

INTERIM REPORT

# EXPOSING THE HIDDEN HOUSING CRISIS

Public attitudes to 'affordable housing'  
and housing policy

November 2021



Exposing the Hidden Housing Crisis  
Public attitudes to 'affordable housing' and housing policy  
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# Contents

About the Centre for Social Justice	2
Acknowledgements	3
Foreword	4
Executive summary	6
Introduction	10
<b>Part 1: The hidden housing crisis</b>	<b>12</b>
1 The hidden housing crisis	13
2 A new vision for affordable housing is needed	23
<b>Part 2: Public attitudes to housing and the Government's policy response</b>	<b>29</b>
3 Housing and 'the politics of belonging'	30
4 Attitudes to housing affordability	33
5 Attitudes to housing policy	39
6 Attitudes to social housing and new housing developments	46
7 Attitudes to a low-cost rented homebuilding programme	56
<b>Part 3: Understanding the electorate's views on social housing</b>	<b>62</b>
8 Introducing six segments of the English public	63
9 Understanding the different segments' attitudes to social housing	70
Appendix 1: Segment demographics table	83

# About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five 'pathways to poverty', first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report *Breakthrough Britain*. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report *It Happens Here* shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises and other grass-roots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2021 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.





# Acknowledgements

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We are grateful to the sponsors of this report.

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# Foreword

Of the many lessons the pandemic has taught us, one is surely the importance of home.

As Covid forced us away from our favourite haunts and meeting places, our homes took on a new meaning altogether – becoming classrooms, workplaces and fortresses against the virus almost overnight. Yet the varying experiences of lockdown over the last year and a half reflect concerning disparities in England's housing stock today.

For example, the instruction to 'stay at home' in March 2020 meant something entirely different for the 820,000 households living in cramped, overcrowded conditions. The closure of outside spaces disproportionately affected the one in eight who lack access even to a shared garden. And the thousands of children locked down in one-bedroom flats alongside parents and siblings undoubtedly found the move to online learning all the more challenging.

In short, our vulnerability to the social impact of Covid – and indeed the virus itself – was unavoidably shaped by the places in which we live. Yet the truth we must face up to now as politicians is that, while the pandemic shone a spotlight on many of the injustices in housing, these are not new. Building back better must include staring difficult problems in the face.

As Prime Minister, I made it my personal mission to address the inequity in our housing market. We knew we simply could not carry on in the same direction – and I am proud of what we achieved.

We put generational reforms in motion to improve housing security for renters. We tightened up the planning system to ensure developers meet their obligations to deliver more affordable homes. And we abolished outdated restrictions on local authorities to help build the new generation of council homes we desperately need.

It has been encouraging to see the Government advance on these reforms, including through the increased allocation for new social rent in the £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme, and the forthcoming Renters Reform Bill.

But let's be clear. The dysfunction in our housing system is deep-rooted, having developed over multiple decades and under governments of all stripes. Addressing it fully remains one of the fundamental public policy challenges of our time.

And so it is welcome that the Centre for Social Justice has set out to develop a new vision for truly affordable housing in England. Because, as the CSJ exposes in this important report, there remains today a 'hidden housing crisis' that is exacting a huge toll on our nation's collective health, wellbeing and finances.

Millions of renters are seeing the gains of work undermined by exorbitant housing costs, with over two-thirds of private renters in the bottom two income quintiles seeing more than 30 per cent of their disposable income eaten away by rent. According to one recent study, it is estimated that nearly two million couples have delayed or chosen not to start a family because of their housing situation. Some 124,000 children will go to sleep tonight in temporary accommodation, facing significantly hampered educational prospects as a result.

Taxpayers are now picking up the bill for decades of too few truly affordable homes being built. Next year, housing benefit expenditure is forecast to exceed £30 billion – and then to double again in the 30 years thereafter as more (and older) households see the more expensive private rented sector as their only option.

We must put this right.

For as I argued while in Downing Street, the focus on helping the ‘just about homeowners’ onto the ladder – vital though this is – has at times distracted from what should be our overwhelming priority as Conservatives: ensuring that everyone has a decent, affordable and secure home in which to live, work and build strong families.

Of course, this argument is not a new one. The Conservative manifesto of 1951, on which Winston Churchill sought his second term in office, was resounding: “Housing is the first of the social services... [t]herefore a Conservative and Unionist Government will give housing a priority second only to national defence”. He was elected on a platform which recognised housing as “one of the keys to increased productivity.” Overcrowded and unsuitable homes were rightly identified as the enemy of work, family life, health, and education.

