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Public attitudes towards development

Polling report

6 June 2025

Foreword

Foreword by Rt Hon Andrew Stephenson CBE
Former Local Government Minister and Curia Advisory Board Member

New polling by Opinium and policy institute Curia shows the public want the Government to lay the groundwork on housing before they lay the bricks

The public wants more homes. That much is clear. But they don't believe the Government can – or will – actually deliver them.

New polling from Opinium commissioned by policy institute, Curia presents a sobering message for ministers and opposition leaders alike: while the majority of people agree Britain needs more housing, faith in political promises to deliver that housing is in dangerously short supply.

Only 17% of the public believe Labour will meet its housebuilding pledge. Among the very voters most likely to support new development – so-called “YIMBYs” – more than two-thirds still doubt the party can deliver. The Conservatives fare even worse, and the Liberal Democrats barely register. In an age of political distrust, it is not enough to be right on policy. You have to convince people you can follow through.

That's Labour's credibility challenge – and the Government's delivery crisis.

The polling underscores a central contradiction that has haunted successive governments on housing policy for decades: while national support for new homes sits at a healthy net +37%, that plummets to just +7% when it comes to people's own local areas. It's not that people are inherently anti-housing. It's that they've seen promises made without infrastructure delivered. They've seen beauty and place sacrificed for volume and speed. And they've stopped believing that the system will act in their interests.

This isn't just about “NIMBYs” vs “YIMBYs”. The data reveals a public torn between a national sense of urgency and a local sense of risk. Forty-five percent favour protecting local character by restricting development, while 37% want more housing to address shortages and prices. Few are fully convinced by either camp. Meanwhile, more than twice as many people think the planning system is failing than performing well.

So how can the Government – any government – bridge this divide?

The answer lies in rebuilding trust through tangible, place-based delivery. Nearly half the public say they would support more housing if homes were of high quality and in keeping with local character. A similar proportion want infrastructure – transport, schools, services – to come first. Prioritising brownfield development remains a key trust signal.

There's another insight buried in the data that policymakers must heed: people support infrastructure far more than housing. Net support for local infrastructure development sits at +42%, compared to just +7% for housing. Wastewater plants, rail links, and broadband projects all receive strong backing. The public's message is clear: lay the groundwork before you lay the bricks.

Yet the Government's narrative on innovation and reform still isn't landing. Just 21% think AI growth zones will benefit their area – and one-third of respondents admit they don't even know what they are. That matters. When it comes to delivering housing and infrastructure, framing and familiarity are as important as policy detail.

Even widely assumed grievances – such as hostility to environmental protections – are being overstated. Only 14% think current regulations are too restrictive. Many more believe they are too weak or about right. Even dormice win majority support for protection.

In short, this is not a public waiting to be persuaded with flashy announcements or combative rhetoric about planning reform. It is a public that is asking – politely but firmly – for competent, thoughtful, community-aligned delivery.

Labour now has a rare electoral window in which to act boldly on housing. But it must bring people with it – not just through national messaging, but through local trust-building and visible progress. The polling gives the blueprint. The question now is whether the political class has the courage, discipline, and humility to follow it.

Because the public doesn't just want homes. They want to believe in the people building them.

Contents

This polling provides a detailed view of public attitudes toward housing policy, the political landscape on housing, planning reform, and infrastructure development in the UK. This includes:

The research shows a lot of tension between national housing need and local resistance, with significant implications for political strategy and planning reform.

The public desires more homes and infrastructure, especially in underserved regions like the North and Midlands, but strong local sensitivities, particularly among NIMBYs, limit support for development of especially housing. Many of the arguments now frequent in policy circles aren't yet accepted by the public, especially when it comes to environmental regulations.

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Methodology

Opinium Research, in partnership with public policy institute Curia, conducted a political and nationally representative survey among 2,050 UK adults aged 18 and over between 28th and 30th May 2025.

Research results

Public division on development: “NIMBYs” vs “YIMBYs”

The public remains divided on the issue of housing development. **Over two in five (45%) UK adults support limiting new building projects** in order to preserve the character of local areas – which we will refer to as “NIMBYs” throughout this report. In contrast, **37% back a more pro-development stance**, supporting increased construction to address housing shortages and rising property prices – which we will describe as the “YIMBY” view.

