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Public attitudes to housebuilding in London

BritainThinks and Lowick

Roundtable

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BritainThinks is an international insight and strategy consultancy.

We put the people who matter most to your organisation at the heart of your thinking.

Public attitudes to housebuilding in London



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Background and methodology

- Development in London is facing a challenging moment. Public opposition, political pressures and conflicting policies leave little room for manoeuvre. In this context, effective public consultation becomes critical to success in the planning process.
- How to approach public consultation is already on the agenda for many in the sector. BritainThinks and Lowick have conducted research with the general public in London to understand their perspective and spark a conversation about what could be done differently. The research comprised:
 - 2 x focus groups with 8 participants each
 - Spread of of demographics
 - Recruited from across London
 - Min. 3 in each group with experience of the planning system
 - Demographically representative online survey of 1,004 Londoners
 - 3 x teledepths with industry stakeholders to contextualise the findings



The most important findings from our research:

1

Londoners want to fix the housing crisis but concerns over housebuilding cannot be dismissed.

2

Londoners feel the planning system as a whole is broken and don't trust any of the key players.

3

The public do not feel they have a say – and the industry is looking for solutions.

4

There is a high level of public support (62%) for 'Community Panels' as a form of meaningful consultation.

01 **Londoners want to fix the housing crisis but concerns over housebuilding cannot be dismissed.**

Londoners do not see a bright future for their city – concern over housing is a key driver of this pessimism

London is becoming a better place to live

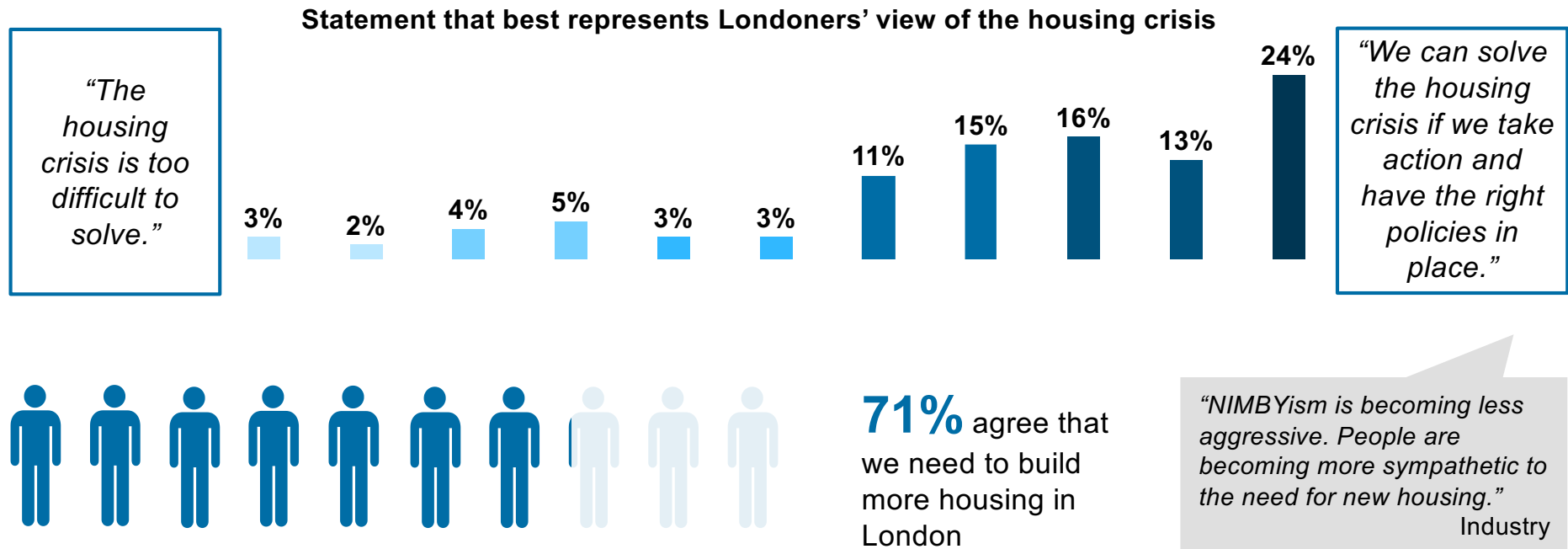


In focus groups, housing (availability and cost) was raised spontaneously as one of the top issues facing London, alongside overcrowding:

"I have a 25 year old daughter living with me because she can't afford to live anywhere else. To get her on the housing ladder I would need to sell my house and I don't want to do that."

