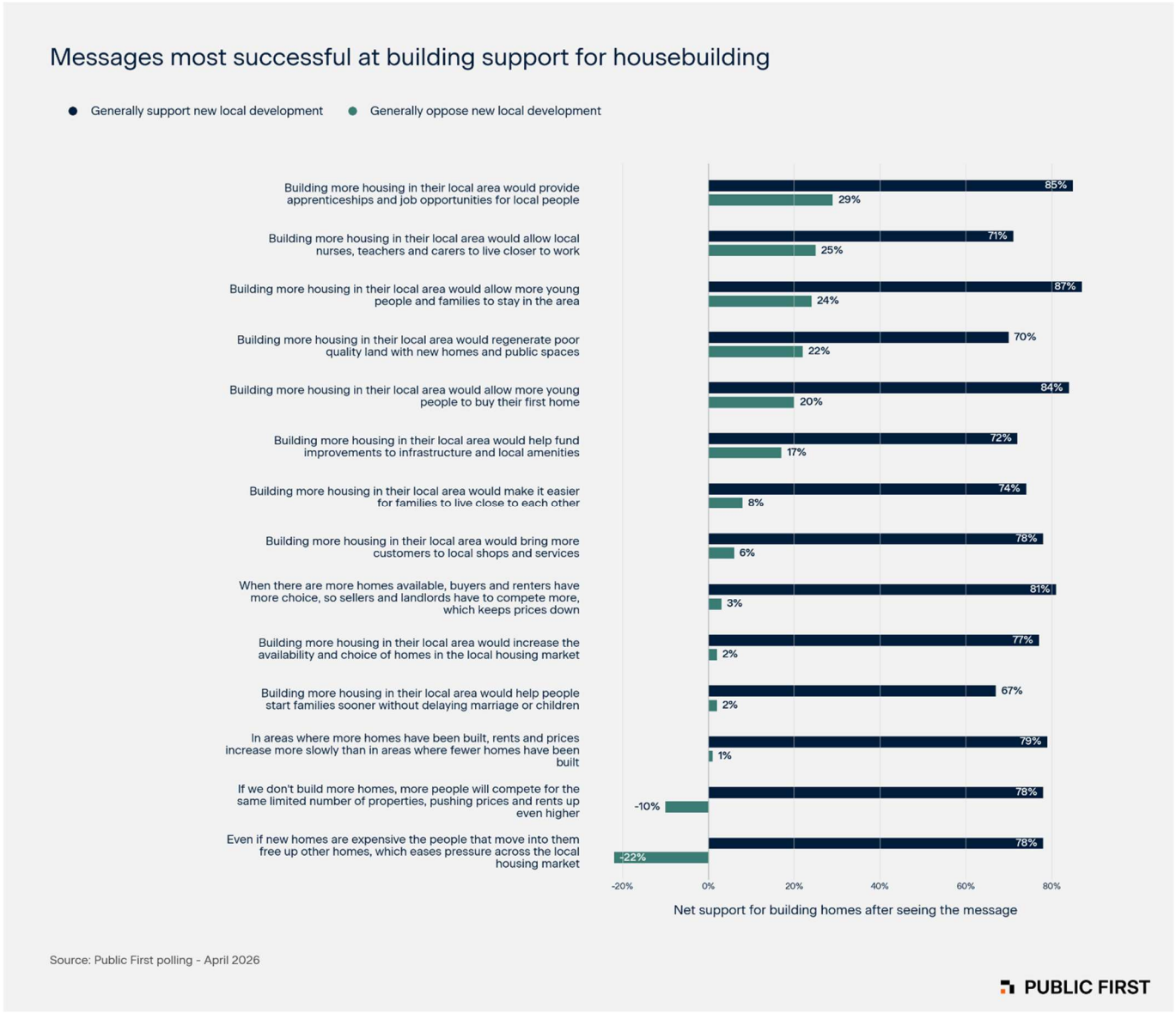
Support for new homes increases most when the benefits are visible, local and easy to understand. The strongest performing messages are those that emphasise:

- Jobs and apprenticeships created by new development
- Helping young people and families stay in the local area
- Enabling first-time buyers to get on the housing ladder

These messages clearly describe who benefits, how and why it matters to the local community. They also ground concerns about housing affordability in everyday life showing how lower housing costs are delivered in practice – whether younger generations can stay close to their family, whether communities feel stable and rooted, and whether new development creates employment opportunities for locals.

