



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Public attitudes to house building:

Findings from the 2014 British Social Attitudes Survey



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Key findings

- Opposition to new homes in England has continued to fall substantially between 2010 and 2014. In 2010 46 per cent of respondents said they would oppose new homes being built in their local area compared to 31 per cent in 2013. This fell to only 21 per cent in 2014. Similarly, those supportive of house building in their local area rose from 28 per cent in 2010 and 47 per cent in 2013 to 56 per cent in 2014.
- Net opposition (percentage of those saying they are supportive less those saying they are opposed) has reduced from 18 per cent in 2010 through -16 per cent in 2013 to -34 per cent in 2014. The strength of opposition for new homes has also decreased. The proportion of respondents stating they would strongly oppose new homes being built in their local area fell to almost a third of its previous level, from 15 per cent in 2010 to 6 per cent in 2014. At the same time the proportion of respondents who said they would strongly support new homes more than tripled from 5 per cent to 16 per cent.
- Opposition fell or remained static across all age, tenure and income subgroups and among respondents living in different types of areas. However, home owners, those living in small cities and towns and in rural areas were still more likely to be opposed than renters and those living in large cities.
- All respondents were asked whether having a say in proposed developments in the neighbourhood would make them more supportive of new homes. The most common response was that this would make no difference at 45 per cent. However, 42 per cent stated it would make them more supportive, with 9 per cent of respondents stating it would make them much more supportive.
- Only 2 per cent of respondents who did not support new homes in their local area or neither supported or opposed, said they would become *much* more supportive if households who lived close to a proposed development were given a cash payment if the development went ahead, with 16 per cent saying they would become more supportive. The majority of respondents at 65 per cent stated a cash payment would make no difference to their level of support,

whilst a significant minority at 16 per cent would become more or much more opposed to development.

- The majority of respondents at 52 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed when asked to consider whether “*property owners should be able to change commercial buildings such as offices, warehouses and shops, to new homes without the need to seek planning permission*”. Thirty one per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the question whilst 17 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.
- When those who did not answer that they would support new homes in their local area were asked “*how likely is it that you would actively oppose the building of a housing development in your local area?*”, 42 per cent said they would be likely or very likely to actively oppose. This compares to 28 per cent who said they would be unlikely or very unlikely, and 26 per cent who said they would be neither likely nor unlikely to actively oppose.
- Of the respondents who said they would be likely to actively oppose the building of a housing development, actions likely to be taken include;
 - Signing a petition (66 per cent)
 - Attending a planning meeting to object (62 per cent)
 - Submitting a formal objection to a planning proposal (50 per cent)
 - Writing to your local councillor (45 per cent)
 - Joining an action group (26 per cent)
 - Other action (1 per cent)
- Views were mixed when all the respondents were asked “*if the government were going to do something to make homes more affordable, what do you think the most useful action would be?*”
 - Give some sort of financial assistance to first time buyers (38 per cent)
 - Give more money to housing associations and local authorities (27 per cent)
 - Get banks to increase access to mortgages (14 per cent)
 - Make it more expensive to purchase second homes (7 per cent)

- Giving more money to shared ownership schemes (5 per cent)
- Make it easier for developers to get planning permission (4 per cent)
- Something else (3 per cent)

1. Introduction

1.1 This report provides findings relating to public attitudes to house building as measured by the British Social Attitudes survey (BSA) 2014. The findings provide evidence about changing attitudes to new house building across England before and after the introduction of the coalition government's planning and other housing related reforms. Although it is not possible to directly attribute change in attitudes to government policy due to the many other factors which might shape attitudes, the findings do give some context in terms of changing public attitudes over the time.

1.2 The survey has been run annually by NatCen Social Research since 1983. Its aim is to measure the extent to which the attitudes, values and beliefs of the British public change over time. The survey is representative of all households in Britain, (although it should be noted that the questions presented here were asked of people living in England only). It uses a robust methodology that is replicated each year meaning changes in attitudes can be reliably compared between years. The fieldwork for the survey involves computer-assisted interviews carried out face-to-face with respondents aged 18 and over. The fieldwork in 2014 took place between August and November.