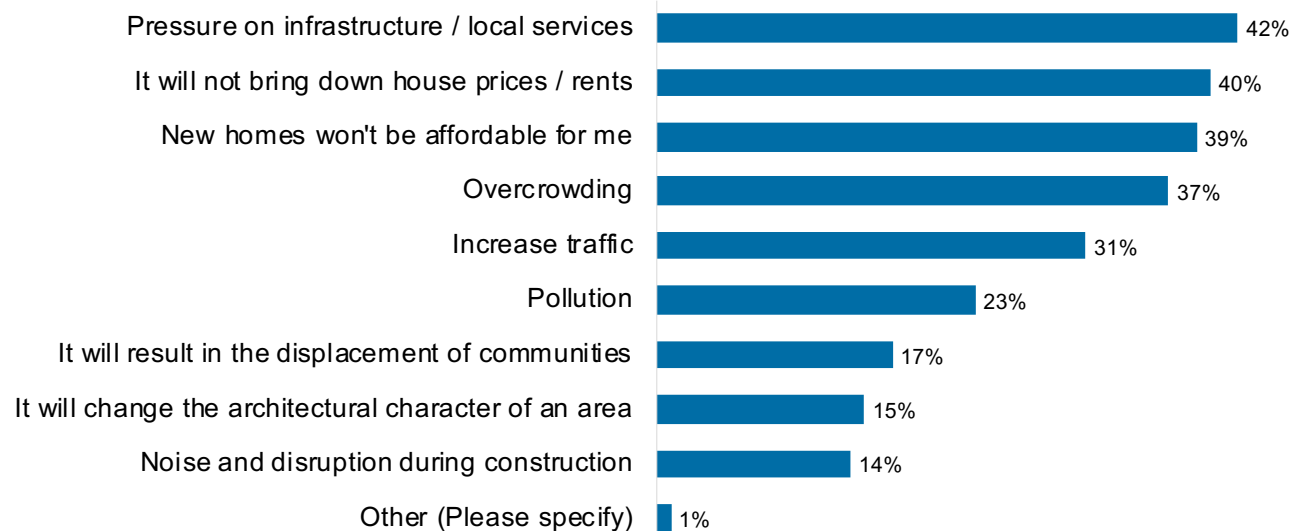
"It's so overcrowded in London you can't get a council flat and private rent is so high. The actual property prices are exorbitant. You can't afford to live in London."

On the one hand, Londoners buy into the housing crisis and there is a will to fix it



But despair over affordability and overcrowding can also drown out support for more housebuilding

What concerns, if any, do you have about more housebuilding in London?
NET percentage of each statement being placed in respondents' top 3 concerns



"Waltham forest used to be known as a forest, now it's more like a concrete jungle. On every corner there is a building going up. There's no space."

02 Londoners feel the planning system as a whole is broken and don't trust any of the key players.

From the perspective of Londoners, there is a range of evidence to suggest that the system is broken



Empty buildings

“The ridiculous building of more homes when so many buildings are sitting empty is a scandalous and immoral waste of resources.”



Amenities not keeping up

“I’ve got 2,000 new ‘units’ going up [in my area]. They are not building any more doctors’ surgeries, schools. There’s no parking spaces. There’s going to be at least another 2,000 people and there’s no extra amenities to accommodate them.”



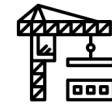
Unaffordable

“New homes won’t be affordable for those whom the houses are intended to be built for.”



Luxury homes

“Most housing is built for foreign investment or rich people. There are too many empty luxury flats and barely used houses. The housing market is utterly dysfunctional.”



Housebuilding taking place

“Building is taking place everywhere. How is there still a problem?”

Interviews with industry echo the view that the system as a whole is not working well

Planning & practitioners

"We are finding a real disconnect between GLA, local councils and local communities. We've been chosen to develop [high density housing] – but that's in complete disharmony with the view of the local community...So as developers we are caught between [their] competing priorities."

Industry

"We're all separate and speaking a different language. When we do speak it's immediately confrontational."

