

# Building More, Building Beautiful



How design and style can unlock the housing crisis

Jack Airey, Sir Roger Scruton and Sir Robin Wales

Foreword by Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP





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**Sir Robin Wales** was the leader of Newham Council 1995-2002 and then elected Mayor from 2002-16, chair of the association of London Government (now London Councils) 2000-06, a Board member of LOCOG (the London Organising Committee for the 2012 Games) and was knighted for services to local government in 2000. While in Newham he introduced the first Borough wide private rented sector licensing scheme, established a housing association, Local Space, which now provides homes for 1800 homeless families and established and chaired Red Door Ventures, a local authority owned housing company with the aim of building and retaining high quality housing.

**Sir Roger Scruton** is a writer and philosopher who has published more than forty books in philosophy, aesthetics and politics. He is widely translated. He is a fellow of the British Academy and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He teaches in both England and America and is a Senior Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington D.C. He is currently teaching an MA in Philosophy for the University of Buckingham.

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# Contents

Foreword	5
Executive Summary	6
Recommendations: A new agenda for design and style	12
The Importance of Consensus to Planning and Development	14
Achieving Consensus on the Building of New Homes	16
People Aren't Happy with the Design and Style of Modern Homes	20
Why New Homes Do Not Prioritise Good Design	26
People's Preferences for Design	30
Conclusion: How design and style can be more prominent in housing policy	40
	42

# Foreword

By Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, Secretary of State for Housing

The challenge of building 300,000 new homes a year by the mid 2020s is significant. That is why the government is taking radical action to reform the way the way planning system works, to incentivise developers to meet demand and revolutionise the way the system of housing delivery works from land assembly to securing a home of your own.

No government has been more committed to meeting the country's pressing housing need. And yet, we know that meeting the unit target is not enough. We don't just want to build estates, we want to create communities. We want to build, through new development, on the strength and quality of Britain's towns and cities. New homes shouldn't be seen as a burden on communities but rather as strengthening communities.

I have committed my department to a radical programme. Dramatically up-rating developer build out rates, ending the unfair stigma associated with social housing, reforming leasehold laws, providing securer tenure for people in the private rented sector, ensuring more affordable homes are built in areas of high pressure and making it easier for people to own their own home by offering support for programmes such as Help to Buy. I've also committed the department to a major programme of activity to tackle homelessness. This government has made housing and creating a place you can call home a central tenet of its domestic agenda and is acting accordingly.

But we know we can do more. Policy Exchange highlights a major concern in this report. The design, style and quality of new homes. We are currently consulting on the revised National Planning Policy Framework with the quality of development an important part of this. We want to see local communities intimately engaged in helping to shape the future of the development in their area, feeding in their views on the design and style of new developments and helping local authorities create style guides and codes which developers can use to meet the needs of communities.

For London this is a particular need. With land values high and the requirement for innovative use of space and higher densities, the need to build homes which are sympathetic to their surroundings and that add, not detract, to the sense of place which an area already has is paramount.

I support this report's intention; to start a debate about the design, style and quality of new housing and how it best meets people's needs. In the coming months I look forward to discussing these matters further.

## Executive Summary

Debates around design and style of development often fall into a familiar trap. One side seeks to impose a particular architectural view of the world over another. The easy way of closing such a debate is to assert that preferences over design and style are subjective, that individuals have their own taste and therefore to suggest one approach over another is flawed at its inception. The argument follows that we can never agree what is objectively good in a debate entirely dominated by subjective opinion.

This report argues that such a framing is wrong and detrimental to development occurring in areas of high need. Evidence collated for this report shows that not only do people have a soft consensus over what is desirable, but that such a consensus is essential to new homes being built at the rate required. As the country takes to building a new generation of homes, public support for which is much higher than often presented, it is essential they meet the aesthetic needs of citizens, communities and the nation as a whole, both now and in the future. This report is produced to that end.

### Towards a consensus for new homes

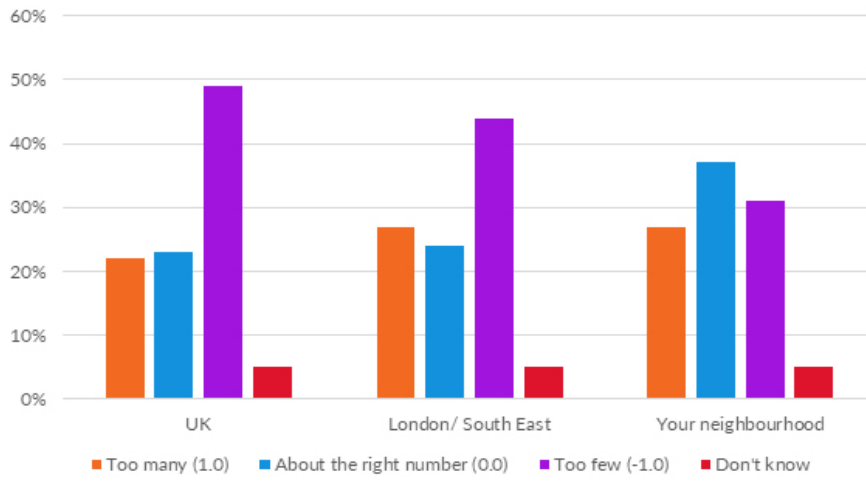
Not enough new homes have been built in areas of high need over the past few decades and a reason for that is the failure of politics at a national and local level. Housing policy over the past few decades has been characterised by minimising the number of losers, generating as little productive activity as possible, rather than policy in line with public good. Cries of nimbyism have warned leaders away from allocating and approving new homes, all with the assumption that people do not want new homes in their area.

Public polling conducted for this report suggests otherwise. Whether in the UK, London and the South East, or their own neighbourhood, less than three-in-ten people from London and the South East believe too many homes are being built in their area.

London respondents are especially supportive of a higher number of new homes being built in their neighbourhood. 41 percent of respondents from Inner London support a higher rate of development in their area and only 16 percent support a lower rate. So, even in London, where development causes significant disruption, there is significant support for more to be done. In fact, people are generally positive about new homes, even when they are built in their neighbourhood. The principle is accepted by many, but the reality often runs counter. Why?

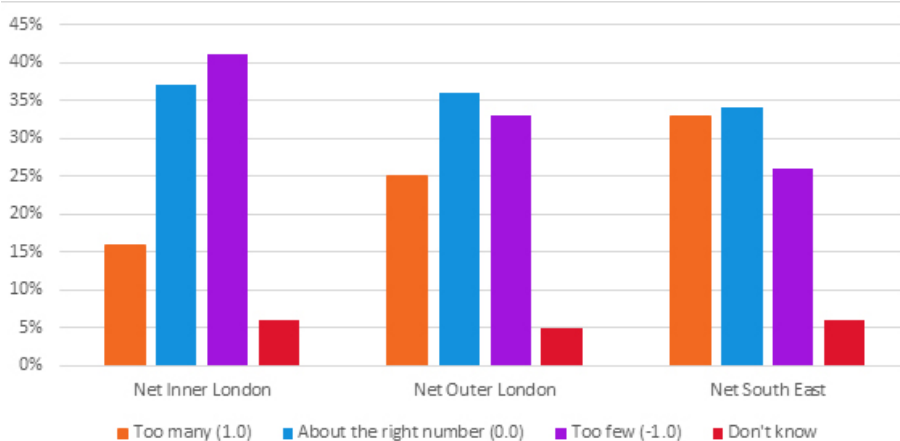


Figure i: Do you think that we are currently building too many, too few or about the right number of new properties for people to live in...?



Data source: Deltapoll

Figure ii: Do you think that we are currently building too many, too few or about the right number of new properties for people to live in your neighbourhood?



Data source: Deltapoll

### The absence of beauty

Simply put, not enough new homes are built with beauty in mind. Decisions over space are nearly always financial, not aesthetic, and so the aesthetic needs of the community are too often marginalised (along with issues like affordability). High rise developments are prioritised over low rise because of the cost of land. Ceiling heights are reduced to maximise the number of units. The façades and vernaculars of buildings are homogenised to drive schemes through the planning system.

Running through the heart of this report is an acute sense that beauty is a universal value, and a major concern of many citizens when it comes to new building. And there is a reason for this. Aesthetic values arise in the

course of our most basic social interactions: manners, fashions, ways of dressing and speaking - all are shaped by the need for beauty, grace and charm. We gravitate to places which are beautiful and try to make our own homes beautiful, for the simple reasons that beauty is a sign that other people matter to us: the pursuit of beauty is a way of caring about the common good. If a record number of new homes are to be built in the coming years, therefore, let us aim for them to be beautiful.

### Architect versus no architect

Although debates around architecture and design tend to focus on traditionalist tendencies against modernist tendencies, it is not a major feature of our argument in this report. It is true that the public has a preference – reflected in the polling conducted for this report – and it is right that new homes should be designed accordingly. Yet the most pressing tension is between architect and no architect. Between deep and considered thought over the needs of the individual and no thought at all. Between a settlement and a collection of units.

The reality is that good design is often an afterthought. In too many cases, the design of new homes is led by the business model of the developer – to squeeze as many homes as possible into a certain floor area at the quickest timescale at the lowest rate that can be afforded. The role of the architect is neutered to fulfilling that model. Architectural values and the wider social agenda are simply dropped from the equation. Questions of modernism versus traditionalism, brutalism versus classicism are secondary to whether design has been prioritised at all. As the nation therefore gears towards building tens of thousands more homes per year, more architectural values are needed, not fewer.

### The rise of the planner

The recommendations in this report might be perceived as overly prescriptive towards planners. This would be incorrect. Through focus group work, it is clear planners have a critical role in the process of furthering and safeguarding the sense of place. However, whether through a lack of confidence in the legal cover they have when challenging poor quality developments, or in their ability to drive a developer in the right stylistic direction without endangering the allocation of affordable homes, they are underpowered to fulfil that role. Recommendations in this report seek to address this imbalance, providing planners the capacity to ensure new homes reflect the form and will of the places and communities they serve.

### What is wanted from new homes: Fittingness, belonging and happiness

People don't want excitement or drama from the design of their home. They want a sense of community, comfort and togetherness. The phrase 'fittingness' has been used in previous research and perfectly sums up the desires of most people. They don't want identikit soulless developments or

alienating expansive glass towers. They want homes that fit in with those already there. They want a sense of belonging and happiness to radiate from their properties. And they want to feel proud of their home.

When building new developments, the aim, therefore, should not be a decisive break from the past, but building on the past and reflecting local public will. The difference between a collection of units and a settlement lies in the capacity to meet these needs.