1.3 A large housing module of questions was funded by the department in the 2010 survey involving around 3,000 households in England. A copy of the report on the 2010 findings can be found [here](#). A smaller "planning for housing" module was commissioned by the department in the 2013 [survey](#) involving around 1,000 households in England. A further module was included in the survey in 2014 to obtain information on long term trends. Therefore, some questions, including the support or opposition to more new homes were asked in all three surveys. Although the survey involved 3,000 households in 2010, 1,000 households in 2013 and 2,500 in 2014, robust sampling methods and weighting of the data ensures that each

survey is representative of all households in England and the three are therefore comparable¹.

1.4 Because the key repeat question relating to attitudes to new homes was not asked in every year since 2010, it is not possible to say when any changes in attitudes occurred, for example whether there has been a gradual change, or rapid change in one year between 2010 and 2013. However, the on-going reduction in opposition for house building and increase in support identified in 2014 does point to a longer term trend in changes in attitudes to house building.

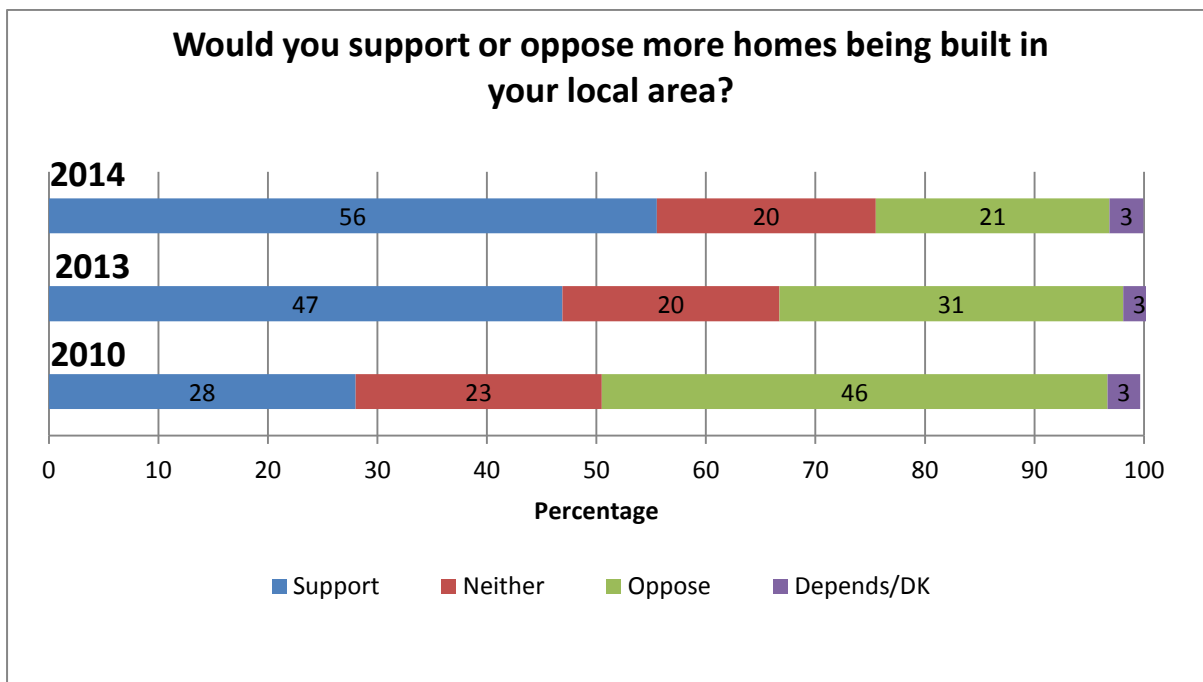
¹ The response rate for the 2014 survey was lower than previous years, at 47%. However, the weighting process ensures that the profile of respondents matches that of the population through three stages of weighting. These are selection weights, non-response model and calibration weighting. We are therefore confident that the data used for analysis is representative of the general population.