Industry

Politicians

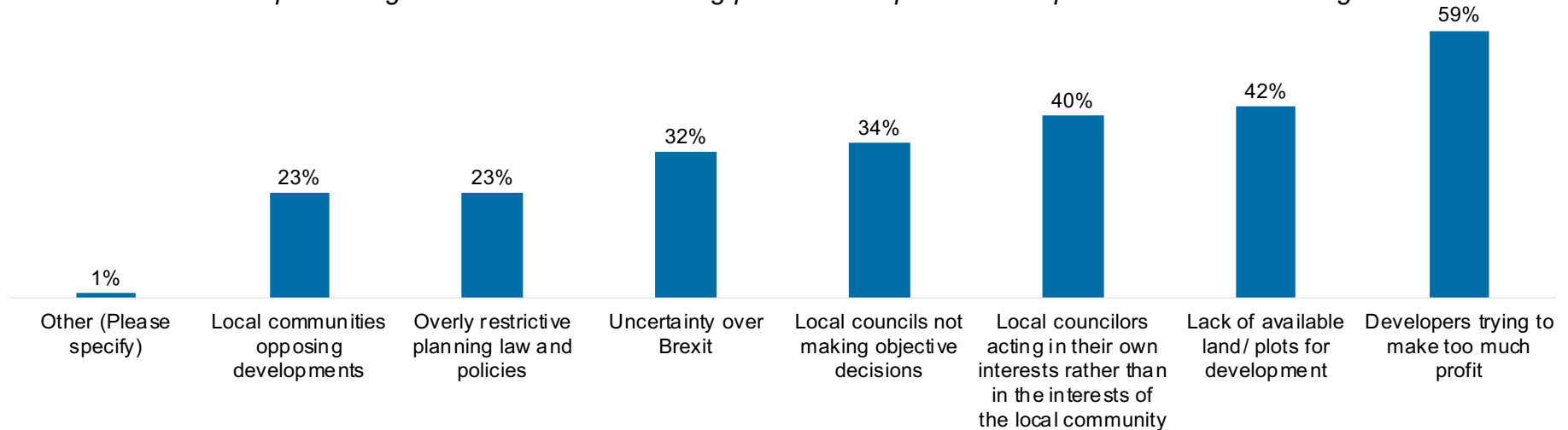
Community

Developers

Londoners blame developers first and foremost, but they are also critical of the role local councils, councillors and communities play

What do you think are the main barriers to housebuilding in London?

NET percentage of each statement being placed in respondents' Top 3 main barrier ranking



"They need to promote more communication between councils and the local communities. What happens in our borough – all of our concerns get taken to the council and then they throw them out. I don't trust either the councils or the developers."

Whilst trust in developers is low, views soften when the challenges are explained

- During the focus groups, we explored some of the challenges that developers face, particularly the need to meet affordable housing targets whilst abiding by local plans and being able to deliver a profit
- Whilst suspicions remained, Londoners generally became more sympathetic towards and voice the need for compromise

“I see that case study as a failure of the local plan. You can’t get housebuilders to build if they’re not making any money on it.”

The Mayor of London’s minimum threshold for affordable housing within a wider private housing-led development is 35%. In Charlton, the local plan specifies that the most appropriate affordable housing to meet local need is three-bedroom family homes. However, a recently adopted local planning policy for the area limits the number of floors a new development can have.

Property developers face a dilemma:

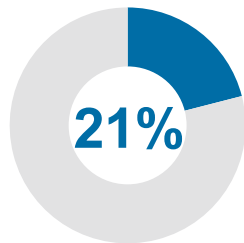
- *To meet the requirement of 35% affordable 3-bed homes, developers have to build a large number of private homes for sale – which means that the buildings they propose will need to be a minimum height for the economics of the scheme to stack up.*
- *Two planning applications have fallen through this year on the basis that they are too high for local policy, but with the height reduced are financially undeliverable with the requisite 35% of affordable housing units.*

It’s therefore impossible to bring forward developments (without huge public subsidy) within the area covered by the local policy.

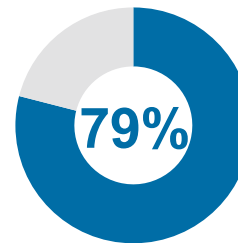
There is no narrative around housebuilding in London. If trade-offs are not explained, Londoners will fall back on the assumption that development is bad.

