



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Public attitudes to house building

Findings from the 2017 British Social Attitudes survey



© Crown copyright, 2018

Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

This document/publication is also available on our website at www.gov.uk/mhclg

If you have any enquiries regarding this document/publication, complete the form at <http://forms.communities.gov.uk/> or write to us at:

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF
Telephone: 030 3444 0000

For all our latest news and updates follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mhclg>

June 2018

ISBN: 978-1-4098-5256-8

Contents

Key findings	4
Introduction	5
The British Social Attitudes survey	5
Housing modules	5
Survey findings	7
Opposition and support for new homes	7
Which advantages would influence support for new homes	11
Financial incentives for new homes	14
Responsibility for deciding where new homes are built	16
Preferences for buying or renting	18
Analysis	19

Key findings

- In 2017, 55 per cent of people were supportive of new homes being built in their local area. This is consistent with the results from 2014 when 56 per cent of respondents were supportive, and shows that there has been an increase in support over time, up from 47 per cent in 2013 and 28 per cent in 2010.
- In 2017, 21 per cent of people were opposed to new homes being built in their local area. This is the same as in 2014, and less than the proportion of respondents who were opposed in 2013 (31 per cent) and 2010 (46 per cent).
- Net opposition, which is the percentage of those saying they are opposed minus those saying they are supportive, has reduced from 18 per cent in 2010 to -16 per cent in 2013 and to -34 per cent in both 2014 and 2017. This shows that in 2013, 2014 and 2017, the number of people supporting more homes being built in the local area was greater than the number opposing.
- In 2010, 5 per cent of respondents stated that they strongly supported more homes being built in their local area, this increased to 14 per cent in 2017.
- The strength of opposition to new homes decreased since 2010. In 2017, the proportion of respondents stating they would strongly oppose new homes being built in their local areas was 5 per cent, compared to 15 per cent in 2010.
- Those who were opposed to new homes or were neither supportive nor opposed were asked what would make them more supportive. Respondents frequently selected Respondents most frequently selected 'More employment opportunities'; 'More medical facilities built or existing ones improved'; 'Transport links improved'; 'More schools built or improved'; More affordable homes to rent (from LA or HA); 'More green spaces/parks created or existing ones improved; and 'More homes for low cost home ownership/shared ownership'.
- Respondents were asked whether the provision of a cash payment for households who lived close to a proposed development would influence their support. The majority of respondents (65 per cent) stated that a cash payment would make no difference, 23 per cent said it would make them 'more supportive' or 'much more supportive' and 9 per cent stated the cash payment would make them 'more opposed' or 'much more opposed'.
- The survey also asked who should be responsible for deciding where new homes are built. Half of respondents (50 per cent) said local councils should be responsible and 41 per cent said local communities should decide where new homes are built.
- Respondents were asked to select whether they would choose to rent or buy if they had a free choice. The majority, 88 per cent, said they would choose to buy and 11 per cent would choose to rent. This figure has changed little in the last thirty years.

Introduction

The British Social Attitudes survey

1. The British Social Attitudes survey measures the extent to which the attitudes, values and beliefs of the British public change over time. The survey has been run annually by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) since 1983 (apart from in 1988 and 1992 when its core funding was used to fund the British Election Study series). A variety of funders, including government departments, grant-giving bodies, other foundations and universities support the survey, enabling it to cover a wide range of social, economic, political and moral issues. Questions are designed to be relevant to policy debates but also to be repeated at regular intervals.
2. The survey uses a robust methodology that is replicated each year meaning changes in attitudes can be reliably compared between years, although observed changes may not always be significant. The fieldwork for the survey involves computer-assisted interviews carried out face-to-face with respondents aged 18 or over living in households in Great Britain. The fieldwork in 2017 took place between July and November.
3. The survey is designed to yield a representative survey of adults (aged 18+) in Britain. While the British Social Attitudes survey covers England, Scotland and Wales, this report presents data for England only.
4. This report provides findings relating to public attitudes to house building as measured by the British Social Attitudes survey 2017. The analysis for this report has been carried out solely by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). The findings provide evidence about changing attitudes to new house building across England since 2010, as well as preferences for owning and renting. A new question was also asked relating to public opinion on who should make decisions about where new homes should be built in local areas. It is not possible to directly attribute change in attitudes to government policy given the broad range of factors which might shape attitudes. However, the findings give context and are helpful in terms of monitoring changing public attitudes over the time.