2. Survey findings

Opposition and support for new homes

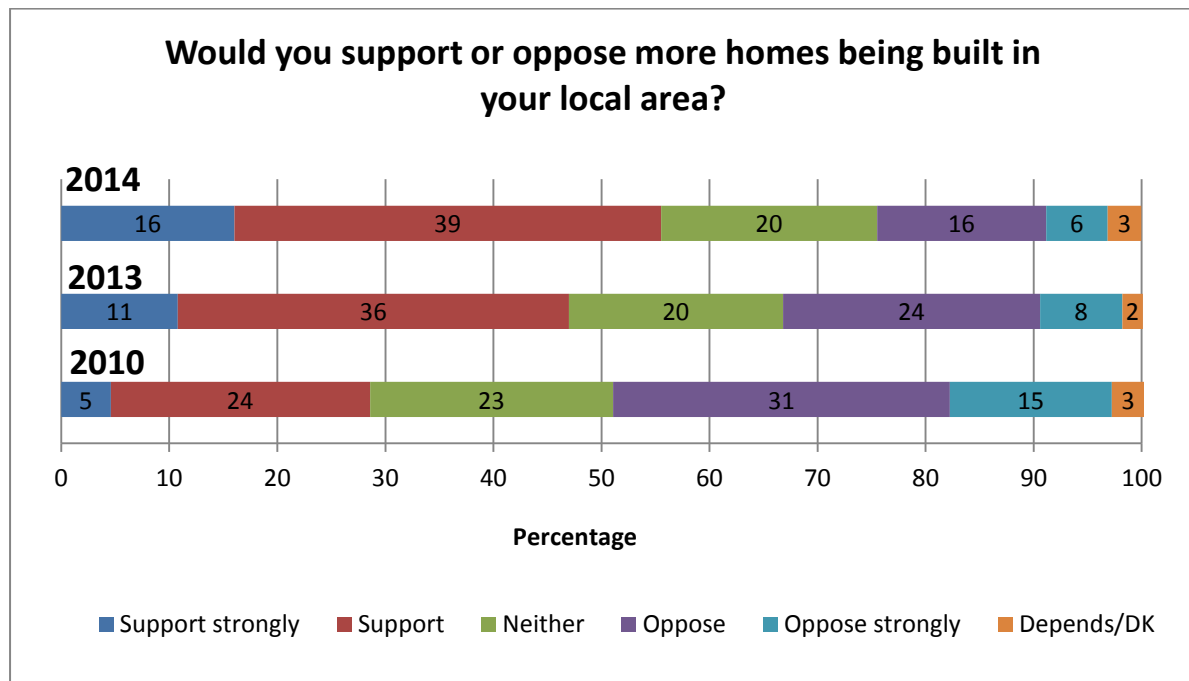
2.1 Opposition to new homes has continued to fall substantially between 2010 and 2014. In 2010, 46 per cent of respondents said they would oppose new homes being built in their local area compared to 31 per cent in 2013. This fell to only 21 per cent in 2014. Similarly, those supportive of house building in their local area rose from 28 per cent in 2010 and 47 per cent in 2013 to 56 per cent in 2014.

2.2 Net opposition (percentage of those saying they are supportive less those saying they are opposed) has reduced from 18 per cent in 2010 through -16 per cent in 2013 to -34 per cent in 2014. The strength of opposition for new homes has also decreased.



2.3 Breaking down the figures to observe changes in the strength of support or opposition, the proportion of respondents stating they would strongly oppose new homes being built in their local area fell to almost a third of its previous level, from 15 per cent in 2010 to 6 per cent in 2014.

2.4 At the same time the proportion of respondents who said they would strongly support new homes more than tripled from 5 per cent to 16 per cent. There was no change in the proportion of respondents who stated they neither supported nor opposed new homes between 2013 and 2014 which remained at 20 per cent.