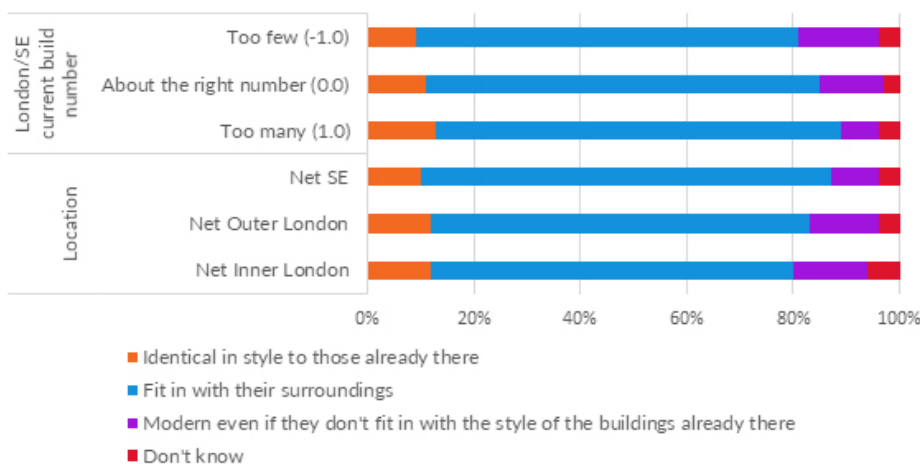
For example, new homes built with a similarity to the existing built environment. In public polling for this report – conducted online by Deltapoll and answered by 5,013 respondents from London and the South East – 74 percent of respondents said new homes should fit in with their surroundings. Just 11 percent said new homes should be modern even if they don't fit in with their surroundings and 11 percent said new homes should be identical in style to those already there. Support for new homes harmonious to their surroundings spans locations and views of the number of new homes in their area. This is illustrated by Figure iii.

Furthermore, people want new homes and communities to be built in a traditional style (albeit with support for modern styles too that work with their surroundings). This is true whether they are in inner London, outer London or the South East. And it is true regardless of whether they want new homes in their area or not.

People also want homes and buildings that engender a sense of belonging, pride and happiness in their look and feel. This is true across all ages, genders and locations.

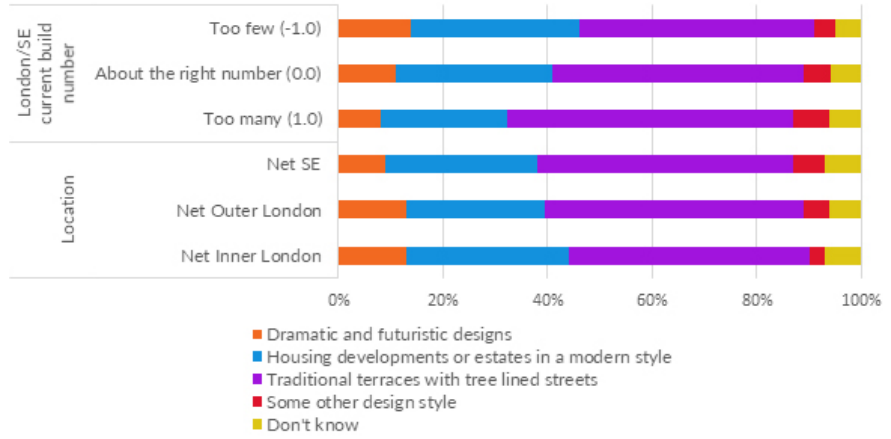
Finally, people want homes that are private, spacious and with design qualities like feature windows and exposed brick facades. These preferences are fairly constant by age, gender and location, except for 'thick, sound resistant walls'. 78 percent of over 65s associate this feature with homeliness, compared to 47 percent of 18-24s.

**Figure iii: Thinking generally about new housing development, which one of the following do you think best describes how new build homes should relate to existing properties?**



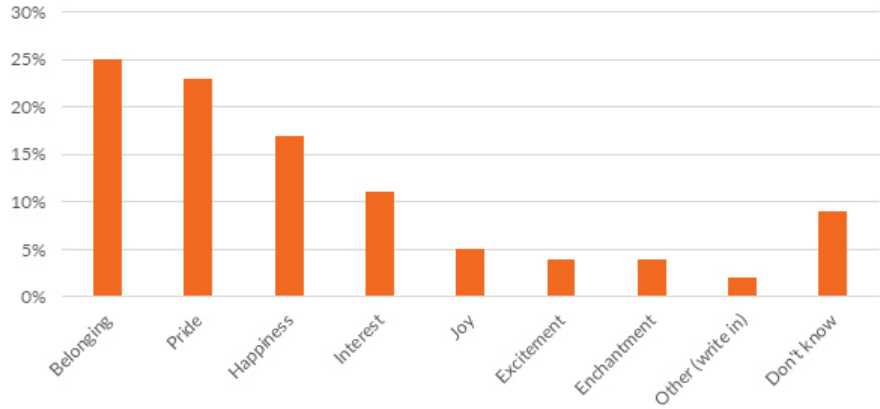
Data source: Deltapoll

Figure iv: Which of the following best describes the style of new homes and communities that you would most like to see built in future?



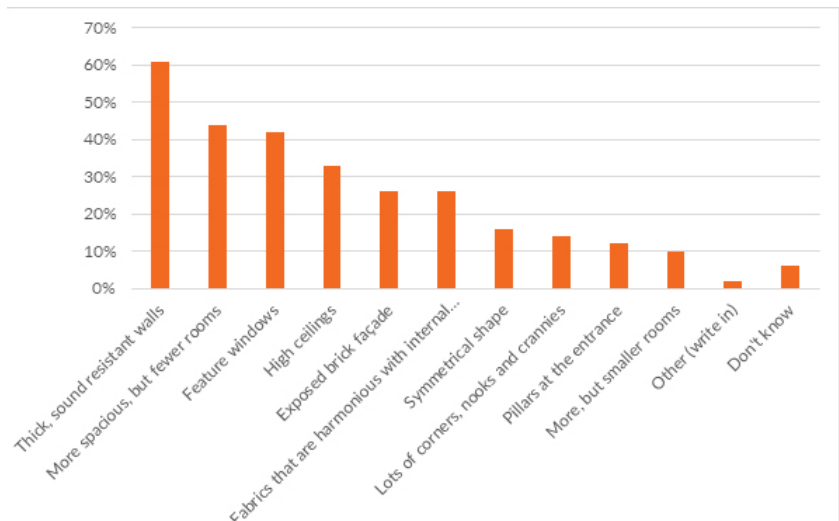
Data source: Deltapoll

Figure v: What single emotion do you think you should have when you think about the look and feel of homes and buildings in your area?



Data source: Deltapoll

Figure vi: Suppose for a moment that it was your responsibility to decide the look and feel of new homes for people in London and the South East of England. Which, if any, of the following features would you include to help create warm feelings associated with home?



Data source: Deltapoll

### Building consensus on design and style

Simply put, the public has a preference on design and style. To achieve consensus on building new homes at the rate required, we should begin meeting it. This does not mean every person liking every new home. Nor does it mean new homes built within the parameters of a narrow set of styles. Both, as the polling for this report indicates, are impossible and, what is more, they are undesirable.

What it means is a design and build process more sensitive to the aesthetic needs of individuals, communities and the nation as a whole, with the views of the public more valued from concept to planning to construction. The expertise of design professionals – the architects and the planners – should be used to that end. The recommendations in this report, listed across the page, are put forward to achieve this.

## Recommendations: A new agenda for design and style

In revisions planned for later this year, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) should:

- Insist every local planning authority produces a design and style guide within eighteen months. This should be designed in consultation with residents and with clear reference to the local and strategic planning framework. In multi-tier areas of governance, the Greater London Authority, mayoral-combined authority or county council should also be directed to produce a design and style guide which applies in lower-tier areas that fail to produce design and style guides within the timeframe dictated. Eighteen months would provide enough time for drafting, consulting and then adopting the guide.
- Make local public will with regard to design and style a more prominent feature of the definition of ‘sustainable development’. Specifically, it should read: “planning should... always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings, reflecting local public will on issues of building design and style”.
- Include a general guide for the design and style of new build homes, to accompany the NPPF.

Within local design and style guides:

- The local planning authority should, where they do not already exist, establish design panels, a third of whose members should be architects living or practising locally. At least one third of the panel should be members of the public who are either likely to live in new homes being built, or who already live in similar types of properties. The panel should advise on new developments above ten units. There should be a process encouraging comparative judgement, with templates for study and a book of existing successful designs, encouraging the exercise of judgment and choice.
- The local planning authority should outline the designs and styles of builds it would view favourably when a home is built using modern methods of construction. This should reflect local public will and then be privileged in the local planning framework. To provide developers with an element of standardisation and the best opportunity for a market to mature, this would be best

done at scale of the Greater London Authority, mayoral-combined authority or county councils.

To encourage developers to build better homes:

- Using a strengthened NPPF, with design and style enshrined in principles of sustainable development, accelerated planning permission should be granted for developments which demonstrably reflect design and style codes.
- Using registers of small sites, planners should provide permission in principle to schemes that use modern methods of construction accepted within the local planning authority's design and style code. These should be specific to small sites.
- Planners should view favourably developments where the local public has demonstrably been consulted from an early stage on its form and design

To ensure community representation in the local planning framework:

- Every new development over 150 units should have a consultant architect appointed by the local council, but paid for by the developer as part of their commitment to the community. The consultant architect's role would be to provide constructive and practical design and style advice to the developer on behalf of the council, thereby ensuring design choices are broadly made in line with local public will.
- Local councils should designate areas, where appropriate, as 'Special Areas of Residential Character' to give residents confidence that new developments will be in keeping with the look and style of the existing area. These would be to promote new buildings in keeping with the existing built environment, rather than a means to frustrate development.

In line with the strong public support they carry, government should accelerate the new garden towns programme. This programme should be coordinated by central government but with local agreement. To incentivise this, in the forthcoming spending review, as part of a renewed Housing Infrastructure Fund, government should:

- Invite funding bids that further civic beauty and design in new garden cities
- Match fund new council tax revenues generated as a result of new garden city developments.

## The Importance of Consensus to Planning and Development

The housing market is a regulated market, and more regulated than most others. While building regulations, health and safety provisions and environmental laws are a relevant part of this regulation, more important by far is the planning process, which intervenes between the provider and the purchaser in ways that have large scale and unintended consequences. Housing is a market in which it is not only the seller and the purchaser who have an interest in the product, but everyone else living in or passing through the neighbourhood, and whose amenity may be affected by what is done. It is vital that the planning process is geared to obtaining the consent of all those people, overcoming their resistance to new proposals and so lowering the political, legal, economic and social cost of the planning process.

This means that every effort must be made to discover what it is that citizens prefer, not only as a home to purchase and to live in, but also as a place to look at, to pass by, and to see in the background of their daily life. Buildings are part of settlements, and settlement is a collective enterprise, in which we depend on others to coordinate their efforts with our own.

Of course people have different tastes, and many decisions are hotly contested. But our research shows that there is a large measure of consensus about the style, scale and details of the buildings that respondents would like to see in their neighbourhood, and that their resistance to new development is largely dependent on ensuring that this consensus is respected. Nor is this result surprising. Beauty is a universal value, which we pursue in part because it is the surest way to reconcile us with our neighbours. Good manners, dress codes, polite speech, clean habits – all these we adopt for aesthetic reasons, because they harmonize our conduct with that of other people. And the same goes for good manners in architecture: we want new buildings to fit in with the old, not to blaze out their defiance of the existing order, but to harmonize with the settlement all around. When people talk about beauty in architecture, it is this ‘fittingness’ that they have in mind, and in referring to it they are expressing their deepest social needs.

Hence people look to the planning process first of all to protect and further the aesthetic quality of their environment. People want ‘beauty in their back yard’ because beauty is a symbol of home. Aesthetic harmony is the sine qua non of settlement, and the only firm requirement that must be fulfilled, if people are to live happily with the others whose property they overlook. The search for beauty and the building of community are therefore two aspects of a single process.