Housing modules

5. In 2010, the Department for Communities and Local Government (now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) funded a large housing module and 2,617 people were surveyed to examine attitudes towards housing among people living in England¹. Smaller modules were commissioned in 2013, 2014 and 2017 to obtain

¹Public attitudes to housing in England: Report based on findings of British Social Attitudes survey (2010) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-attitudes-to-housing-in-england-results-from-the-british-social-attitudes-survey>

information, and for some themes establish long term trends, on key areas of interest to the department².

6. Some questions, such as the support or opposition to more homes being built in the local area, were asked in all four surveys and so trends can be compared across this period. Although the number of household responding to the survey changes across years (the survey involved 3,000 households in 2010, 1,000 households in 2013 and 2,500 households in 2014 and 2017), robust sampling methods and weighting of the data ensures that each survey is representative of adults (aged 18+) in England and the four years of results are therefore comparable³.
7. Although the methodology allows for reliable comparisons between years, it is not possible to say when changes in attitudes occurred; for example, whether there has been a gradual change or a rapid change. However, the data does suggest that the reduction in opposition to house building identified between 2010 and 2013 has been maintained in 2014 and 2017 and thus may be part of a longer term trend in changed attitudes to house building.

² Public attitudes to new house building: findings from the 2013 British Social Attitudes survey <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-social-attitudes-survey-2013-attitudes-to-new-house-building> Public attitudes to new house building: findings from the 2014 British Social Attitudes survey <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-social-attitudes-survey-2014-attitudes-to-new-house-building>

³ The weighting process ensures that the profile of respondents matches that of the population through three stages of weighting. These are selection weights, non-response model and calibration weighting.

Survey findings

Opposition and support for new homes

Question and response categories

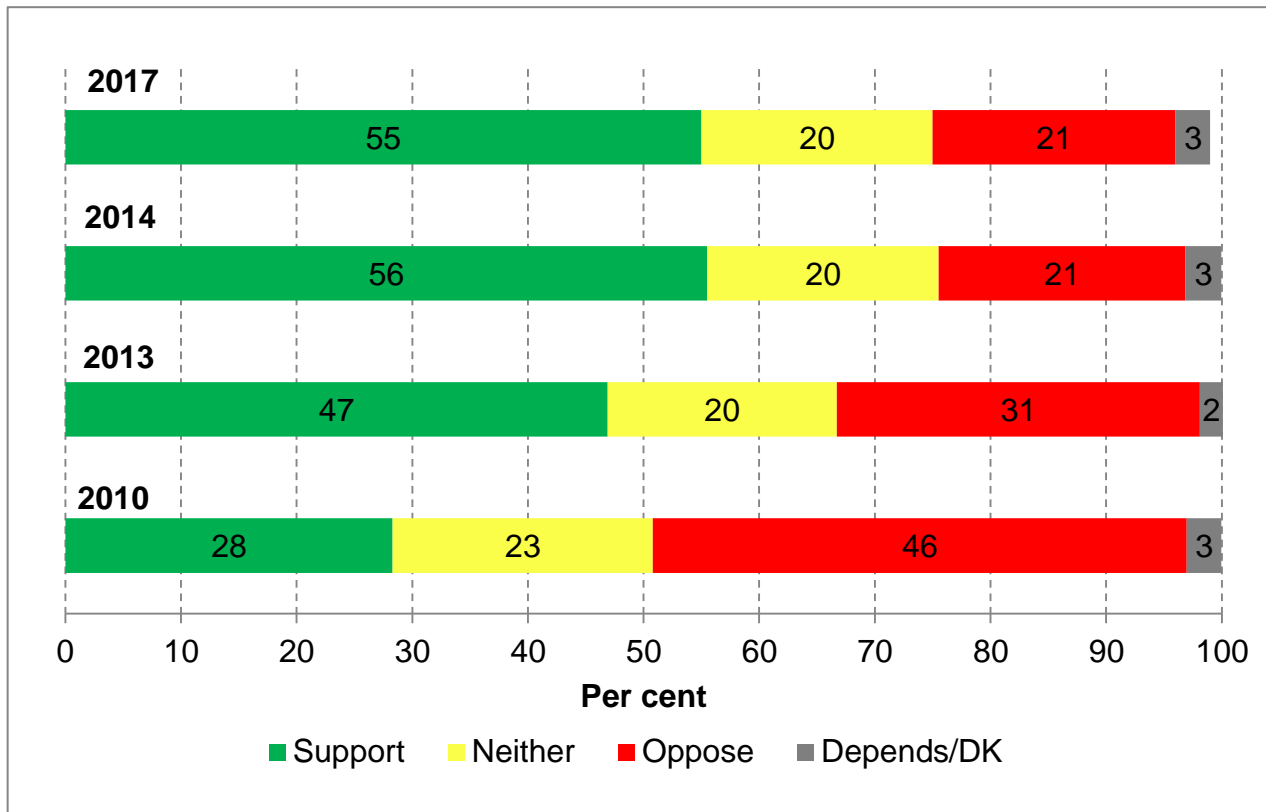
8. Respondents were asked: *Would you support or oppose more homes being built in your local area?*
9. Response categories were:
 - Support strongly
 - Support
 - Neither support nor oppose
 - Oppose
 - Oppose strongly
 - [SPONTANEOUS ONLY - It depends]