Opposition to new homes by housing tenure

2.5 Homeowners were more opposed to new homes than renters. Twenty six per cent of owners were opposed, compared to 11 per cent of local authority tenants, 14 per cent of housing association tenants and 15 per cent of private tenants. Between 2013 and 2014 opposition has continued to fall for all tenure groups. Owners had the largest change in opposition of all tenures at 11 per cent.

Opposition to new homes by age

2.6 Opposition to new homes was similar across age groups but the most opposed group were aged 55-64, among whom 25 per cent were opposed compared with 17 per cent in the 18-34 age group. Similarly, the 18-34 age group had the largest change in support for house building between 2013 and 2014 from 49 per cent to 62

per cent. Since 2013, the largest reduction in opposition has been among respondents aged 35-54, where overall opposition fell from 36 per cent in 2013 to 21 per cent in 2014.

Opposition to new homes by household income

2.7 There were broadly similar levels of opposition between respondents in different income categories. Twenty-three per cent of respondents in the highest income quartile said they would be opposed compared with an average of 21 per cent. Opposition decreased across all income quartiles between 2013 and 2014. The greatest reductions were among the highest income quartile, where overall opposition fell from 33 per cent to 23 per cent and the lowest quartile where opposition fell from 29 per cent to 16 per cent. Conversely, support for house building increased the most amongst the second highest quartile during this period from 44 per cent to 56 per cent.

Opposition to new homes by type of area

2.8 In 2014, opposition to new homes was highest among respondents living on 'a farm or home in the country' (32 per cent) and 'a country village' (27 per cent)². Opposition was lowest amongst those living in big cities (10 per cent).

2.9 Opposition fell between 2013 and 2014 among those living in all types of areas, except those on a farm or home in the country where opposition increased by 9 per cent. However, between 2013 and 2014 opposition fell most markedly among those living in small cities and towns (34 to 22 per cent) and suburbs (32 to 22 per cent). There has also been a very small change in support for new homes amongst the country villages whilst opposition has reduced by 5 per cent.

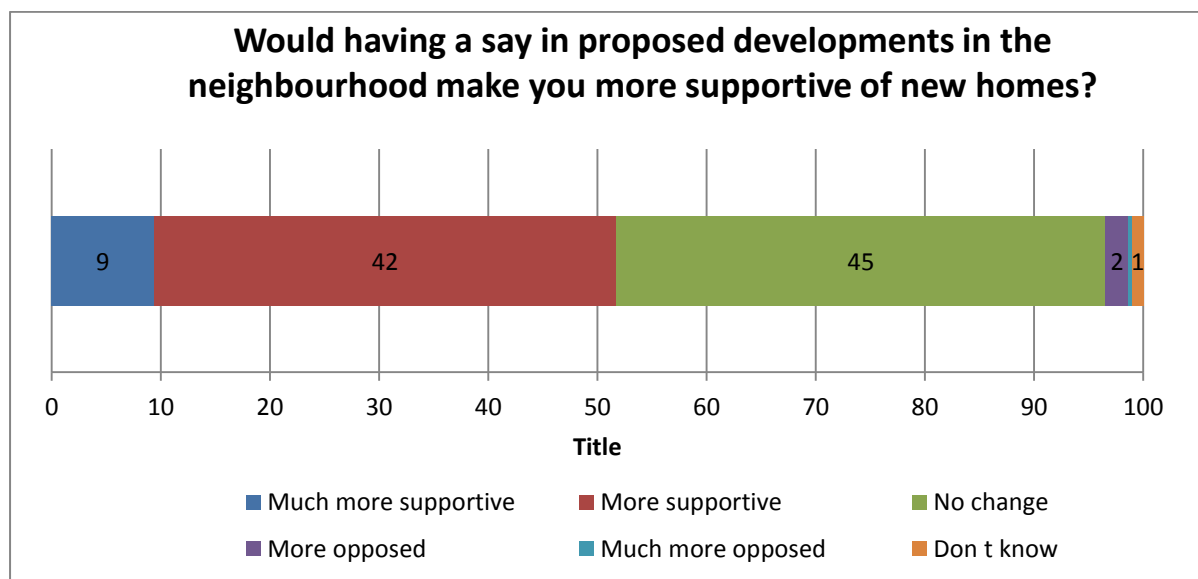
² Please note the base sizes for respondents living on 'a farm or home in the country' (n=80) and 'a country village' (n=490) are relatively small.