It is therefore of urgent importance to respond to the emerging consensus about planning and housing, as we detail it in our report. Not only should we take note of what people want, we should find the ways to involve ordinary people more centrally in the decision-making process. Some will say that, if we are to place architectural beauty at the heart of planning, then we should give architects a fundamental role in designing the product. But architects have a professional interest in furthering the choices of their clients, and may also be reluctant to build in ways that go against their professional formation. Although their opinions are to be valued, they are not definitive.

What matters far more is the opinions of the general public, and in particular of those whose environment and amenities will be directly affected by the development. We need a way of involving the public, which will make due allowance for the fact that the people most affected by a plan are likely to be too busy to spend more than a few evenings on giving their views, and will need guidance – in the form of comparisons, templates and examples – in order to make up their mind. Such ways of involving the public have been suggested and developed, for example by Ben Bolgar of the Prince's Foundation<sup>1</sup> – and government support is needed to develop such suggestions so as to provide a widely available public resource.

This report is written to these ends. First, we consider the need and want for new homes. Second, we ask whether people like new homes. Third, we outline the reasons why new homes tend not to prioritise aesthetics. Fourth, drawing on extensive public polling of residents in London and the South East and four focus groups conducted for this report,<sup>2</sup> we summarise people's preferences for design and style. Finally, we conclude how design and style can be more prominent in housing policy.

### What do we mean by aesthetic needs?

We have chosen three core needs the individual requires from a home. Good quality design and planning should achieve these. When we refer to aesthetic need in the rest of the report it will exclusively be in reference to the below point unless otherwise stated.

1. A sense of settlement – that their home is part of a community with strong connections and history. That it feels permanent. That the area is welcoming, safe and dignified.
2. A sense of fittingness – that their home is sympathetic to those around it and the materials and design of the home fits in with the landscape and the history of the area.
3. A sense of proportion – that things are designed and built with human needs in mind. The desire for space and natural light. The desire for comfort and privacy.

<sup>1</sup> The Beauty-In-My-Backyard website provides a toolkit to communities seeking to influence the design and style of development in their area: <https://www.bimby.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> Public polling prepared by Deltapoll. Online fieldwork dates: 3rd May-10th May 2018. 5,013 respondents from London and the South East. Focus groups arranged by Deltapoll, themed as follows: architects, planners, members of the public (all) and younger members of the public.

# Achieving Consensus on the Building of New Homes

Increasing the rate of new housing supply is one of government's top priorities in its domestic policy agenda. A large part of Whitehall has been orientated towards achieving that goal – namely the renamed Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government – and last year's Housing White Paper announced steps that will be taken to achieve that. As the Prime Minister wrote in her Foreword, "I want to fix this broken market so that housing is more affordable and people have the security they need to plan for the future. The starting point is to build more homes."<sup>3</sup>

Although the housing crisis spans affordability, a shortage of homes for social rent and issues of inherent unfairness like some leasehold practice, building more homes is the central feature of government's response to the housing crisis. The aim is for many more homes to be built – government has set an aim of 300,000 per year, around a 50 percent increase – and this report is a part of the answer to achieving that in London and the South East, the area of the country most affected by a shortage of housing.

In the report we focus on the importance of reflecting the preferences and ambitions of the public in how new homes are built. This is not to surrender to arguments of nimbyism, far from it, but to help achieve a lasting consensus on what is built in London and the South East and why. Nimbyism often results from a largely justified lack of confidence in the appearance of new developments. As public polling for this research confirms, people from London and the South East are broadly supportive of more new homes being built in their area. But they want them to be designed at a higher quality and more harmonious with their place.

The unattractiveness of some new homes derives in large part from the hugely complex housing market. Land, as we argue, is the key factor, where the economic almost always trumps the aesthetic. Government has made some moves to disrupt the land market in different parts of the country, yet there is more that can be done by them and by local authorities. A second part of any reform programme must include a bolstering of the planning system and planning departments. The answer is not necessarily more regulation, just regulation that is properly applied and policed more in the interests of civil society as a whole. The planning system, after all, is a part of the welfare state. People look to the planning process to protect and further the aesthetic quality of their environment. It should operate to this end.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/590464/Fixing\\_our\\_broken\\_housing\\_market\\_-\\_print\\_ready\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/590464/Fixing_our_broken_housing_market_-_print_ready_version.pdf)

## How many new homes have been built?

From conversions to change of use, the sum of new supply is made up of several components, but primary to it, and the focus of this report, is new builds.<sup>4</sup> Between 2006/07 and 2016/17, 1,670,000 new homes were built in England. After a big drop in the rate of new homes built after the recession, figures illustrated by the chart below show the rate at which they are built has increased significantly in the past few years. Over 65,000 more new homes were built in 2016/17 compared to the number in 2012/13.

## How many new homes need to be built?

Although the exact number of new homes required to match housing demand is contested,<sup>5</sup> household projections suggest that many places will need to increase supply of new homes in their area. This is particularly so in London and the South East. The map below illustrates the challenge ahead. It shows the rate at which annual new build delivery needs to increase to meet projected demand over next ten years for London and South East boroughs.<sup>6</sup> As can be seen, delivery needs to increase significantly in outer London boroughs and in the ring of rural local authorities that skirt the city boundaries.

## Do people want new homes?

One of the main reasons not enough new homes have been built in the past few decades is the failure of politics at a national and local level. Housing policy over the past few decades has been characterised by minimising the number of losers, generating as little productive activity as possible, rather than policy in line with public good. Public opposition has warned leaders away from allocating and approving new homes, reinforcing the assumption that people do not want new homes in their area.

Public polling conducted for this report suggests otherwise. Whether in the UK, London and the South East or their own neighbourhood, less than three-in-ten people from London and the South East believe too many homes are being built in their area. In fact, people are generally positive about new homes, even when they are built in their neighbourhood.

London respondents were especially supportive of a higher number of new homes being built in their neighbourhood. 41 percent of respondents from Inner London supported a higher rate of development in their area and only 16 percent supported a lower rate.

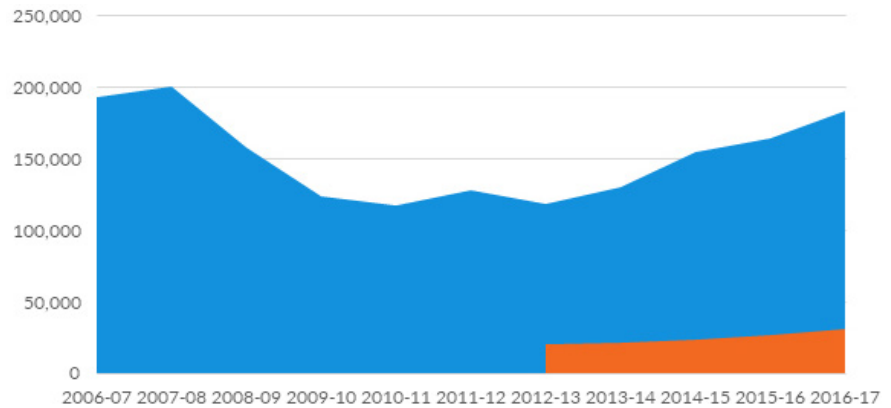
In London and the wider South East, we can see support for new homes in people's own neighbourhoods is highest in Inner London and lowest in Buckinghamshire.

<sup>4</sup> Around 85 percent of additional dwellings, as counted by MHCLG, is new build.

<sup>5</sup> While government hopes for 300,000 homes to be built a year, some have argued there is no shortage in the supply of homes. For instance, <https://medium.com/@ian.mulheim/part-1-is-there-really-a-housing-shortage-89fdc6bac4d2>

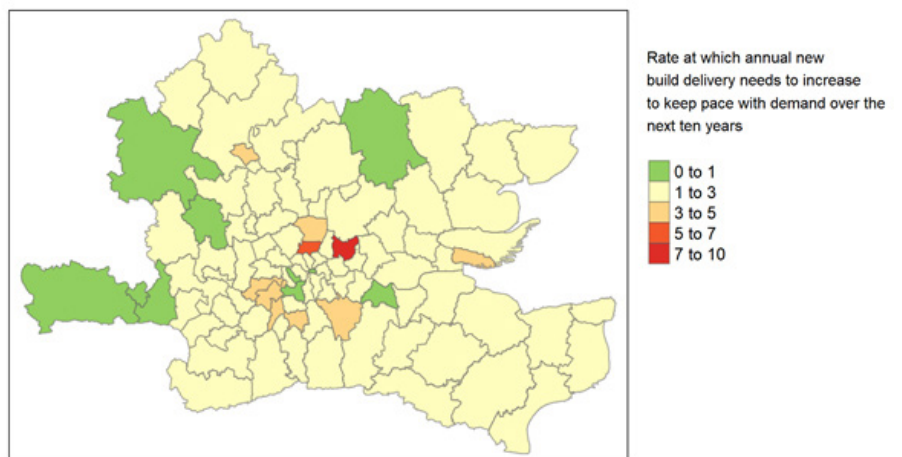
<sup>6</sup> This uses a methodology developed by Localis in their 2017 report *Disrupting the Housing Market*.

Figure 1: New builds in England and London



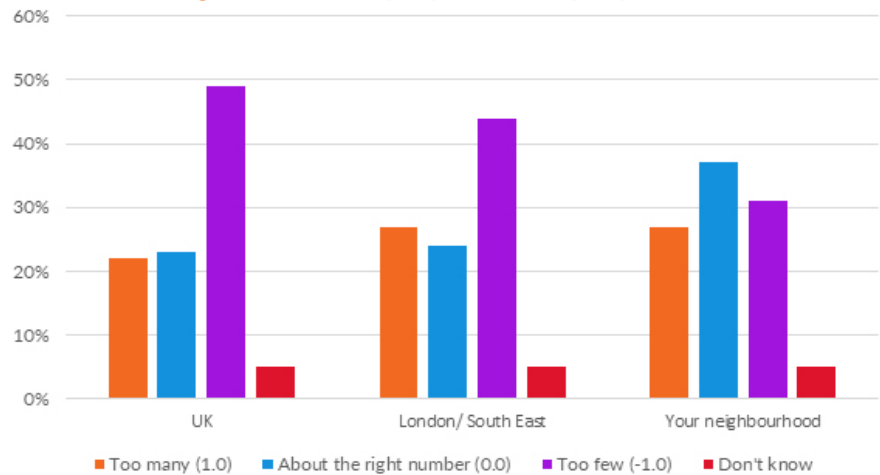
Author's calculations from: MHCLG (2017) – Table 120 Components of net housing supply, England 2006-07 to 2016-17; MHCLG (2017) – Table 123 Housing supply; net additional dwellings, component flows of, by local authority district, England: 2015-16. Figures for London are only available from 2012/13.