Headline results

10. Twenty one per cent of respondents were opposed to new homes being built in their local area. This is the same as in 2014. This is less than the proportion in 2013 (31 per cent) and 2010 (46 per cent).
11. Similarly, 55 per cent of respondents were supportive of new homes, up from 47 per cent in 2013 and 28 per cent in 2010.
12. Net opposition⁴ has reduced from 18 per cent in 2010, to -16 per cent in 2013 and to -34 per cent in 2014 and 2017.
13. The proportion of respondents saying they would strongly oppose new homes being built in their local area in 2017 was 5 per cent. In 2010, 15 per cent of respondents strongly opposed new homes being built in their local area.
14. The proportion of respondents who said they would strongly support new homes has increased from 5 per cent in 2010 to 14 per cent in 2017.

⁴ Percentage of those saying they are opposed net of those reporting they are supportive i.e. if net opposition is less than zero then more respondents are supportive than opposed.

Figure 1: Would you support or oppose more homes being built in your local area?



Notes:

Sources: BSA 2010, 2013, 2014 and 2017.

Unweighted bases: For each year were 2795, 2315, 2449 and 2617 respectively for 2010, 2013, 2014 and 2017.

Support includes respondents who either answered “support strongly” or “support” and Oppose includes respondents who either answered “oppose strongly” or “oppose”.

All results have been rounded to the nearest per cent.

The proportion of respondents who supported more homes being built in their local area in 2017 (55 per cent) is not statistically significantly different to the proportion in 2014 (56 per cent).

Opposition to new homes by housing tenure

15. More homeowners (25 per cent) were opposed to new homes being built in their local area compared to renters. Of the respondents renting in the local authority tenure 16 per cent were opposed to new homes, 13 per cent of housing association renters were opposed and 14 per cent of private rental tenants.

Opposition to new homes by age

16. The age group most opposed to new homes being built in the local area were respondents 65 and over (27 per cent opposed). The least opposed group was those who were between 18 and 34 (16 per cent). Respondents aged 35 to 54 had 20 per cent opposition, whilst those aged 55 to 64 had 23 per cent opposition⁵.

Opposition to new homes by region

17. Since 2014, the largest reduction in opposition is in the East of England, where opposition fell from 32 per cent in 2014 to 19 per cent in 2017.