Nearly all messages tested increased support among people already favourable to local development, suggesting broad agreement within this group on the benefits of new homes.

Crucially, some of these messages are particularly effective at softening opposition to local housebuilding among those who would otherwise oppose new homes in their local area. Arguments focused on apprenticeships and jobs (+29% net support), helping key workers live locally (+25%), and allowing young people and families to remain in the area (+24%) all increase support even among opponents of local development.



Economic arguments can work

Economic explanations of housebuilding – based on increased supply, choice and competition – are often assumed to be unpersuasive with the public. In fact, the findings suggest a more nuanced picture.

Arguments that explain how increasing the number of homes reduces pressure on prices generate very strong support among people who already support local development. Messages about increased choice, slower rent increases and easing competition in the housing market all perform strongly with this group.

However, these same messages can prove more divisive among those who oppose new development locally. While they persuade some audiences – particularly younger people and renters – they can also reinforce scepticism among opponents when presented in abstract or purely economic terms.

The data shows the difference between messages that mobilise existing support and those that broaden it. Economic arguments are effective when they are connected to visible and local outcomes people recognise in everyday life. On their own, abstract references to “supply” or “market forces” are less likely to persuade sceptical audiences than messages rooted in fairness, local benefit and community outcomes.

Different messages resonate with different audiences

There is no single message that works for all groups. Responses vary depending on people’s stage of life, their position in the housing market and their attitudes towards local development.

Younger people (18-34s) are the age group most receptive to economic arguments about supply and affordability, as well as messages about access to homeownership. Those aged 35-54 respond strongly to messages focused on family outcomes and practical benefits, such as enabling key workers to live locally. Older groups (aged 55+) are more sceptical overall, but respond relatively better to messages that emphasise fairness, local benefit, and the impact of development on communities.

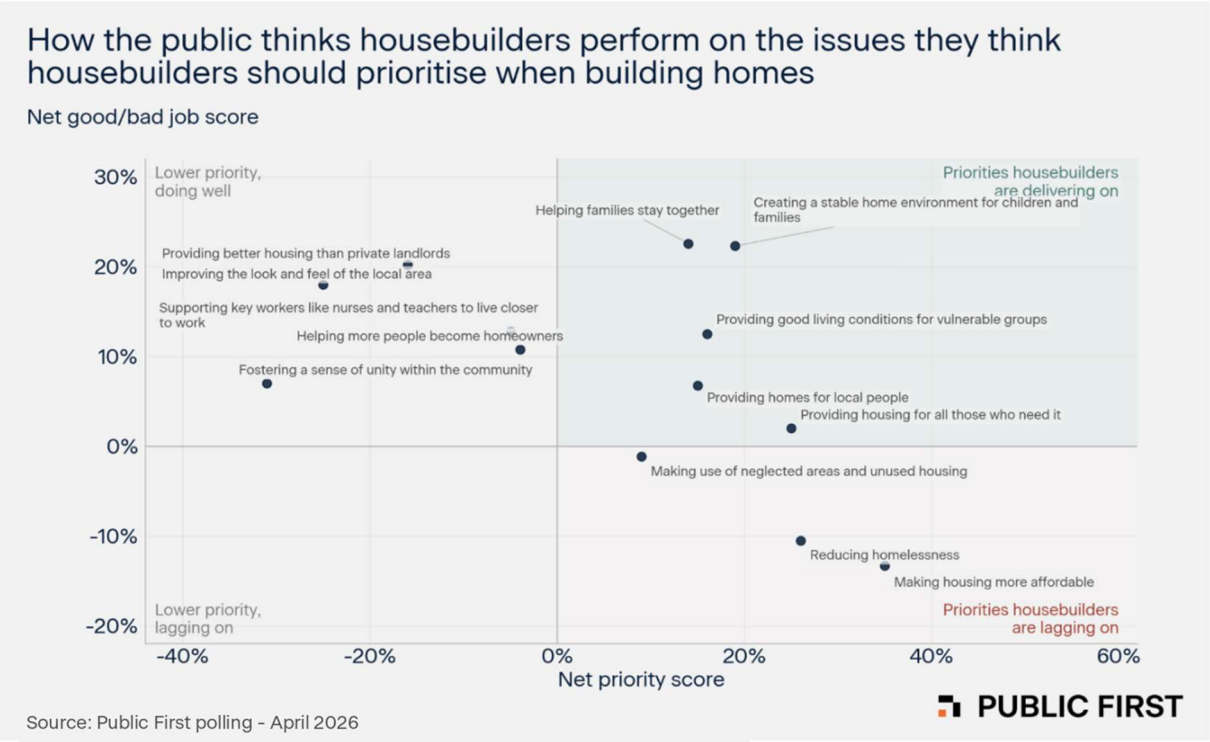
A similar pattern is visible by housing tenure. Renters are the most supportive of new homes and respond strongly to both economic and access-based arguments. Mortgage holders are broadly supportive, particularly when housebuilding is framed as improving how the housing market works. Among outright homeowners, support is lower and more conditional and is shaped more by concerns about fairness and local impact.