Figure 2: Where new build delivery needs to increase the most in London and the South East



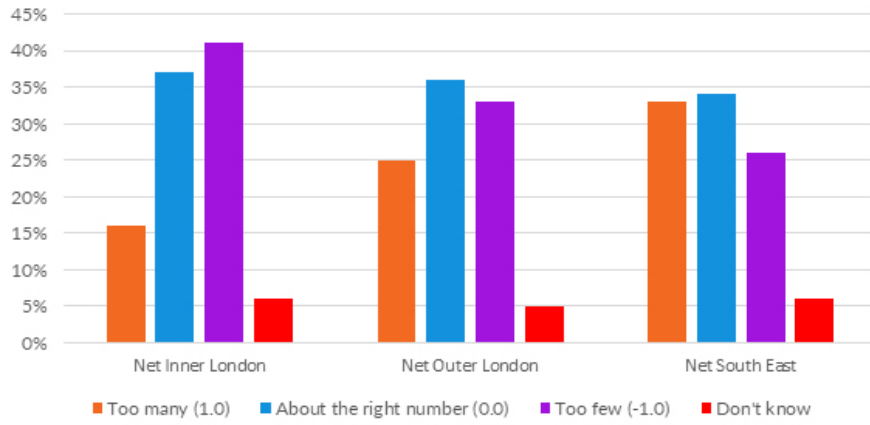
Author's calculations from: MHCLG (2017) - Table 123 Housing supply; net additional dwellings, component flows of, by local authority district, England: 2015-16; DCLG (2017) - Household projections for England and local authority districts.

Figure 3: Do you think that we are currently building too many, too few or about the right number of properties for people to live in..?



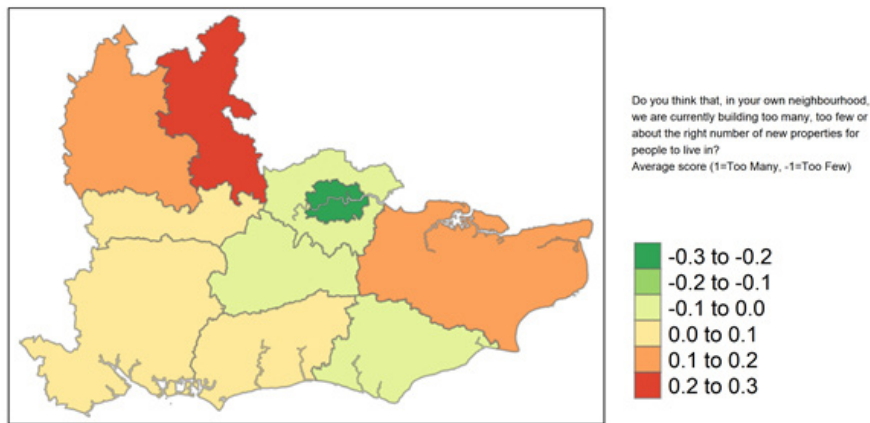
Data source: Deltapoll

Figure 4: Do you think that we are currently building too many, too few or about the right number of properties for people to live in your neighbourhood..?



Data source: Deltapoll

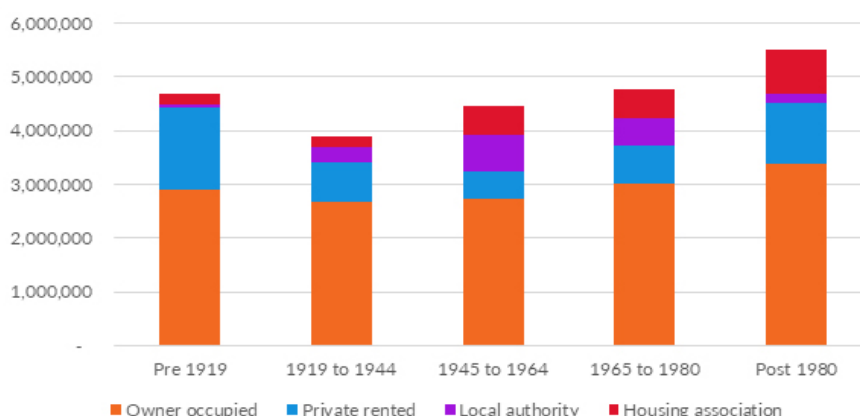
Figure 5: Do you think that, in your own neighbourhood, we are currently building too many, too few or about the right number of new properties for people to live in?



# People Aren't Happy with the Design and Style of Modern Homes

A great many new homes have been built in the past few years, and many more will be built in the years to come. Although over the course of time some will be demolished, and some will be converted, the reality is that new homes are lasting fixtures of the built environment. The graph below shows this. As can be seen, a significant proportion (around 37 percent) of housing in England was built before 1945.

Figure 6: English housing stock by dwelling age and tenure



Data source: Deltapoll

## Do people like new homes?

Given their fixity to the fabric of villages, towns and cities, it is important new homes are built in a way that people like. The point sounds obvious, yet it is worth explaining fully. Firstly, someone's home is a significant part of their lives. They tend to spend most of their time there, they spend much of their money on it and it is a source of pride. It therefore seems essential a new home provides people and families with the environment to flourish. Secondly, a new home will almost always be built next to other people's homes in a wider community. New homes should therefore be built in a spirit and form acceptable to fellow residents. Finally, for a new home to be built it must first receive planning permission. If it is out of keeping with what the majority of residents want and like for their community, it is unlikely permission will be conferred.

Yet, despite planning necessitating ever-higher design standards, the

reality is people tend to take a dim view of how new homes are built. In public polling conducted for this research, over half of respondents from London and the South East felt new homes are built as cheaply as possible to maximise developer profit. Although respondents from Inner London were slightly more positive than Outer London and the South East, no more than one in eight respondents, wherever they lived, felt new homes were built with good design and modern living requirements in mind.

This view was replicated in focus groups held with members of the public to inform this report. Attendees were particularly concerned about the levels of space and homogeneity of new builds. When asked about the look and feel of new built properties, one attendee said how

*no thought [is] put into any kind of character, like... Victorian properties with these little steps here and there, and you know, that does something to you when your house is thoughtfully designed. It brings out things in you, and when I look at new-builds, they just look like boxes. That's it. Meagre boxes.*

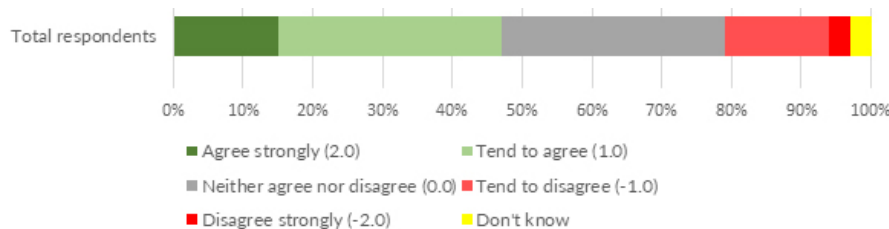
Figure 7: Do you think that modern homes are currently built...?



Data source: Deltapoll

The public polling also shows people from London and the South East tend to find new buildings to be intrusive rather than sensitive to their local environment. 47 percent of respondents agreed with this statement and just eighteen percent disagreed. In focus groups conducted for this report the words soulless, alienating, identikit, chocolate box, noddy houses and ugly, were all used by people to describe their feelings about new development.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 8: To what extent do you agree... new buildings around here have tended to be intrusive rather than sensitive to the existing built environment?



Data source: Deltapoll

7 Focus group

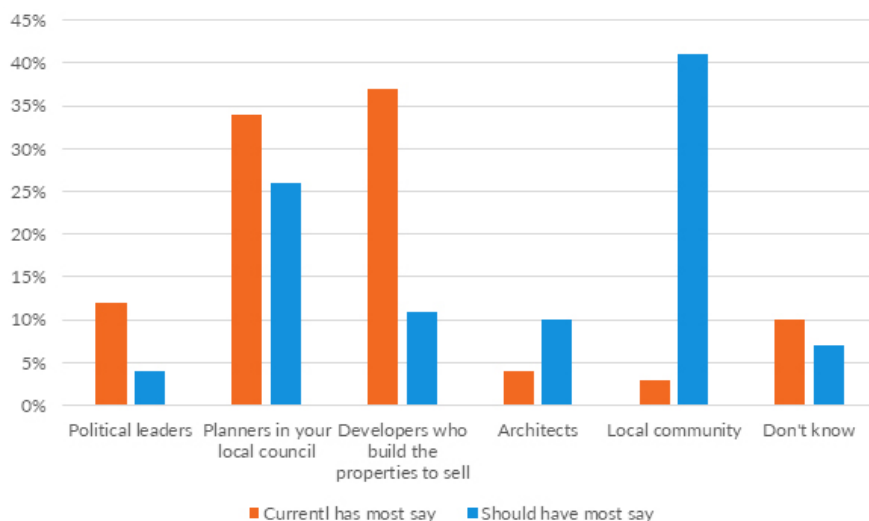
### Homes are rarely built for the individual

Why is it people don't particularly like the homes that are built?

In one sense it is because they are rarely built for people. The architect works for the client and their peers.<sup>8</sup> The developer for the shareholder. The planner for the place. The individuals who eventually live in the homes are a feature of all their thoughts, but a focus of none. In this report we make the case that the aesthetic needs of the individual are marginalised as a result of a deficient house building system, their tastes and preferences forced aside in favour of profit model that developers are unwilling to reform, explain how this manifests and finally, offer a view as to how this can be changed.

Another reason for public disenchantment with new homes is the disempowerment residents feel when dealing with issues relating to the design and style of new developments. As per the chart below, three percent of respondents to our survey felt that the local community currently has the most say in how new homes and communities are designed and built, compared to 41 percent who think they should have the most say. Just 11 percent of people thought developers should have the most say in how new homes and communities are designed and built. This is an astonishing situation for a private market: just over one-in-ten people think the producer of a product should control its production.

**Figure 9: Who do you think currently has/should have most say in how we design and build new homes and communities for people in London and the South East?**



Data source: Deltapoll

Similarly, local planners expressed significant concerns in their capacity to push back against developments which didn't meet the desired aesthetic standards. In particular, they cited the role minimum standards and building regulations can play in being a protection for low quality design, not the consumer.<sup>9</sup>

Like citizens and planners, architects also saw themselves as relatively powerless in the design of new homes. As one said in a focus group, "I

<sup>8</sup> One architect in the focus group said how, "I would probably... care more about the articles in the peer journals, than I would about public perception."

<sup>9</sup> Although, like with all output of the focus groups, it should be noted this is not a view universally held by the planning community.



think the role of the architect has been diminished a lot. Certainly in my experience, particularly when you're at the point where you're going to see planners, it's either the developer, or the client, the funder, or the contractor in some cases, that is taking a much bigger role than they ever used to, and it's their lead that you follow."

## Why beauty matters

The general absence of the individual from the process by which homes are designed and built is to the detriment of society at large. Beauty is a universal value. Whilst we may debate the particulars, the form or position, its existence as a shared aspiration and a guiding light is unchallenged. And, because it is universal, it is worth striving for in the design and style of new homes. When harnessed it can become a powerful lever to strengthen communities. Work conducted in 2010 by Ipsos MORI suggested that "when there is a shared history, feeling of community and pride in a place, people are more likely to say they experience beauty there."<sup>10</sup> And as one respondent at a focus group put it, "Architecture is the most universal form of art. We all experience it."

Further, attractive public spaces, streets as much as parks and gardens, are important factors in both physical and mental health. Research in a number of cities has found that 'more attractive streets and pathways' and 'more attractive public parks and greenspaces' were most often cited as changes that would encourage people to undertake healthy lifestyle activities such as walking, vying with safety as the top priority.<sup>11</sup>

David Halpern's *Mental Health and the Built Environment: More Than Bricks and Mortar?* remains the classic text linking the quality of the built environment and mental health. In the book, Halpern demonstrates a clear connection between the quality of the immediate environment, over and above other factors, and people's mental health.<sup>12</sup> Beauty doesn't just lift the spirits, it stops them from falling.