Opposition to new homes by type of area

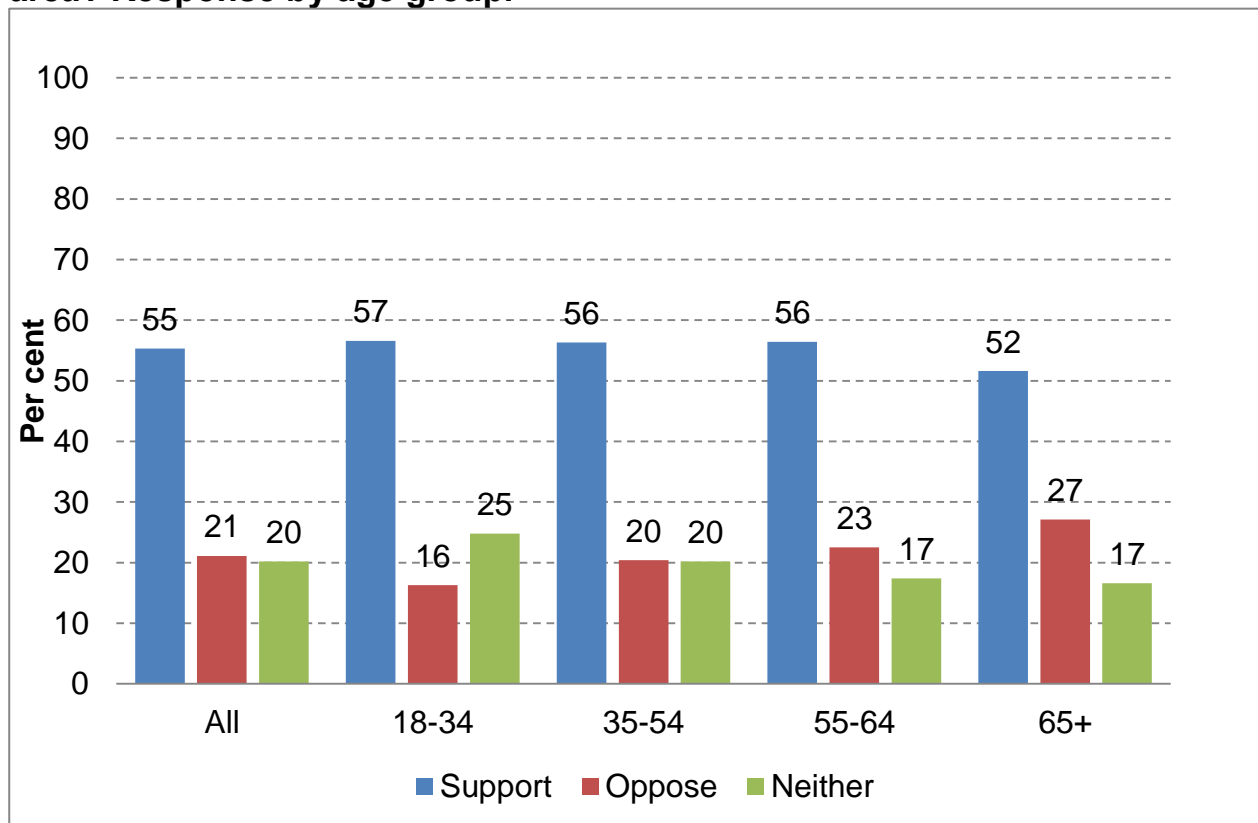
18. Although support was still higher than opposition, opposition to new homes was highest amongst respondents living on a 'farm or home in the country' (36 per cent)⁶, followed by respondents living in 'a country village' (30 per cent)⁷. Opposition was lowest amongst those living in 'a big city' (14 per cent).

⁵The difference between the proportion of respondents opposed to more homes being built aged 18-34 and respondents aged 55-64 and over 65 are statistically significant. The difference in opposition between 35-54 year olds and those over 65 is statistically significant. No other differences between age groups and opposition to homes being built in their local area are statistically significant.

⁶ The base size for respondents living on 'a farm or home on in the country' is relatively small (n=69).

⁷ The difference between the proportion of respondents opposed to more homes being built in their local area who live in a 'farm or home in the country' (36 per cent) is not statistically significant to the proportion opposed who live in 'a country village' (30 per cent).

Figure 2: Would you support or oppose more homes being built in your local area? Response by age group.



Notes:

Source: BSA 2017.

Unweighted base: 2617.

Support includes respondents who either answered “support strongly” or “support” and Oppose includes respondents who either answered “oppose strongly” or “oppose”.

All results have been rounded to the nearest per cent.

The difference between the proportion of respondents opposed to more homes being built aged 18-34 and respondents aged 55-64 and over 65 are statistically significant. The difference in opposition between 35-54 year olds and those over 65 is statistically significant. No other differences between age groups and opposition to homes being built in their local area are statistically significant.