The data shows the most effective pro-housing messages combine both a clear explanation of how development improves affordability and visible evidence that local people and communities will benefit.

Talking about housebuilders

An important part of building support for new homes is how the industry itself is perceived.

The public’s top priority for housebuilders is to make housing more affordable. However, this is also the area where they are seen to be falling short. By contrast, housebuilders are viewed more positively when it comes to helping families stay together, creating stable environments for communities, and providing good living conditions for vulnerable groups.



These are outcomes that matter to people and provide a foundation on which to build a more credible case for development.

09 A more confident case for housebuilding

The case for new homes is often made in cautious and abstract terms. Politicians generally talk about need, targets and supply. The findings in this report show a more powerful approach is available. New homes can be framed not just as a long-term necessity, but a response to the public's number one priority, which is the cost of living.

Affordability is the primary lens through which the public judge the benefits of housebuilding. Unlike many political issues, concern about housing affordability cuts across age groups, regions and political affiliations. It should sit at the centre of the argument, not at its margins.

Housebuilders and policymakers should:

- Lead with the problem being solved. Frame new homes as a response to the cost of living and a way of helping local people afford to stay in their communities. The strongest messages are those rooted in visible pressures people already recognise, particularly younger generations being priced out of their local area.
- Make local benefits explicit. People are significantly more supportive of development when they believe it will benefit existing communities. They are willing to accept the disruption and change associated with development when they believe the benefits, particularly lower housing costs for local people, are meaningful and fairly distributed. Be clear about who homes are for, how many are going to local buyers, and how developments support local families, first-time buyers and key workers.
- Be explicit about fairness. Many people are sceptical because they believe development benefits outsiders. Messages that emphasise fairness and local access are therefore particularly important in building trust.

- Use concrete examples not generalities. Arguments about supply and affordability can work, but only when grounded in visible outcomes people can recognise in everyday life. Abstract references to "market forces" or "housing targets" are less persuasive than examples showing how development improves affordability in practice.
- Connect local outcomes to affordability. The public are open to the argument that increasing supply reduces pressure on housing costs, particularly younger people and renters, but they need to see how the mechanism works in their own area. Showing how development leads to more choice, more opportunities for local people and less competition for housing makes the affordability argument more credible.

The findings also point to an important distinction between messages that mobilise existing support and those that broaden it. Economic arguments about supply, choice and competition perform strongly among people already supportive of local development, but can be more divisive among opponents. By contrast, messages rooted in apprenticeships, key workers and helping young people stay in the area are more effective at softening opposition to development itself.

The public are open to the argument that building more homes improves affordability and can reduce the cost of living, but only when that case is made clearly, credibly, and in ways that people can recognise in their own lives.

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