Opposition to new homes by type of area

	Support	Neither	Oppose	Depends/DK	Change in opposition 2013 - 2014
Big city	73	15	10	2	-7
Suburbs	53	23	22	3	-10
Small city or town	58	18	22	3	-12
Country village	43	25	27	5	-5
Farm or home in the country	41	24	32	3	+9
Total	56	20	21	3	-10

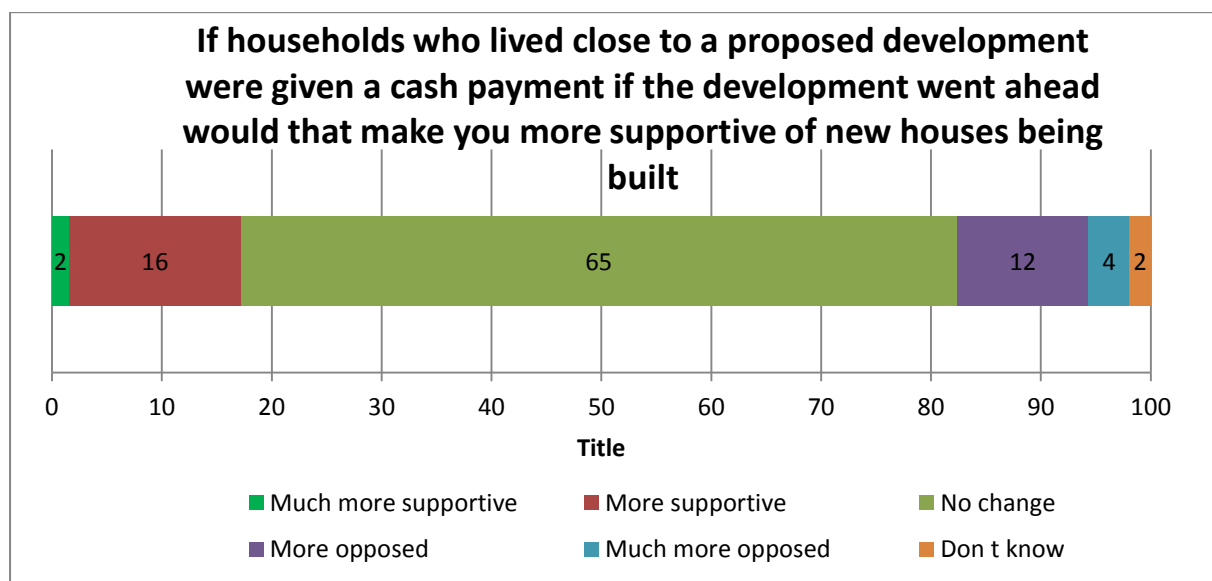
Local development

2.10 All respondents were asked “*And what if households who lived close to a proposed development were given a say, and a vote, in developing a plan for the whole neighbourhood. Would that make you more supportive of new homes being built in your local area, less supportive or would your view not change?*”. The most common response (45 per cent) was that it would not change their support for new homes. However, 42 per cent said that it would make them supportive and 9 per cent stated it would make them much more supportive.