Which advantages would influence support for new homes

Question and response categories

19. Respondents who either opposed the building of more homes or were neither supportive nor opposed⁸ were asked: *Sometimes when new homes are built there are advantages to local residents. From the list provided which, if any, of these advantages would make you support homes being built in your local area? You can choose up to three.*
20. This question was intended to further explore the views of those who do not support new homes being built in their area, particularly what might persuade them to change their view.
21. Response categories were:
- More employment opportunities created
 - Transport links improved
 - More green spaces/parks created or existing ones improved
 - More schools built or improved
 - More affordable homes to rent (from local authority or housing association)
 - More homes for low cost home ownership / shared ownership
 - Homes of a higher quality design
 - More shops or supermarkets built or existing ones improved
 - More medical facilities built or existing ones improved
 - Library built or existing one improved
 - More leisure facilities built or existing ones improved
 - Financial incentives to existing residents were provided
 - Other (WRITE IN)
 - [SPONTANEOUS ONLY: it depends]
 - None of these
 - (Don't know)
 - (Refusal)

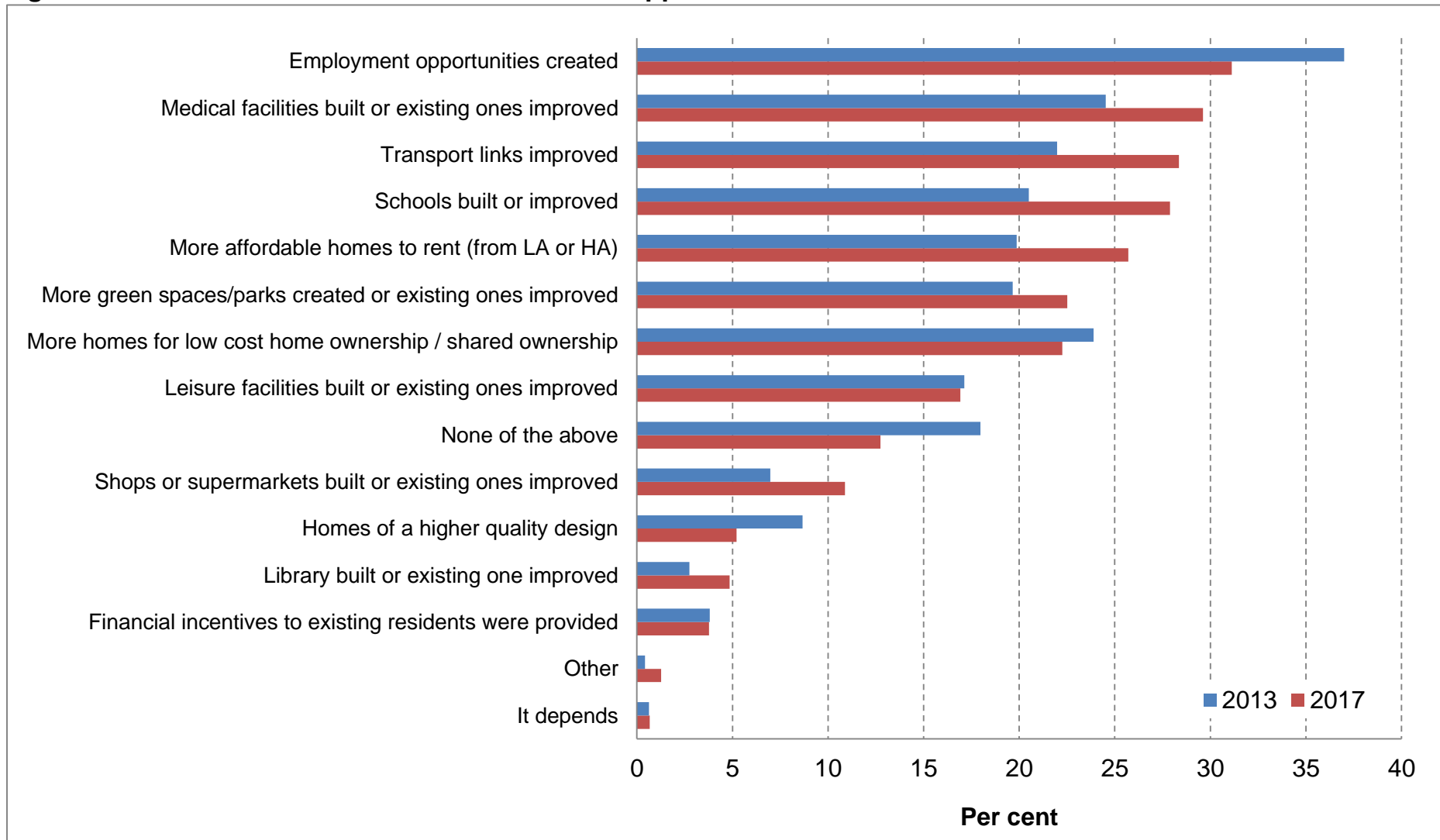
Headline results

22. Since 2013, the percentage of respondents reporting 'more employment opportunities created' would increase their support has reduced from 37 per cent to 31 per cent.
23. Other conditions were more frequently cited by respondents in 2017 compared to in 2013; this included 'more schools built or improved' (up from 21 per cent to 28 per cent), 'transport links improved' (up from 22 per cent to 28 per cent) and 'more affordable homes to rent' (up from 20 per cent to 26 per cent).