03 The public do not feel they have a say – and the industry is looking for solutions.

The planning process is felt to be completely opaque and there is low awareness of what is up for grabs in planning consultations



Only 21% agree that they have a say in the development that happens in their local area



Nearly 8 in 10 Londoners would like to have more say in the development that happens in their local area and/or London as a whole



“You see the notices on the lampposts but you always think it doesn’t involve you... That’s why they do it like that because they don’t want you to read it.”



*“I’ve never ever had any invitation to get involved with my neighbourhood plan, and that’s what the planning application has been judged against. They’ve never talked about the neighbourhood plan – **there’s no bigger picture**, it’s just a ‘here’s a development of Homebase’ – and I don’t have any idea so I ignore it.”*

There is acknowledgement from within the industry that traditional forms of consultation have limitations, but there is uncertainty over what ‘good’ consultation looks like

*“There is also a move in terms of use of **technology** – we’ve still got quite a long way to go. We are still hiring out a church hall, using laminated boards and getting people to write down comments. It is completely backwards in some regards.”*

Industry



*“The **earlier** they can be consulted on schemes the better – then you can offer them genuine opportunities to influence the outcome. Actually there have been too many times when I have attended a consultation when there are no things they could actually change.”*

Industry

*“Developers are starting to realise that to have a good scheme they need to **listen** to what people are saying.”*

Industry

04 There is a high level of public support (62%) for ‘community panels’ as a form of meaningful consultation.

In the poll, we tested the idea of a ‘community panel’

“ One idea to ensure Londoners have more say in development plans is to hold ‘community panels’.

This would involve inviting up to 20-50 demographically representative members of the local community to attend an event, or series of events, to discuss development plans. Attendees would be paid around £100 a day for their time, to increase the chances of getting a balanced view (i.e. hearing from those who would otherwise not be interested in getting involved).

These events would allow residents to hear from property developers and planning officials about the options and trade-offs required to have successful developments. Residents could then debate the various options between themselves and come up with recommendations or principles for development in that area.

These events would take place early in the planning stage, so that property developers can align their proposals to the needs of the local community.

Local planning authorities could draw on the recommendations when deciding whether a planning application is in the best interest of the local community.”

62% of respondents say that this would be effective at enabling the community to have a say. They particularly like the idea that it is representative, conducted early and achieves a balanced view

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The majority say they would participate if they were invited and nearly half would accept recommendations made on their behalf

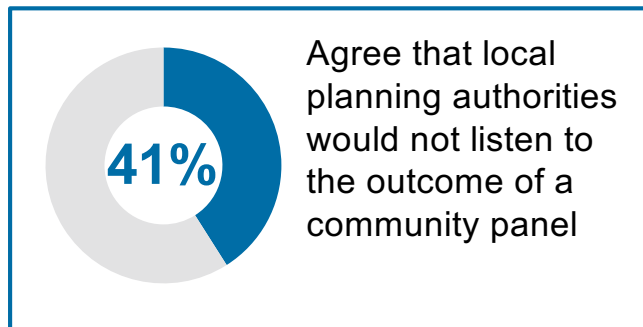
I would participate if I were invited to join the community panel



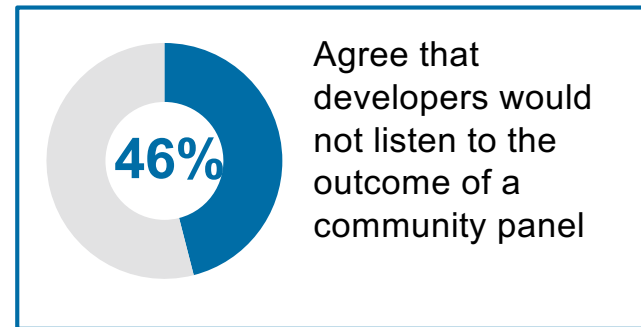
I would accept the recommendations or decisions of the community panel (even if I did not participate)



Willingness to accept such a panel will depend on how credible a representation of the community it is deemed to be, and how much genuine influence it is seen to have over decision making



"I think it sounds like a great idea so long as it is truly representative."



"If people said we don't want to build here, the council could still just ignore it. So what kind of power would this panel actually have?"

Discussion and questions

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Thank you

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