Collectively, we value things that are beautiful for what they are, not simply what they can do. This intrinsic value is important to people and to regard beauty simply in instrumental terms is to steal something of its essence: it is not a tool, it is an end in itself and people are overwhelmingly content to justify their preferences, and even their spending, by appealing to beauty as a reason. It is something we are all disposed to value for its own sake and spending more for something beautiful makes perfect sense. Governments, however, tend to believe and behave differently. This report makes recommendations to change that.

We know that people monetise the value they place on beauty every day in their consumption choices: whether in where to live, in what to wear or in what technology they use. Where a choice exists, and the means too, each of us will pay a little – or a lot – more for something we find more visually pleasing. We know instinctively that people can and do pay more to live in areas that are more beautiful – houses in Conservation Areas are valued more highly and, while beauty is only one consideration along with schools, transport links and services, it remains a significant factor in our

<sup>10</sup> Ipsos MORI, 2010, *People and Place: Public Attitudes to Beauty*

<sup>11</sup> *City Health Check*, RIBA 2013

<sup>12</sup> Halpern D, 1995, *Mental Health and the Built Environment*

spending decisions. This is borne out by studies that show that places seen as more beautiful command higher house prices and commercial rents. For retailers, a good-quality public environment can improve trading by attracting more people into an area.

Beauty is recognised in statute. The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 not only protects areas of natural beauty but, uncommonly for these days, uses the word beauty. Beauty matters in the context of design and style of houses and places because the only places where it is protected are where few people actually live. Given the scale of its redevelopment, if London is to have beauty, then it will come through its homes and new developments.

### Modernist vs traditionalist forms of architecture?

We believe the noted aesthetic needs are more easily met through traditional forms of architecture. The need to break with the past found in the modernist tendency is difficult to square with the individual's need for settlement. Development is also more likely to be acceptable to residents when it fits in, as opposed to stands out. The work of organisations such as Create Streets in particular suggests this is both achievable and desirable in London, particularly when tried and tested forms, layouts and proportions are adopted and even more so when good quality materials are used.

However, whilst this viewpoint is supported by the extensive public polling conducted for this report, it is also a minor skirmish in a larger fight. The problem isn't good architectural philosophy versus bad architectural philosophy, but rather the absence of any architectural philosophy at all. So many of the decisions made around how to use space or design a building are exclusively financial.

To this end, whilst we will assess the public's preference and present it, we do not explore in detail the arguments for or against one architectural school of philosophy over another.

### A new hope for new building

New homes can be built with good design and modern living requirements at the heart of the design process without spending more. This was the view of 63 percent of respondents to the poll (23 percent said only with additional expense and 14 percent said they didn't know). In general, there is little sympathy towards developers by the general public. 77 percent of respondents said cost is too often an excuse for badly designed, soulless new developments. It was also a view common in focus groups with planners. As one attendee said, "There was a world of low cost housing with great design, so I don't know why this could not happen here."

There are concerns that a focus on design could drive up cost for the developer and in turn mean they drive down their affordable housing allocations. This is encapsulated by the comment of one planner in the focus group: "The problem with pushing for design, and if that pushes the cost up, is the viability of the scheme affects whether or not you get affordable housing, which is a massive need... there comes a point, the

land values are so high that you're in a trade-off situation. Do we want to really push on design? Actually you'll find that local people, and local councils generally do want to push on design, but there's a cost to that. You might not get health and education contributions, you really struggle to get affordable housing, so actually, there's a limited pot that developers are able to commit."

However, the work of organisations like Create Streets has shown that this doesn't have to be at the expense of affordable housing either. For example, recent work with Policy Exchange shows that low rise commercial sites in urban areas, so called 'Boxlands', can be turned into mixed use developments which create London-like neighbourhoods and meet affordable housing need without the objection of local residents.<sup>13</sup>

So, people from London and the South East tend to view new homes as badly designed, though there is an optimism that they do not have to be built this way. Why, then, are new homes built the way they are? From planners to architects to developers, no one actively wants to build ugly homes. And yet, as we have argued, good design and the wants and desires of the individual often seem to be an afterthought.

If we are to start building for people and placing their needs first, meeting their expectations and deliver the design, style and aesthetic satisfaction people want from their homes, we need to explore the fundamentals of how our homes are built. In the next chapter we argue why the economic process by which a home is built is central to good design.

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13 Better Brownfield, Policy Exchange, 2018

# Why New Homes Do Not Prioritise Good Design

For new homes to be designed and built in line with the wants of individuals, communities and nation, the housebuilding process needs to be geared that way. The developer needs to build homes of a form and quality people want to live in. The architect needs to design homes and wider developments that people like. And the planner needs to facilitate the construction of homes that improve the built environment, rejecting those that don't. Unfortunately, at too many stages of what is a complex process, this does not happen. The design and style of the end product, the home, is rarely the focus of anyone's thoughts. Central to understanding why are the uncertainties of the land market and the tensions by which land is regulated.

## The land market

The price a developer pays for land is instructive for the development that is then built. Using a methodology known as the 'residual land value', the price a developer will pay for land is dependent on their expectations of sales value in a few years' time, minus projected build costs and their profit (typically 20 percent of sale price). In what Shelter and KPMG have called the 'land price trap', the typical business model of developers means they "must guess the future sales price of homes many months or years in advance of a sale in order to determine how much to pay for land".<sup>14</sup> To achieve set profit levels, developers are essentially trapped into this formula. Because the land market is so competitive, and landowners tend to accept the highest price offered, the projections on which winning bids are made become ever more optimistic. This means assumptions made on all the characteristics we associate with good design that people want and like – build quality, plot ratios, floor space – are squeezed as more is paid for land.

As Shelter and KPMG argue, this is a perverse mechanism for a market to operate by.<sup>15</sup> Rather than devoting attention to improving their product in line with consumer demand – like almost every other market in the world – the model of major housebuilders is instead predicated on gaining returns on capital investment in the land market. Land is seen as the investment, not as the raw material for a consumer product, namely housing. Hence it is hoarded and exchanged without reference to its use, and without that use being inscribed on the very face of its value. Aesthetics, affordability and social needs are of no consideration to the land market. We cannot expect new homes and settlements to be well designed when the most important input operates against it from the start.

<sup>14</sup> [http://england.shelter.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/802567/Building\\_the\\_homes\\_we\\_need\\_digital\\_copy.pdf](http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/802567/Building_the_homes_we_need_digital_copy.pdf)

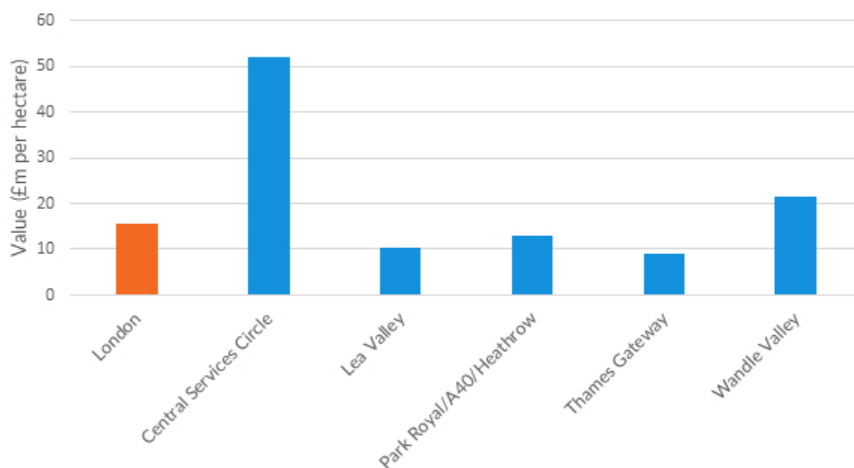
<sup>15</sup> [http://england.shelter.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/802567/Building\\_the\\_homes\\_we\\_need\\_digital\\_copy.pdf](http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/802567/Building_the_homes_we_need_digital_copy.pdf)

Rather than being tasked to design homes people like and consumers want to buy, the role of the architect is neutered. The developer has a formula to adhere to and it's the architect's job to make it work. As one architect put it in the focus group, "They crunch numbers, and they have a picture of what they want to go in with, and you're just trying to make the best of [it]." And as another architect put it, "it's the client who's actually paid the money, who's actually leading the design process."

### The London and South East context

Although they have begun to fall in recent years in line with house prices, residential land values remain extremely high in London relative to the rest of the country. The global nature of the city's labour market and investor profile make its land market highly competitive.<sup>16</sup> Estimations by MHCLG suggest residential land values in London is over ten times higher than other regions of the UK.<sup>17</sup> And, as illustrated by the chart below, residential land values differ quite significantly between inner and outer London.

Figure 10: Residential land value in London



Data source: GLA<sup>18</sup>

In the wider South East, residential land values are significantly lower than estimated in London, however several times higher than in other regions such as the North East and East Midlands.<sup>19</sup> Further, Savills have recently reported that land values are increasing in commuter towns such as Chelmsford, Luton and Reading.<sup>20</sup>

High values of land in London and the South East matter because, as we have shown earlier in the chapter, a great deal of new housing is needed, and expected to be built, in the area. The perverse outcomes of the land market will be particularly acute in these areas. A significant number of local authorities in this rural ring around London do not even have adopted local plans. This means they have no legal policy framework by which development is managed. The fight for good design will be fought in these areas, so it is essential this changes.

16 <https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/chapter4-economic-evidence-base-2016.pdf>

17 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/488041/Land\\_values\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488041/Land_values_2015.pdf)

18 [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/industria\\_land\\_supply\\_and\\_economy2015.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/industria_land_supply_and_economy2015.pdf)

19 MHCLG estimate residential land values in the South East are £3.6 million per hectare. For comparison, they estimate values are £1.1 million per hectare in the East Midlands, £2 million per hectare in the South West and £1 million per hectare in the North East.

20 [https://www.savills.co.uk/research\\_articles/229130/240942-0](https://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/229130/240942-0)

### The public role in a private land market

From the design of new homes to meeting affordable housing requirements, as we have argued, the mechanism by which land is traded is limiting what homes are built against what people want a home to be. It is a market that is failing. Private interests overwhelmingly dominate public interests which damages civil society. This is felt acutely in London and the South East.

Although the state determines what land can be used for – and is a significant owner of land outright – it takes a minimal role in the way land is bought and sold. While we have no desire for a land market that is not private, there is clearly a targeted role the state can take in enabling it to function as a free and fair market should, mitigating and managing the excesses of the land market.

Government has recently announced reforms to this end. In a 2016 DCLG review of the Homes and Communities Agency's, now Homes England's, role and function, it was recommended the organisation “transform[s] its capability to be more active in the land market”.<sup>21</sup> Today it has new land buying powers and significant funding to support a disruption of the land market where viable sites are stalling. Further, changes introduced by the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 have streamlined rules around the use of compulsory purchase powers and associated compensation. Local authorities have also been provided with the power to introduce development corporations which previously necessitated the Secretary of State's sign-off. Development corporations enable places to take a more direct role in the regeneration of specific areas and, in some cases, they have been used in conjunction with compulsory purchase powers.

Recent movements in government policy towards the land market are welcome, but limited. Along with regulatory change to make planning consent less a part of land's long-term value - for instance reducing use of covenants and options, insisting planning consent expires in a shorter time; and even, as happens in other countries, regulating the price of land - there is more that can be done in terms of state procurement to gear the land market towards meeting market need. In this regard, further research is required. Both issues are too big and complex to be addressed in this paper.