24. Selecting the advantages that would make them support homes being built in their local area, respondents most frequently selected 'more employment opportunities created', 'more medical facilities built or existing ones improved', 'transport links improved',

⁸ When asked: *Would you support or oppose more homes being built in your local area?*

'more schools built or improved', 'more affordable homes to rent (from LA or HA)', 'more green spaces/parks created or existing ones improved', and, 'more homes for low cost home ownership / shared ownership'.

Figure 3: Potential benefits that would increase support for new homes



Notes: Sources: BSA 2013 and 2017. Unweighted bases: 1063 and 1071 for 2013 and 2017 respectively. Respondents were only asked the question if, when asked "Would you support or oppose more homes being built in your local area?" they responded that they either opposed the building of more homes or were neither supportive nor opposed. Respondents could choose up to three replies. Due to the sample size of different responses, comparisons may not be statistically significantly different.

Financial incentives for new homes

Question and response categories

25. Respondents were asked: *And what if households who lived close to a proposed development were given a cash payment if the development went ahead. Would that make you more supportive of new homes being built in your local area, less supportive or would your view not change?*

26. Response categories were:

- Much more supportive
- More supportive
- No change
- More opposed
- Much more opposed
- SPONTANEOUS (Don't know)

Headline results

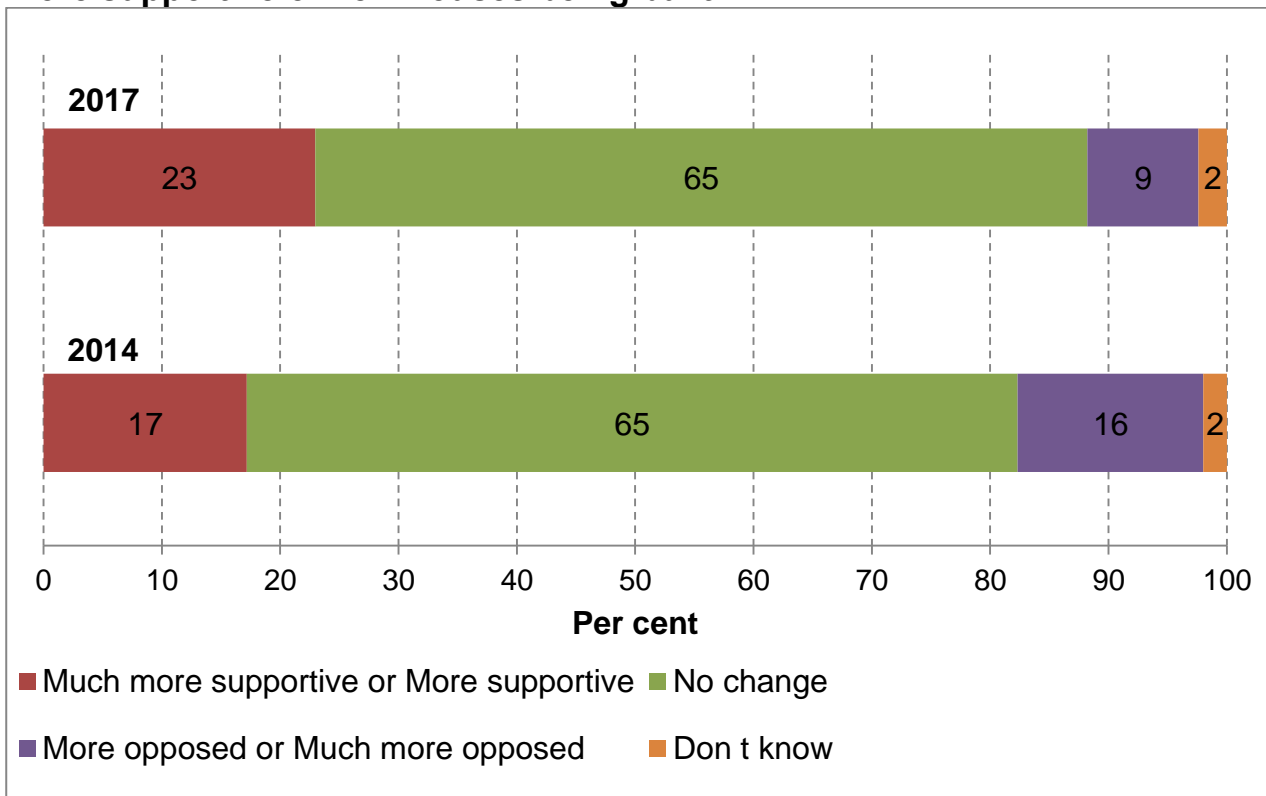
27. The majority of respondents (65 per cent) stated a cash payment would make no difference to their level of support; this is the same proportion as reported in 2014.