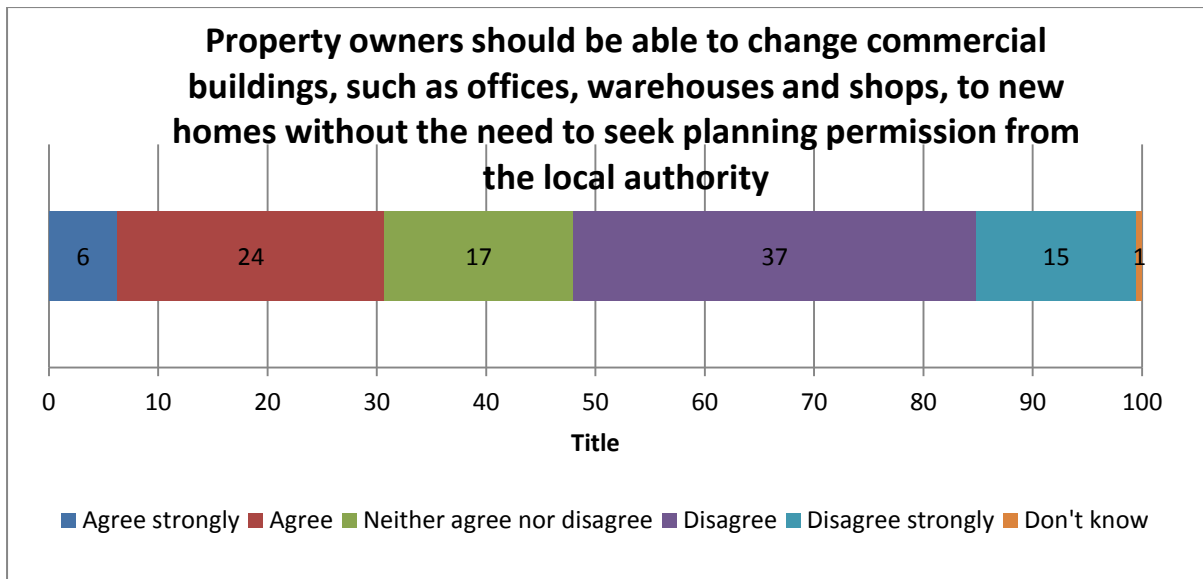
Financial incentives for new homes

2.11 Respondents who did not support new homes in their local area 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?”. Only 2 per cent of respondents said they would become *much* more supportive if households who lived close to a proposed development were given a cash payment if the development went ahead, while 16 per cent said they would be more supportive. The majority of respondents at 65 per cent stated a cash payment would make no difference to their level of support, whilst a significant minority at 12 per cent would become more opposed to development and 4 per cent much more opposed.