### The role of planners

The price a developer pays for land has reverberating effects throughout the process by which a home is built. As we have argued, it impacts the model a developer can operate within and directly impacts resources dedicated to a building's design. Yet land values also place further tensions on those who decide how land can be used: local authority planners. These tensions are evident in two ways in particular:

Firstly, the role a planner takes with regard to their place. Are they a guardian of the realm, making decisions so the new reflects the old? Or is their role to advance the economic and literal growth of their area, focusing on attracting investment and extending opportunity? The answer should be a balance of both. However planners face a number of competing

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21 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/573423/HCA\\_Tailored\\_Review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/573423/HCA_Tailored_Review.pdf)

demands, each of which pull their decision-making one way and another, sometimes against their own instincts and beliefs.

One example of this is where land values are high, a high number of units are necessary for a development to be viable. This restricts the types of development possible for high-value plots of land, imposing a pressure to build up, even if that is not in keeping with the surrounding environment, or reject the development proposal and risk losing investment. In already crowded boroughs, where available land is limited, the pressure becomes even greater. This was summed up by an attendee of the planner focus group: “The real problem is land, because actually, what might be seen as what would fit in, there just isn’t the land for, so then we’re into the tension of actually just getting the raw numbers, and actually, the raw numbers only come through a design that is not what we have”.

A second example is related to the planning proposals themselves. Where a developer has paid a high price for a plot of land, there is a pressure to squeeze costs on build quality. Planning proposals are then put together that only just meet minimum standards. While they can prescribe certain qualities like build materials as a condition of planning consent, planners are often powerless to reject poor developments on the basis of bad quality design, with little hope of winning an appeal if a decision is taken to court. Too often, rather than thinking about what is right for their area, planners have to think in terms of what will avoid the courts. One planner summarised this tension: “when you look at a development, it’s actually, what is the endgame of getting this through, and ultimately, are we going to end up at appeal?” Another noted how when they receive applications they cannot refuse because they would not win the appeal, “often it does come down to trying to develop those relationships with the applicant, with the developer, to try and reduce the harm”.

Secondly, planners face the tension of prioritising good quality of build and design or meeting affordable housing need. In an ideal world this tension would not exist (and research by Create Streets suggests it does not need to). Yet time and again throughout our research it was raised by planners we spoke to. Rightly, local authorities face pressure from central government and the GLA to meet targets for affordable homes. Yet developers argue good design and affordable homes are an extra financial burden they must bear which, when too onerous, can make a development unviable.

## The land market and its regulation militate against good design

Our assessment of the process by which homes are built brings us to the conclusion that: the use of space is almost always a financial decision, not an aesthetic one. The point at which the actual product being produced – the home, not the ‘unit’ – is given consideration too often occurs at the very end of the process. The reality is the way the land market functions, and the impotence of planning departments, militates against the construction of buildings to a level of quality and style of design the public expect and want.

## People's Preferences for Design

Public polling and focus groups conducted for this report find people want homes, not housing units. They value good design and are willing to see more of both their money and public money go towards achieving that. Of particular note is the way people want good design not just for themselves and for their family, but society as a whole. In the focus groups it was clear people want what is best for their community from new developments, but also what is best for people moving into those new homes. This nuance is too often forgotten in debates over new development.

In the rest of this chapter we outline the results of this polling with selected quotes from focus groups with the public. First, we summarise how people value design in the built environment. Second, we consider how people view design in their existing home and community. Third, we ask what form and terms people prefer and support for new homes in London and the South East. Then we consider what forms of development and place people most value and want.

### Outlook on the impact of design

People are overwhelmingly positive about the impact of good design. Both its impact on the individual – 84 percent of respondents thought better quality buildings and public spaces improved people's quality of life and 84 percent of respondents thought living in a well-designed community improves people's happiness - and its impact on a community more widely – 68 percent of respondents thought a well-designed neighbourhood will reduce crime, 65 percent of respondents thought a traditionally designed housing settlement helps foster positive community relations.

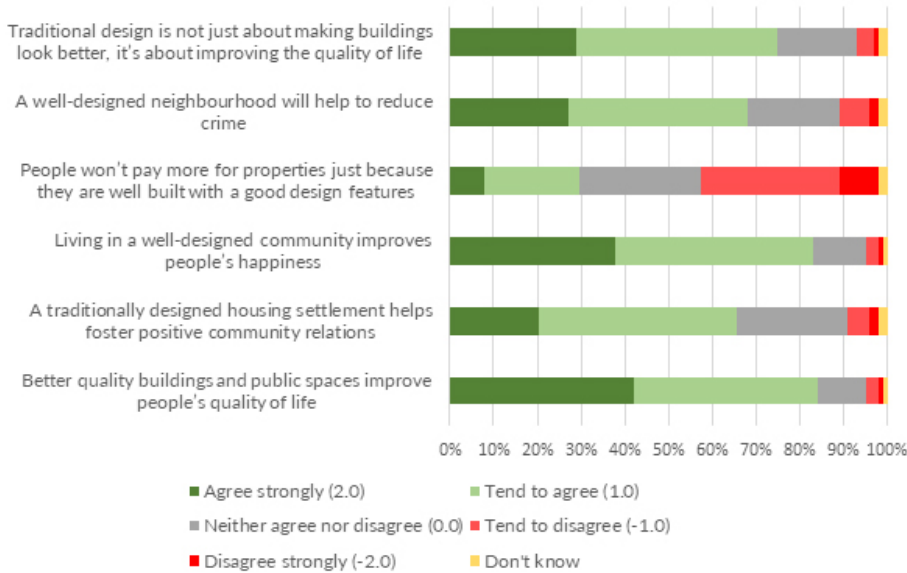
Moreover people are generally positive about the relationship of design with cost. While 30 percent of respondents thought people wouldn't pay more for properties just because they are built with good design features, 41 percent of respondents thought people would. The figures point to a London and South East which cares for design of the built environment.

### How people see their home and place

In the same way that they are positive about the impact of design on lives and communities, people are also positive about their home, the area they live and local civic spaces. Happy, interested, proud and joyful are overwhelmingly the emotions people most associate with each. People are most happy and proud about their home. They find their local area and civic spaces happy and interesting. They are happier about and prouder of their home rather than their area.

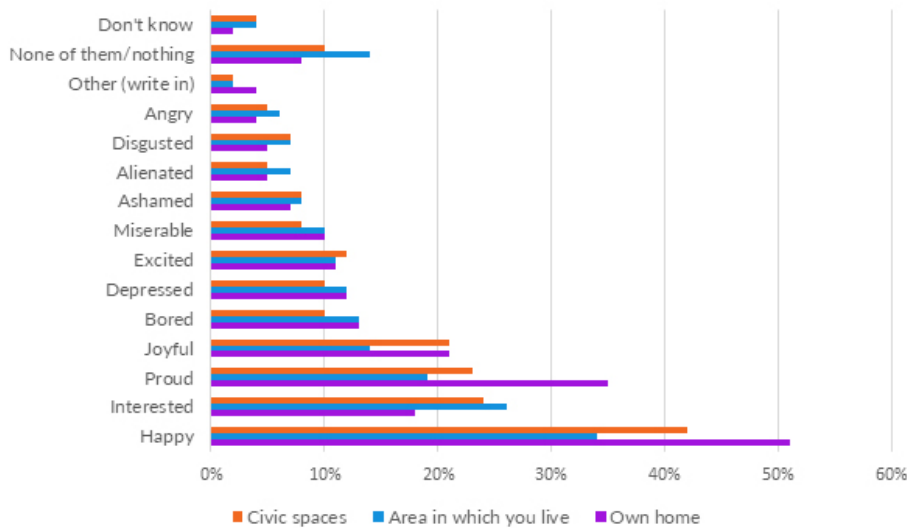


Figure 11: For each of the following statements, do you agree strongly, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree or disagree strongly?



Data source: Deltapoll

Figure 12: Thinking now about the look and feel...in which you currently live, which two or three of the following emotions best describe how you feel about it?



Data source: Deltapoll

People are generally positive about where they live. Yet the factors that they believe make their area a pleasant place to live vary quite significantly by age. For instance, older people tend to value proximity to green and open spaces. Younger people tend to value proximity to facilities. The older the person, the more they value the appearance of buildings and streets.

What is universal is the importance of surroundings to a home. In focus groups with the public, the presence of trees and wildlife were particularly important to people's wellbeing. As one attendee said when asked what

they like about their area,

*"I... get a lot of wildlife. I have foxes. I have got a badger. The badger gets an apple every night and the fox has dog food. There are lots of birds as well, but a green woodpecker. We've got parakeets."*

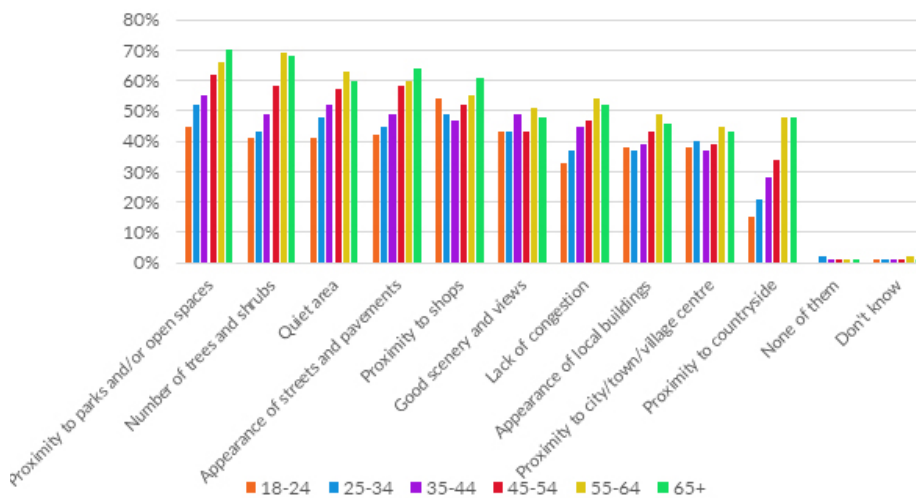
As another said,

*"what I most like about where I live is... overlooking a green, so there's this view of trees that just fills my windows, and I love my bay windows."*

Whether in relation to the noisiness of neighbours, the thickness of walls or if a garden is fenced or not, privacy is another universally important factor. People value civic space, but also the safety and protection of their own. One attendee at the focus group with members of the public said this was most essential to where they decided to live:

*"One of the key decisions I made when I bought my house was that it had to be quiet. For me, it was all about noise, and I suppose, kind of, the actual house came secondary."*

**Figure 13: Thinking only about the area in which you live, which, if any, of the following do you think are important in making your area a pleasant place to live?**



Data source: Deltapoll

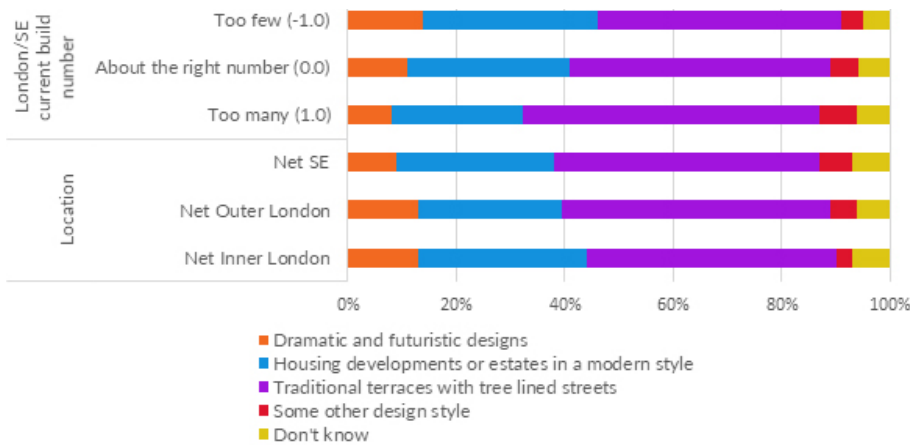
### Attitudes towards the design of new homes and developments

As we have said, in the coming years hundreds of thousands of new homes will be built in London and the South East. People value their existing home and environment, they are generally positive about new homes being built in their area, however they take a dim view of how new homes are built. So, how should this change? What is people's attitude towards

the design of new homes and developments?