28. Less than a quarter of respondents (23 per cent) stated that a cash payment would increase their level of support (including 'more supportive' and 'much more supportive') and less than one in ten respondents (9 per cent) stated that a cash payment would make them 'more opposed' or 'much more opposed' to new homes being built.

29. From 2014 to 2017 the proportion of respondents stating that they would be 'more supportive' or 'much more supportive' of a local development if they were given a cash payment increased from 17 per cent to 23 per cent.

30. Over the same time period, the proportion of respondents who stated that a cash payment would make them 'more opposed' or 'much more opposed' decreased from 16 per cent to 9 per cent.

Figure 4: If households who lived close to a proposed development were given a cash payment if the development went ahead would that make you more supportive of new houses being built



Notes: Sources: BSA 2014 and 2017. Unweighted bases: 1024 and 2617 for 2014 and 2017 respectively. All results have been rounded to the nearest per cent.

Responsibility for deciding where new homes are built

Question and response categories

31. Respondents were asked: *Assuming a decision had been made to build new houses in your local area, which one of those on this card should be mainly responsible for deciding where new homes are built?*

32. Response categories were:

- Local communities
- Local council
- National government
- House builders
- Someone else (PLEASE SAY WHO)
- [Spontaneous – I don't mind]
- [Spontaneous – I don't think housing should be built in my local area]

33. This was a new question asked in 2017.

Headline results

34. Half of respondents (50 per cent) said local councils should mainly be responsible for deciding where new homes are built, while 41 per cent stated that local communities should mainly be responsible.

Responsibility for where new homes are built by tenure

35. More of those who rented privately said that the local council should be responsible for deciding where new homes are built compared with other tenures; however this difference was only statistically significant compared to owner occupiers.

Responsibility for where new homes are built by region

36. Those in London were more likely to say that local councils should be responsible for deciding where new homes are built (Inner London (63 per cent) and Outer London (57 per cent))⁹, compared to the country overall (50 per cent of respondents stating that local councils should be responsible for deciding where new homes are built).

Responsibility for where new homes are built by area

37. Those in 'big cities' more often said councils should have responsibility for deciding where new homes are built (54 per cent), compared to respondents who live in a 'country village' (42 per cent) or 'farm or home in the country'¹⁰ (32 per cent)¹¹.

⁹ The difference between the proportion of respondents in Inner London and Outer London who say that that local councils should be responsible for deciding where new homes are built is not statistically significant.

¹⁰ Please note that the base size for respondents living 'on a farm or home in the country' is relatively small for this question (n=69).

38. A third (33 per cent) of those in a 'big city' said the local community should decide the location of new homes, compared to 50 per cent in a 'country village' and 58 per cent in a 'farm or home in the country'.

¹¹ The proportion of respondents who say councils should have responsibility for deciding where new homes are built, who live in a 'country village' is not statistically significantly different to the proportion of respondents who say councils should have responsibility for deciding where new homes are built, living 'on a farm or home in the country'.