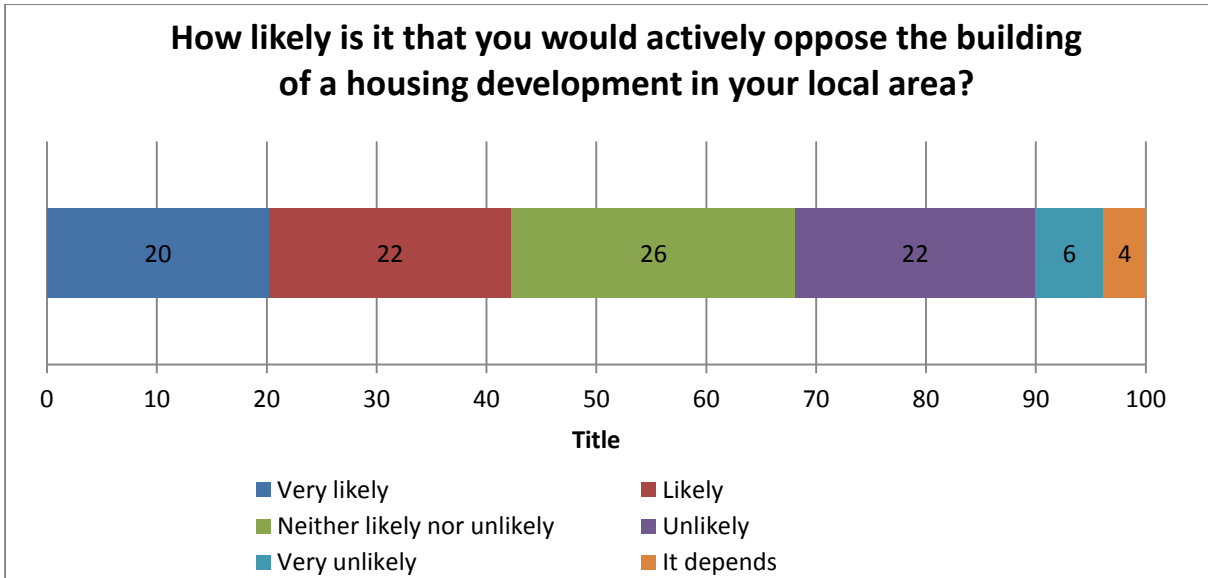
Change of use

2.12 All respondents were asked whether “*property owners should be able to change commercial buildings such as offices, warehouses and shops, to new homes without the need to seek planning permission from the local authority*”. The majority of respondents (52 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Within this figure 15 per cent strongly disagreed. Conversely, six per cent of respondents agreed and 24 per cent strongly agreed with the statement whilst 17 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.

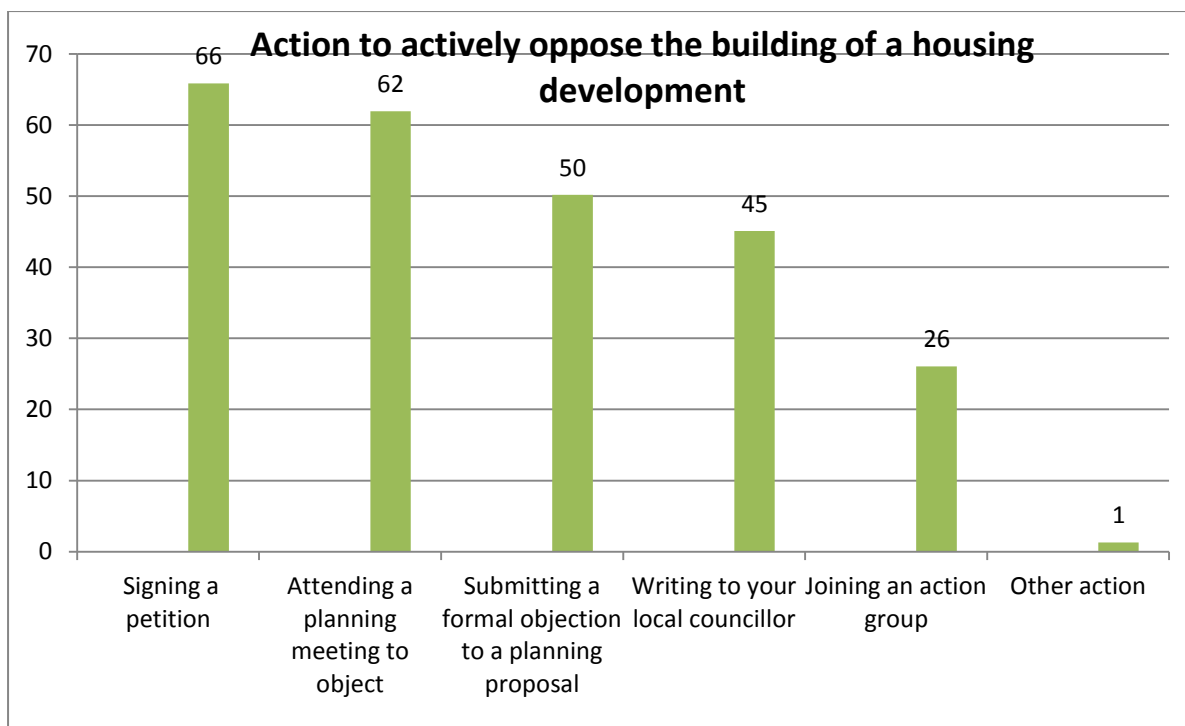


Active opposition to housebuilding

2.13 Respondents who did not support house building in their local area were asked “How likely is it that you would actively oppose the building of a housing development in your local area? By actively oppose we mean, for example, submitting a formal objection, writing to your local councillor or attending a planning meeting to object”. Twenty two per cent said they would be likely and 20 per cent very likely to actively oppose housing development. This compares to 22 per cent who were unlikely and 6 per cent who were very unlikely to actively oppose. A significant proportion at 26 per cent of respondents stated that they were neither likely nor unlikely to actively oppose house building.