Party performance on housing

There is widespread dissatisfaction with how political parties are handling housing policy. **Both Labour and the Conservatives receive negative net approval ratings on the issue, at net -16 and net -22 respectively.**

Approval ratings for each party's housing policy

	ALL UK ADULTS			NIMBYs			YIMBYs		
	Approve	Disapprove	Net	Approve	Disapprove	Net	Approve	Disapprove	Net
Conservative	15%	37%	-22%	17%	36%	-18%	16%	41%	-25%
Labour	22%	38%	-16%	13%	49%	-36%	37%	29%	+8%
Lib Dem	14%	21%	-7%	13%	24%	-12%	18%	18%	0%
Reform	22%	27%	-6%	25%	24%	+1%	24%	33%	-9%
Green	15%	21%	-6%	12%	27%	-14%	22%	17%	+5%

To what extent do you approve or disapprove of the following parties' handling of or policies towards housing?
Base: 2,050 UK adults.

Among those who prefer to limit development (NIMBYs), all major parties are viewed unfavourably, with the exception of Reform UK, which receives a slight net positive score of **+1**, although nearly a third of the NIMBYs (**29%**) are unsure of Reform's stance on housing. In contrast, Labour performs relatively well among pro-development voters (YIMBYs), achieving a net approval of **+8** in this group.

Public understanding of party housing positions

The public has a limited understanding of where most political parties stand on housing development, with the exception of Labour which is the only party to really make its position clear to the public.

Labour is widely seen as pro-development, with **54% viewing the Labour Party as aligned with the pro-YIMBY position**. It is the only party where the most common response to what the party's preference on this issue is not simply 'don't know.'

The Green Party is more commonly seen as opposing development, with **39%** identifying them as preferring the NIMBY stance. For all other parties, the public remains largely uncertain about their stance. The Conservative Party in particular is seen as not having any clear stance on building or development.

Are these parties pro-YIMBY or pro-NIMBY?

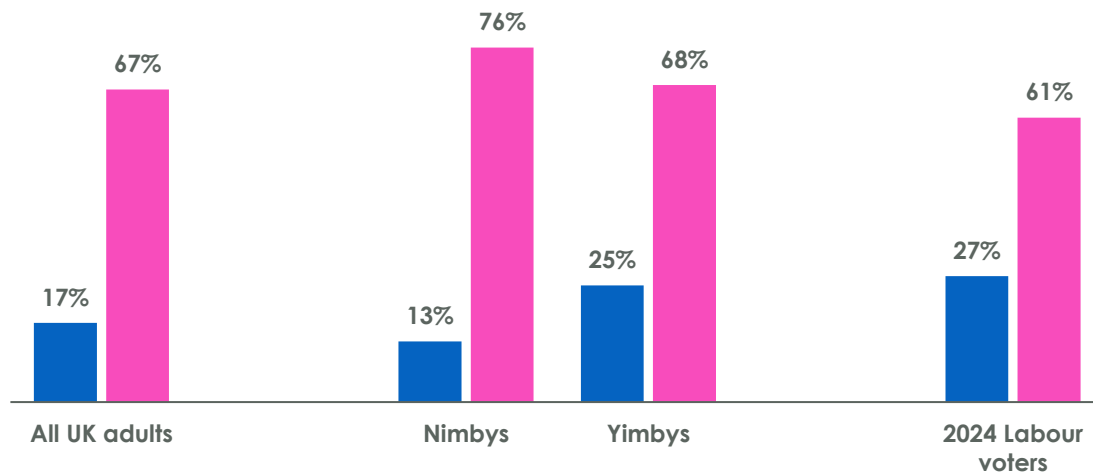
THEY WOULD PREFER TO...	... PREVENT EXCESSIVE BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENTS (ETC.)	... INCREASE BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT (ETC.)	DON'T KNOW
Conservative	26%	27%	47%
Labour	10%	54%	36%
Lib Dem	18%	22%	60%
Reform	22%	25%	53%
Green	39%	14%	48%

And what approach do you think each of the following parties prefer?
Base: 2,050 UK adults.

Scepticism towards Labour's housebuilding promises

While Labour is seen as the party of development, there is strong public scepticism about Labour's ability to deliver on its housebuilding pledge. **Two thirds of the public (67%) believe the party is unlikely to meet its target**, with only **17%** expressing confidence that it will. Notably, this doubt persists even among pro-development voters (**68%** of whom also doubt Labour will follow through) and 2024 Labour voters (**61%** of whom think it unlikely they will meet their pledge).

How **likely** or **unlikely** is it that Labour will build 1.5 million homes?



*The Labour government has promised to build 1.5 million new homes by 2029 (the end of this Parliament).
How likely or unlikely do you think it is that this target will be met?
Base: 2,050 UK adults.*

Attitudes toward building in different areas

While the public broadly supports building more homes across the UK (**net +37%**), support drops significantly when it comes to development in their own local areas (**net +7%**).

Support is strongest for housing development in most urban settings, whether that be major cities (**+26%**), small cities (**+22%**), or suburbs and towns (**+24%**). However, appetite for housing development in rural areas is much lower, with only a **net +8%** in favour.