Firstly, people tend to think new homes should be built in a traditional style. This is true whether a respondent is from inner London, outer London or the South East. And it is true regardless of whether they want more new homes in their area or not.

**Figure 14: Which of the following best describes the style of new homes and communities that you would most like to see built in future?**

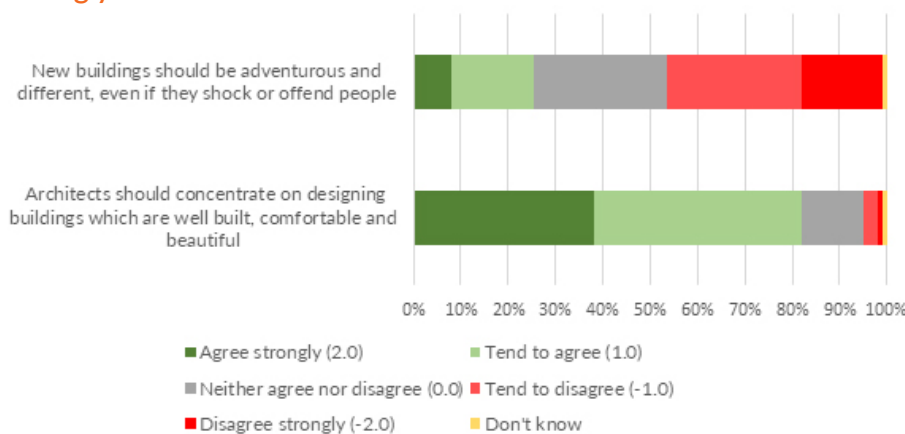


Data source: Deltapoll

Secondly, people want a focus on the comfortable and beautiful, as opposed to the adventurous and different. 82 percent of respondents thought architects should focus on designing buildings which are well built, comfortable and beautiful. Just 25 percent of respondents thought new buildings should be adventurous and different (45 percent of respondents thought they should not be). As a planner said in one of the focus group, “there’s really quite a strong local feeling about not seeing a lot of change.”

Third, people want new homes built with a similarity to the existing built environment. 74 percent of respondents said new homes should fit in with their surroundings. Just 10 percent said new homes should be

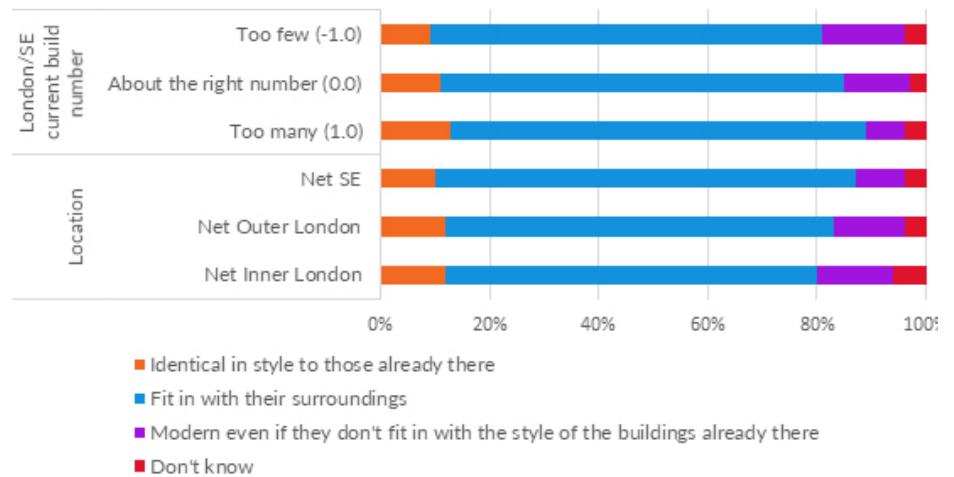
**Figure 15: For each of the following statements, do you agree strongly, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree or disagree strongly?**



Data source: Deltapoll

modern even if they don't fit in with their surroundings. Respondents' support for new homes harmonious to their surroundings spans locations and views of the number of new homes in their area, as per the graph below. The desire for harmony goes against the mind-set of some architects. As one architect said at the focus group, "I think housing should be more about a machine, to use an old adage, a machine for living. It should be about the comfort of the user, rather than fitting in with its surroundings."

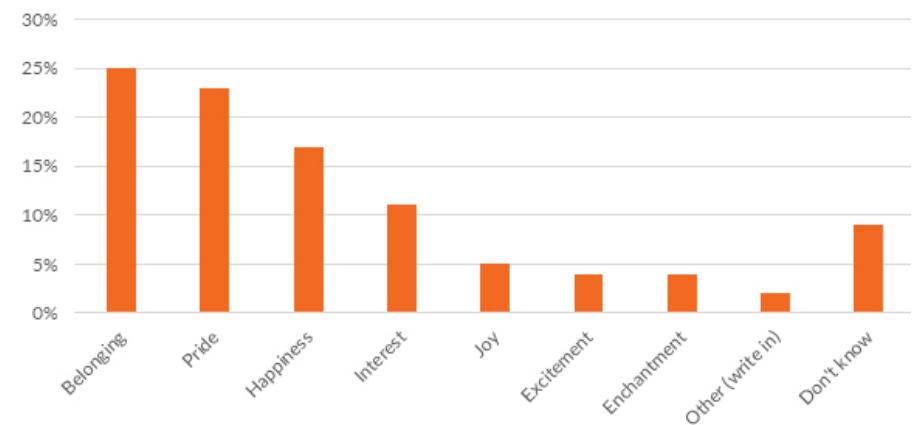
**Figure 16: Thinking generally about new housing development, which one of the following do you think best describes how new build homes should relate to existing properties?**



Data source: Deltapoll

Fourth, people want homes and buildings that engender a sense of belonging, pride and happiness in their look and feel. This is true across all ages, genders and locations.

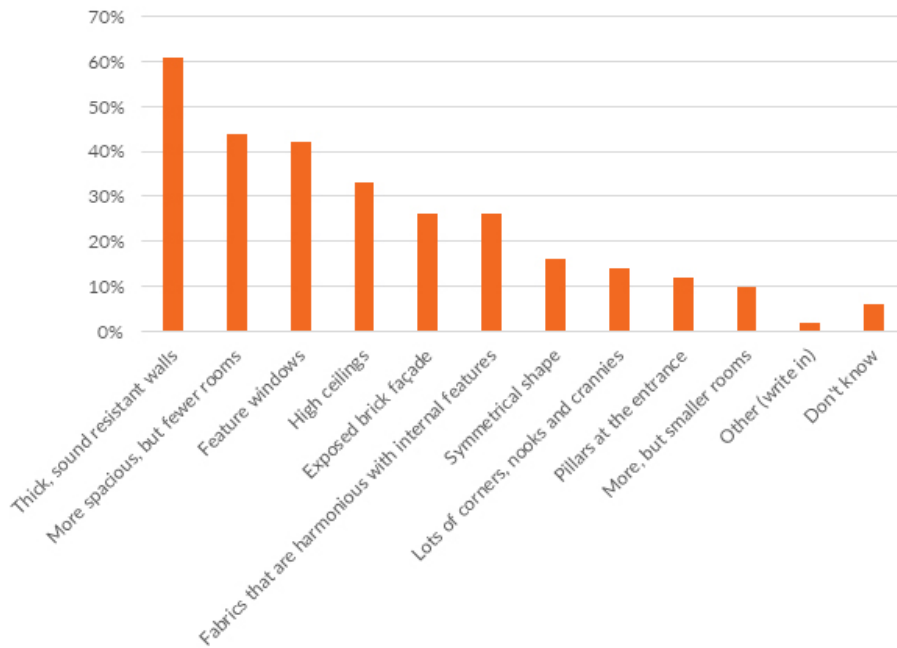
**Figure 17: What single emotion do you think you should have when you think about the look and feel of homes and buildings in your area?**



Data source: Deltapoll

Finally, people want homes that are private, spacious and with design features like feature windows and exposed brick facades. These preferences are fairly constant by age, gender and location, except for ‘thick, sound resistant walls’. 78 percent of over 65s associate this feature with homeliness, compared to 47 percent of 18-24s.

**Figure 18: Suppose for a moment that it was your responsibility to decide the look and feel of new homes for people in London and the South East of England. Which, if any, of the following features would you include to help create warm feelings associated with home?**



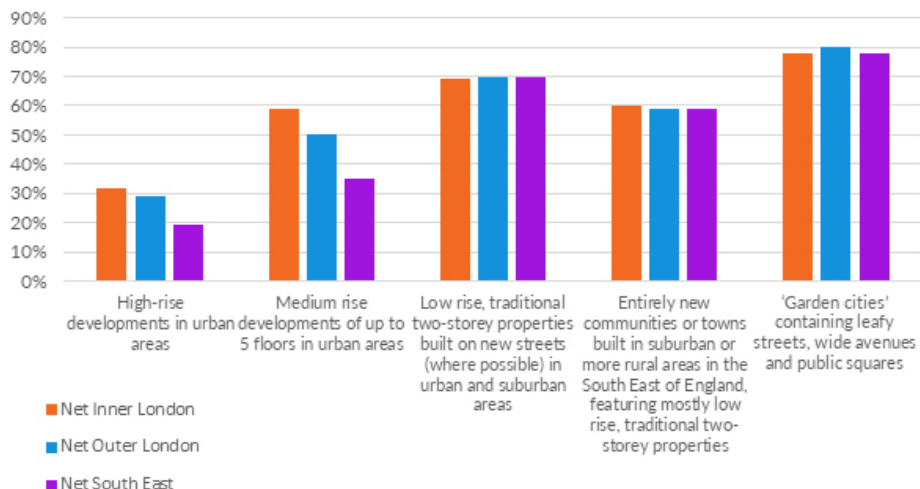
Data source: Deltapoll

### The types of developments people support

When considering general types of development, people are broadly supportive of almost all of them. Close to 80 percent of respondents support the building of garden cities. As these are a feature of government’s plans for increasing housing supply, this should be seen positively. 70 percent support the building of new streets with low-rise traditional two-storey properties. Close to 60 percent support entirely new communities. And medium-rise developments, while opposed by respondents from the South East, are supported by 59 percent of respondents from Inner London and 50 percent of respondents from Outer London.