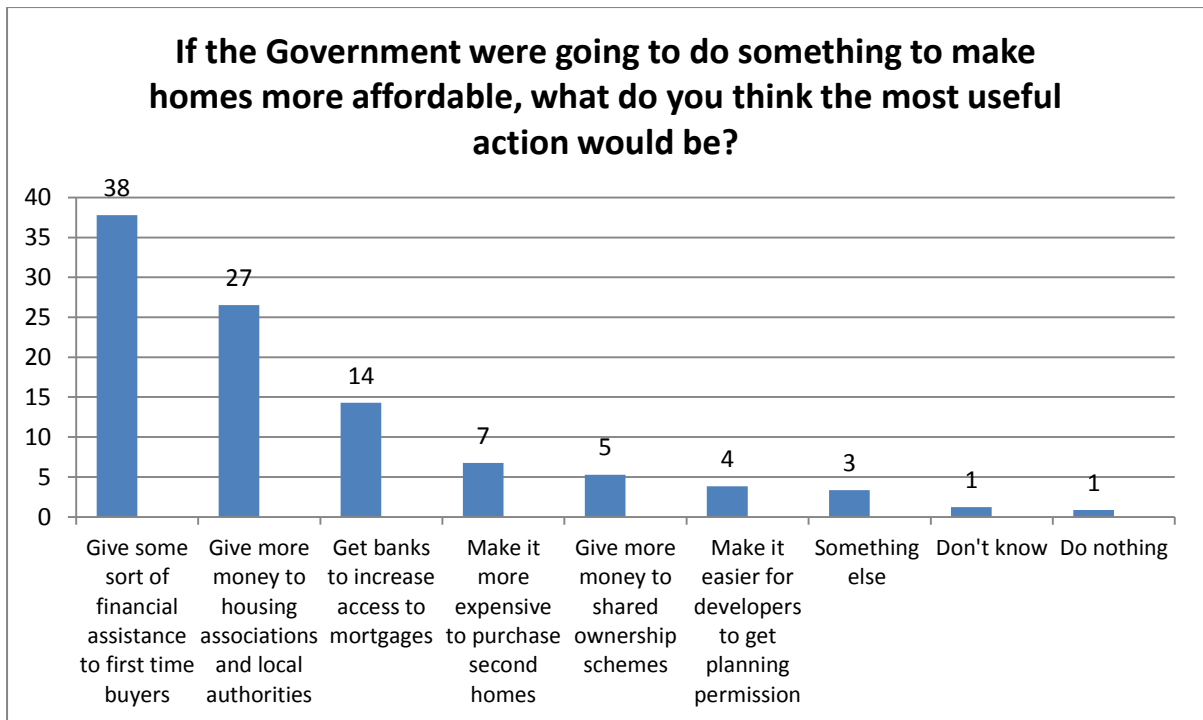


2.14 Of the respondents who said they would actively oppose the building of a housing development, 66 per cent stated they would sign a petition; 62 per cent would attend a planning meeting to object; 50 per cent would submit a formal objection to a planning proposal; 45 per cent would write to their local councillor, 26 per cent would join an action group; and 1 per cent would undertake some other action. Respondents were able to choose more than one response on this question and may well have opted for a suite of activities to oppose the building of a housing development.



More affordable homes

2.15 All the respondents were asked “*If the government were going to do something to make homes more affordable, what do you think the most useful action would be?*”? As before, a range of solutions were identified as possible options for affordable housing. The most common response was to give some sort of financial assistance to first time buyers (38 per cent). The next most common response at 27 per cent was for giving more money to housing associations and local authorities, whilst 14 per cent thought the Government should get banks to increase access to mortgages. Minority responses included, making it more expensive to purchase second homes (7 per cent), giving more money to shared ownership schemes (5 per cent) and making it easier for developers to get planning permission (4 per cent). Three per cent of respondents stated the government should do something else not on the list.



NatCen Social Research will be publishing their 32nd British Social Attitudes report at the end of March 2015.