Regionally, there is greater support for building in the North and Midlands (**+31%**) than in London and the South East (**+15%**), reflecting a perceived need to rebalance housing development out of regions with existing levels of high infrastructure development.

True to the term ‘not in my backyard’, NIMBYs are generally less supportive of house building in all settings but, in particular, they oppose building in in their own local area (**net -33%**).

Do you think we need to build more or fewer homes in the following areas?

	ALL UK ADULTS			NIMBYS			YIMBYS		
	More	Fewer	Net	More	Fewer	Net	More	Fewer	Net
Across the UK generally	54%	16%	+37%	39%	27%	+12%	79%	8%	+71%
In my local area	36%	29%	+7%	16%	49%	-33%	65%	11%	+54%
In major cities	45%	19%	+26%	32%	32%	0%	71%	10%	+61%
In smaller cities	43%	22%	+22%	30%	33%	-3%	68%	13%	+55%
In suburbs and towns	44%	19%	+24%	26%	33%	-7%	75%	7%	+68%
In rural areas	37%	29%	+8%	22%	49%	-27%	63%	14%	+49%
In London and the South East generally	37%	21%	+15%	28%	33%	-5%	55%	14%	+41%
In the North and Midlands generally	45%	14%	+31%	35%	25%	+10%	69%	6%	+63%

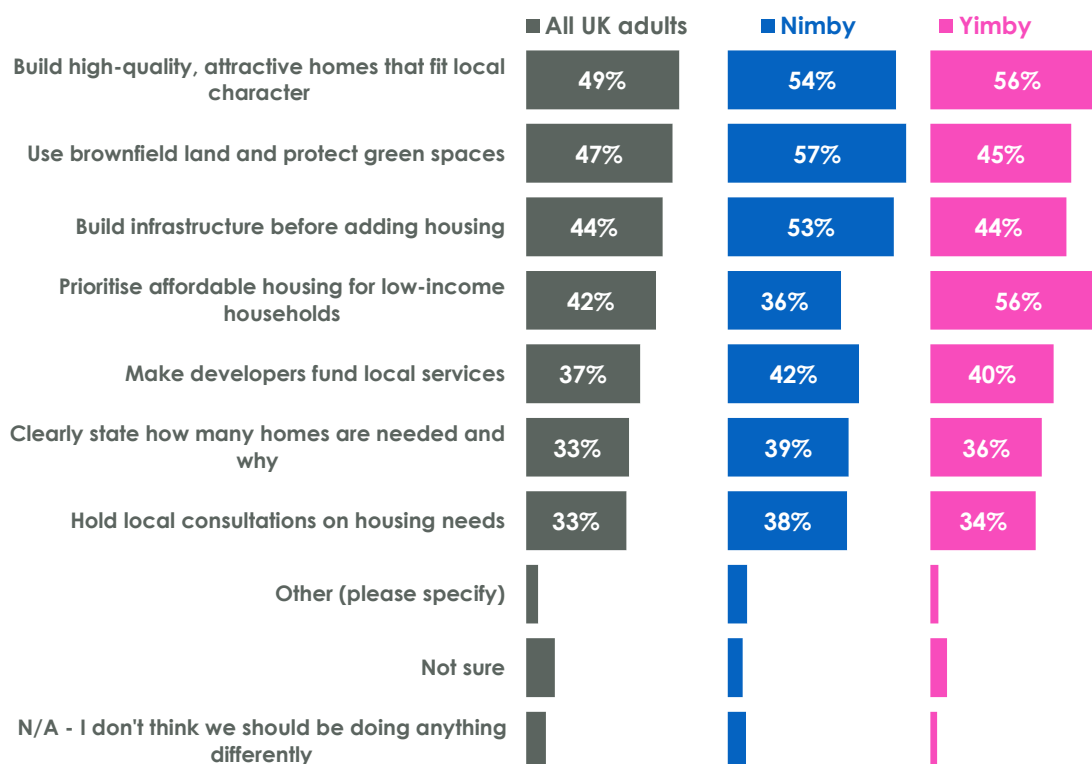
*To what extent do you think we need to build more or fewer homes in the following areas?
Base: 2,050 UK adults.*

How to increase public support for housebuilding locally

Voters identify several ways to increase support for new housing in their local areas. The top three priorities are: ensuring homes are high-quality, visually appealing, and in keeping with local character (49%); prioritising brownfield sites while protecting green spaces (47%); and building new infrastructure before adding more homes (44%).

Views on prioritising social or affordable housing are the most divisive aspect. While 56% of YIMBYs believe that an emphasis on housing for lower incomes would increase public support for housebuilding, NIMBYs are significantly less likely to agree (36%). This is reflected even more strongly along party lines: 51% of 2024 Labour voters think prioritising social or affordable housing would help build public support, compared to only 35% of 2024 Conservative voters.