Preferences for buying or renting

Question and response categories

39. Respondents were asked: *If you had a free choice would you choose to rent accommodation, or would you choose to buy?*

40. Response categories were:

- Would choose to rent
- Would choose to buy
- (Don't know)
- (Refusal)

Headline results

41. If they had free choice, the vast majority of respondents stated that they would choose to buy (88 per cent) and 11 per cent would choose to rent.

42. These figures have remained broadly stable over the last thirty years. In 1996, 84 per cent said they would choose to buy and 15 per cent say they would choose to rent.

Preferences for buying or renting by tenure

43. Across all renting tenures, 74 per cent would choose to buy accommodation if they had a free choice. Respondents who are currently renting privately are more likely to show a preference for buying (81 per cent) compared with those who are renting from a housing association (64 per cent) or local authority (69 per cent).

Preferences for buying or renting by age¹²

44. If they had free choice, 90 per cent of respondents in both the 35 to 54 age group and 55 to 64 age group would choose to buy. The 18 to 34 age group is the least likely to want to buy (86 per cent) and conversely the most likely to want to rent (13 per cent). Of the respondents aged 65 and over, 87 per cent would rather buy.

Preferences for buying or renting by household income

45. Respondents in the highest income category were more likely to have a preference for buying (95 per cent) compared to households in the lowest income category (79 per cent).

¹² 18-34 year olds are more likely to want to rent than 35-54 year olds and this is statistically significant. 18-34 year olds are less likely to want to buy than 35-54 year olds and this is statistically significant. No other differences between age groups and preferences for buying or renting are statistically significant.

Analysis

46. For the years that MHCLG commissioned a housing module in the British Social Attitudes survey, figures are presented. Not all differences between years presented are statistically significant. Where differences are not statistically significant, we have noted this.

47. The analysis highlights differences between certain subgroups of the population. Where differences between subgroups are not statistically significant, we have noted this. The variables used for subgroup analysis are:

- **Housing tenure** which defines the conditions under which the home is occupied, whether it is owned or rented, and if rented, who the landlord is and on what financial and legal terms the let is agreed. In this report, the housing tenure is defined as one of four categories: owner occupiers, renting from a local authority (LA), renting from a housing association (HA), renting privately.
- **Age** of the survey respondents is grouped into four categories; 18 to 34 years old, 35 to 54 years old, 55 to 64 and 65 and older.
- **Household income** in this report the variable 'Household Income Quartile' is used which includes four categories of monthly gross household income. These are;
 - less than £1,200 per month;
 - £1,201 to £2,200 per month;
 - £2,201 to £3,700 per month; and,
 - £3,701 or more per month.
- **Region** in this analysis divides England into ten; North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, South West, East of England, South East, Inner London and Outer London.
- **Self-reported area type** is self-reported by respondents who were asked to categorise their area as one of the following: a big city, a suburb of a big city, a small city or town, a country village, a farm or home in the country.

48. In some sections of the analysis, 'net' figures are presented in order to illustrate the balance of opinion; the proportion of people opposed compared to the proportion of people who are supportive. In such cases the proportion of respondents who chose positive statements (support or strongly support) is subtracted from the proportion of respondents who chose negative statements (oppose or strongly oppose). Where variables have a 'neither' option or a 'don't know' option, these are not included in calculating the net figure.

49. For those looking to conduct further analysis using the British Social Attitudes survey, data from 2017 will be deposited at the UK Data Archive later this year following the

publication of the 35th NatCen British Social Attitudes Report, in July 2018. For historical BSA data please see the UK data archive¹³. In February 2017 the National Housing Federation published “Demise of the NIMBY: Changing attitudes to building new homes”¹⁴ which included analysis using British Social Attitudes survey results for 2016.

¹³ UK Data Service series record for British Social Attitudes Survey
<https://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/series/?sn=200006>

¹⁴ National Housing Federation published “Demise of the NIMBY: Changing attitudes to building new homes”
[http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/Demise_of_the_NIMBY_-_Changing_attitudes_to_building_new_homes_\(February_2017\).PDF](http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/Demise_of_the_NIMBY_-_Changing_attitudes_to_building_new_homes_(February_2017).PDF)