In focus groups with architects, medium-rise developments were highlighted as an appropriate type of development for building at the rate required, while reflecting concerns of the public, planners and architects: “I think, going back to the housing crisis issue, we’ve got to be building at higher density than that, and there’s got to be some way, we need to find a way of persuading the public and the planners, and the people who are responsible for the change in nature of those neighbourhoods, that medium density is going to be better. Otherwise, you’ll end up with a carpet of two-storey houses, and no space in between to get the numbers that you need.”

Figure 19: To what extent would you support or oppose properties being built in the following ways? (Net support)



Data source: Deltapoll

When considering specific designs and styles of houses, while preferences vary by setting – for instance, whether it’s urban, suburban, rural or very rural (these differences are summarised opposite and shown more fully by tables in the appendix) – rural designs are most popular when size and other factors are discounted. The table below shows four of the five most popular designs were rural, with particularly high popularity even for respondents who live in urban and town locations.

In a specifically urban London setting, respondents tended to support the building of new homes with the look and feel of period architecture, followed by modernist styles. In a specifically suburban setting, there is also a preference for both old – 1930s semis and Victorian terraces – and new vernacular – modern and 1990s suburban homes. In rural housing estates, there is a preference for space and order rather than the futuristic. And, finally, in a very rural setting, there seems to be a preference for homes that use local materials. Terraced cottages were much more popular than more modern styles.

	Urban	Suburban	Large town	Small town & fringe	Village / Rural
	12%	15%	14%	13%	15%
	10%	14%	11%	18%	14%
	6%	9%	6%	12%	16%
	7%	9%	8%	10%	13%
	9%	7%	12%	7%	8%

### The types of places people want

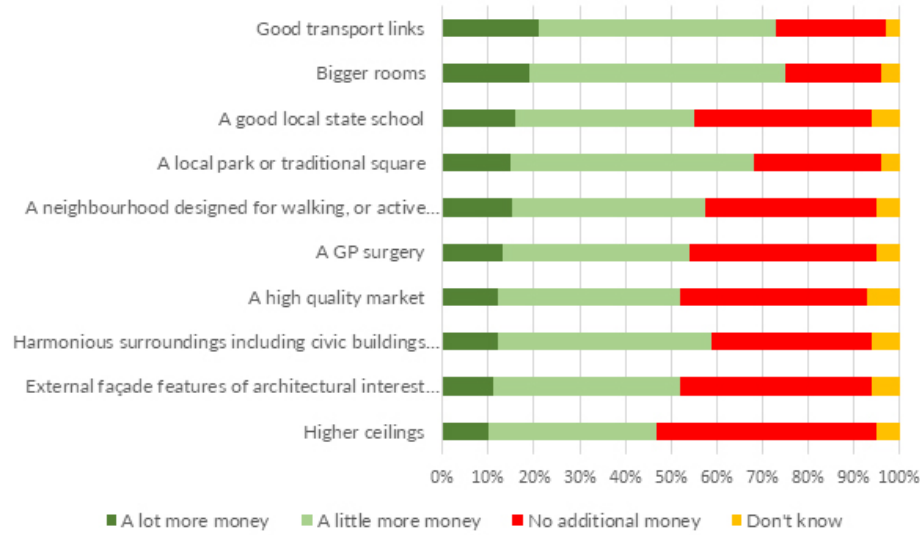
The polling results give a clear indication of the types of homes people want built in different parts of London and the South East. While they differ from city to town to village, there is a widespread preference for new homes to be harmonious with the existing built environment to help foster and maintain a sense of belonging to, and pride for, an area. Yet to focus on the home or only the wider development is to miss a wider sense of why a person might support or oppose housebuilding in their area, or why someone may want to have their home there in the first place.

As demonstrated by Figure 20, factors beyond the form and function of a home like transport, schools and GP surgeries are hugely important to people's buying decisions. This is not to say that the inner and outer design of new homes is not important to people's buying or renting decisions. Quite the opposite is true – over half of respondents said they would spend more money on a home with harmonious surroundings or external features. However it underlines both the importance of place and wider public facilities to people and the importance of identity. Put simply, people want new developments to be a somewhere, not a nowhere. As an attendee of a focus group with members of the public put it, "I think even if the house was really nice, if you were in a grotty, run-down area, or you didn't feel safe walking down the street at night, it would ruin it, so I'd rather have a small, lesser type house in a clean, safe, lovely area, than vice versa."

The importance of well-designed places is relevant to government's plans for the construction of new settlements in the South East. As we have seen, the public are highly supportive of such schemes, they just want them to be designed well. In that regard, it is positive that the centre of one of Welwyn Garden City – one of the first garden cities, planned and built in the early twentieth-century – was the most popular of its type. As can be seen by the relevant table in the appendix, when it comes to town centres, people tend to prefer an abundance of green and ordered space. This should be instructive to the design of future settlements in the wider South East.



Figure 20: If you were in the market to buy a newly built home, would you be prepared to pay a lot more, a little more, or no additional money for each of the following design features?



Data source: Deltapoll

## Conclusion: How design and style can be more prominent in housing policy

No-one actively wants new homes and developments to be badly designed. The public, as we cover extensively in this report, believe in the power, possibility and form of good design. There is a preference towards the traditional and the harmonious, though this is not universal and it varies by setting. Architects, while often seemingly more interested in satisfying their peers rather than the aesthetic needs of people who see and use the buildings they design, are passionate about the built environment. While we can question the style of certain architects and practices, no one denies that people who enter architecture profession aren't doing so but anything but the best of intentions: namely, good design. Similarly, while they are regularly criticised for allowing the building of shoddy developments, the reality is planners face a number of competing tensions. They have to make difficult decisions and today their departments have half the budgets they did eight years ago. Finally, although throughout this report we argue against the types of soulless development too often the norm, the reality is most developers are profit-driven with responsibilities towards their shareholders. It is rational for them to act in those interests.

What this means is the want and responsibility for good design is shared, but only one actor has the means and wherewithal to privilege it further. And that is the state. We have proposed recommendations to that end. Rightly, government has made housing a priority of its domestic policy agenda. To be successful in that regard, and remembered as the government that delivered a lasting solution to the housing crisis, it is essential that design and style are a feature of policy and general attitude to the built environment.

As we have argued, new homes should reflect consensus. Both in the short-term, with greater involvement of citizens and architects in their design. And in the longer-term, where the homes built in the next decade are those most cherished in one hundred years, like Georgian and Victorian architecture are today. Unlike countries like Japan, where homes tend to last for a thirty-year cycle, what is built in the UK tends to be there for a long time. This adds pressure to building beautiful homes.




In the slipstream of last year's Housing White Paper, there is now an ideal opportunity for government to make design and style a more prominent part of housing policy. In the next few months, a green paper will be







published on social housing. Alongside issues like affordability, regulation and safety, we hope design and style of new homes is a central feature of the strategy paper too. And in changes to the NPPF, scheduled for later in the year, we hope design and style is privileged more in the planning system.






Locally, as places refresh and adopt their development frameworks, and as more city regions and counties put together strategic plans, there is also significant opportunity. Local planning authorities can, as we recommend, produce design and style codes to accompany their local plans. They can also invite residents to sit on local design panels to engender cohesion and consensus.






To be clear, a stronger emphasis on good design need not, and should not, come at the cost of affordable housing. Good design and affordable housing should be seen as complementary, rather than exclusive of one another. After all, while we may disagree on its form and conception, beauty is a universal value that should be universally enjoyed.

# Appendix A: The specific designs and styles of houses people support by setting by area status

Which, in your opinion, has the right look and feel for an urban London setting?	Urban	Suburban	Large town	Small town & fringe	Village / Rural
	25%	28%	24%	29%	32%
	17%	15%	14%	15%	11%
	14%	15%	20%	13%	14%

(...continued)	Urban	Suburban	Large town	Small town & fringe	Village / Rural
	12%	14%	10%	15%	11%
	8%	6%	5%	6%	9%
	8%	5%	7%	6%	6%
	6%	3%	7%	3%	4%
	4%	3%	3%	4%	3%
	2%	1%	1%	*%	1%
Don't know	2%	3%	3%	3%	2%
None of them	3%	6%	5%	7%	8%

Which, in your opinion, has the right look and feel for a suburban setting?	Urban	Suburban	Large town	Small town & fringe	Village / Rural
	19%	24%	22%	22%	18%
	20%	18%	26%	18%	19%
	17%	15%	12%	11%	13%
	12%	15%	10%	19%	17%
	13%	9%	7%	11%	11%

(...continued)	Urban	Suburban	Large town	Small town & fringe	Village / Rural
	6%	5%	8%	5%	8%
	4%	4%	5%	4%	6%
	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%
	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%
	2%	1%	1%	1%	8%
Don't know	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%
None of them	1%	2%	3%	2%	1%

# Appendix



Which, in your opinion, has the right look and feel for a housing estate setting?	Urban	Suburban	Large town	Small town & fringe	Village / Rural
	29%	37%	36%	39%	36%
	30%	30%	30%	28%	27%
	19%	14%	16%	10%	5%
	14%	13%	11%	15%	14%
Don't know	6%	4%	4%	6%	17%
None of them	2%	3%	3%	2%	1%



Which, in your opinion, has the right look and feel for a very rural setting?	Urban	Suburban	Large town	Small town & fringe	Village / Rural
	29%	31%	28%	35%	34%
	29%	27%	32%	29%	28%
	19%	18%	17%	18%	19%
	17%	17%	17%	15%	14%
Don't know	3%	4%	3%	2%	4%
None of them	3%	2%	3%	1%	1%

## Appendix B: The types of location centres people support by area status

What look and feel of central location would you choose for a larger town?	Urban	Suburban	Large town	Small town & fringe	Village / Rural
	34%	33%	34%	33%	35%
	20%	22%	22%	22%	16%
	16%	13%	14%	14%	14%

(...continued)	Urban	Suburban	Large town	Small town & fringe	Village / Rural
	12%	14%	15%	16%	18%
	12%	13%	9%	10%	11%
Don't know	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%
None of them	2%	3%	4%	3%	2%

The UK needs more homes, particularly in London and the South East. Yet local opposition to their construction holds back development – so-called Nimbyism. This report by Policy Exchange seeks to understand the challenge and suggests recommendations.

The report found that the housing crisis will only be solved if developers of new homes place more emphasis on design and style to gain the support of existing communities, according to exclusive new polling for Policy Exchange. *Building More, Building Beautiful: how design and style can unlock the housing crisis*, with a Foreword from Secretary of State for Housing Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, shows that Nimbyism can be overcome if plans better reflect people's desire for traditional building design, like Victorian terraces and Georgian blocks.

The report was co-authored by conservative thinker Sir Roger Scruton and former Labour Mayor of Newham Sir Robin Wales, who argue that by placing greater emphasis on design and style, communities would be reassured that development would enhance their community.

Sir Robin Wales said:

*“This research shows that people are broadly supportive of more new homes being built in their area - they just want them to be designed at a higher quality and more harmonious with their place. If the Government wants to meet its target of building 300,000 new homes a year, they need to recognise that good design and style are vital to securing local consent for development. Poorer communities in particular are keen to see more traditional design and style which is more likely to fit in with existing buildings.”*

Sir Roger Scruton said:

*“For too many people, new homes don't mean progress but desecration. Housing is a market in which it is not the seller and the purchaser only who have an interest in the product, but everyone else in the neighbourhood or passing through the neighbourhood, and whose amenity may be affected by what is done. It is vital that the planning process is geared to obtaining the consent of all those people, overcoming their resistance to new proposals and so lowering the political, legal, economic and social cost of the planning process.”*