What do you think would increase public support for housebuilding?



If new homes need to be built, what do you think we should do differently, if anything, about building new homes in your local area to increase public support?
Base: 2,050 UK adults.

Support for infrastructure greater than housing

Public support for infrastructure development is notably stronger than for new housing, with broad backing both at a national and local level.

Across the UK, the net support amongst the public for building more infrastructure stands at **net +48%**, compared to **+42%** when asked about their own local areas. Regionally, there is a relative preference for prioritising new infrastructure in the North and Midlands (**+39%**) over London and the South East (**+27%**).

While support is slightly lower amongst NIMBYs, there is net support for building more rather than less new essential infrastructure both nationally and locally regardless of which side of the planning debate respondents sat on.

Do you think we need to build more or less new infrastructure in the following areas?

	ALL UK ADULTS			NIMBYS			YIMBYS		
	More	Less	Net	More	Less	Net	More	Less	Net
Across the UK generally	58%	10%	+48%	58%	13%	+45%	70%	8%	+62%
In my local area	55%	13%	+42%	51%	18%	+32%	70%	8%	+62%
In major cities	49%	13%	+36%	45%	17%	+28%	62%	10%	+52%
In smaller cities	50%	12%	+38%	46%	17%	+29%	65%	9%	+56%
In suburbs and towns	51%	12%	+38%	47%	18%	+29%	65%	9%	+56%
In rural areas	47%	15%	+32%	42%	23%	+19%	63%	8%	+55%
In London and the South East generally	42%	15%	+27%	39%	20%	+19%	54%	12%	+41%
In the North and Midlands generally	49%	10%	+39%	47%	14%	+33%	64%	6%	+57%

To what extent do you think we need to build more or less new essential infrastructure in the following places?

Base: 2,050 UK adults.

Fast-tracked infrastructure (NSIPs)

There is strong public support for fast-tracking certain types of infrastructure through the planning system. Projects like wastewater treatment plants (**net +40%**), rail infrastructure (**+34%**), digital infrastructure (**+34%**), and wind farms (**+33%**) are widely backed for streamlined approval.

However, support is far weaker for airports (**net 0**), AI/data centres (**+4%**), and electricity pylons (**+11%**).

Do you think we should centralise/fast track the planning for the following?

	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	NET
Wastewater treatment plants	53%	13%	+40%
Railway lines and rail infrastructure	49%	15%	+34%
Digital infrastructure (such as cables)	46%	12%	+34%
Wind farms	49%	17%	+33%
Harbours and ports	42%	12%	+30%
New roads and motorways	44%	19%	+25%
Power generating stations (incl. nuclear, gas, coal plants)	38%	23%	+15%
Electricity transmission lines (pylons)	34%	22%	+11%
AI infrastructure (such as data centres)	28%	24%	+4%
Airports and airport extensions	30%	30%	-0%

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) are major developments in areas like energy, transport, water, wastewater, or waste. They are considered nationally important and go through a faster, centralised approval process, bypassing local planning authorities in favour of decisions made by the central government.

To what extent would you support or oppose the following forms of infrastructure going through this faster process and being except from normal planning processes?

Base: 2,050 UK adults.

When it comes to **AI Growth Zones**, public awareness and understanding remain low. Only **21%** believe such zones would benefit their area, while **25%** think it would have a negative impact on their area, and **32%** are unsure either way. Attitudes split along familiar lines: **NIMBYs** are generally negative (**36% negative impact** vs. **15% positive impact**) whereas **YIMBYs** are more optimistic (**35% positive impact** vs. **17% negative impact**).

Environmental regulations in planning

Public opinion does not support the view that environmental regulations are a major barrier to development. Only **14%** believe the rules are too restrictive, while **30%** think they don't go far enough, and **28%** feel they strike the right balance. Even among YIMBYs, **38%** say the current environmental regulations on planning and development are about right.

ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION...	ALL UK ADULTS	NIMBYS	YIMBYS
...is too restrictive and unnecessarily prevents things being built / makes it more expensive	14%	10%	23%
...is about right and balances local building needs with environmental concerns	28%	25%	38%
...does not go far enough and currently allows too many things to be built which have a damaging environmental impact	30%	45%	21%
Not sure / don't know	28%	20%	19%

*Which of the following statements best describes your current view on environmental regulation in relation to the planning system and the building of housing and infrastructure?
"Environmental regulation in the UK planning system..."*
Base: 2,050 UK adults.

There is also strong public backing for protecting nature during development. Support is particularly high for safeguarding ancient trees (84%), wild birds (82%), butterflies and otters (78%) from the impact of building homes or infrastructure. Even dormice, the least supported option tested, receive majority support for protection (55%).