Margaret Thatcher, similarly, saw the immense potential of social housing as a springboard into home ownership. Indeed, what is often forgotten about the introduction of the Right to Buy is that, in the early years of the policy between 1980–85, more than 250,000 new social homes were built to replenish the stock – giving thousands more families a path to realising the dream of ownership.

Rediscovering our tradition of truly affordable housebuilding for the 2020s is what is needed if we are to address the social, economic and fiscal costs of the hidden housing crisis. Moreover, as polling evidence presented by the CSJ suggests, this would be in tune with the views and desires of the new electorate as it has realigned in the years following the Referendum.

So now I call on Conservatives to let us make it our shared mission, once again, to fix this hidden housing crisis as a central plank of our levelling up agenda. And even as we hope to have put the worst of the pandemic behind us, we must never forget just how much home matters.



**The Rt Hon Theresa May MP**  
Prime Minister, 2016–19

# Executive summary

## A new vision for affordable housing is desperately needed

It has become hackneyed to describe the state of housing in England as a 'crisis'. For many, the phrase has come to be synonymous with the growing chasm between the average wage and the price of a home.<sup>1</sup> Yet the plight of those struggling to get on the housing ladder, serious though this is for our society and economy, reflects merely one dimension of the housing crisis in England. Indeed, while this aspect has received considerable attention from both politicians and the media, there is another – darker – side to the story.

That is, the rise of expensive, insecure and poor-quality housing for families with far less to begin with. As we show in this report, the collapse in the supply of decent, affordable homes for people living on modest to low incomes has not just made homeownership even less attainable. It has made it harder to start and maintain healthy families, to thrive in work, and to provide an educational foundation for children.

Poor housing worsens everything, stable housing fixes lots.

CSJ Alliance Charity, North East

If you're a family of five sharing one room, how can you expect a child to engage in their learning or be able to do their homework...? Attainment is also about the housing issue.

CSJ Alliance Charity, London

The Government has published plans to increase the delivery of homes (primarily to buy) through reforms to the planning system.<sup>2</sup> It has allocated a welcome £11.5 billion for new affordable housing until 2026, building on measures introduced to increase the supply of homes for social rent, such as the recent removal of borrowing restrictions on council housebuilding.

Yet the supply of truly affordable homes for rent still falls well short of what was delivered historically to meet the needs of the population living in inadequate housing and for whom buying remains a distant dream.<sup>3</sup> Our research found that:

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1 Guardian, 'House prices hit record high despite cut in stamp duty break', 7 September 2021

2 MHCLG, Planning for the Future, 2020

3 By 2021 the annual delivery of 'social rent' homes had fallen to 6,000 from 50,000 in the early 1990s and over 100,000s in the 1960s, as the Government shifted its delivery priority to more expensive 'affordable rent' housing following the 60 per cent reduction in grant funding set out in the Budget 2011.

- tonight, over 90,000 families and more than 120,000 children will go to sleep in 'temporary accommodation' (including bed and breakfasts), with serious implications for health and education;<sup>4</sup>
- over two thirds (69 per cent) of private renters in the lower two income quintiles spend 30 per cent or more of their disposable income on rent, representing 1.2 million households;<sup>5</sup>
- an estimated 150,000 properties see parents sharing a bedroom with their children;<sup>6</sup>
- high housing costs have critically undermined the impact of positive government initiatives to raise incomes among lower earners (such as increasing the minimum wage and personal tax allowance), constituting a key driver of 'in-work poverty';<sup>7</sup> and
- 60 per cent of private renters have less than £100 in savings, making even low-cost home ownership affordable housing products (such as Shared Ownership or First Homes) unattainable.<sup>8</sup>

Reversing the decline in good quality and truly affordable housebuilding, while addressing the drivers of demand, is desperately needed to improve the health of the nation and its finances – putting thousands more lower earners on a realistic path to home ownership.

Indeed, the fiscal consequences of this hidden crisis are just as stark, as housing benefit spending has risen dramatically to account for systemic changes in the way our nation is housed. **As governments of all stripes have become more reliant on the ballooning private rented sector to house lower earners,<sup>9</sup> expenditure on housing benefits<sup>10</sup> is forecast to be £30.3 billion by 2021–22 – more than double the total government grant allocated for new affordable housing until 2026, in just one year.** While the total benefit expenditure is higher overall in the social rented sector, the spending is considerably higher per home in the private rented sector and – crucially – does not lead to re-investment in new truly affordable housing.

In this context, policies to support the 'just about homeowners' must be at least matched in ambition by plans to improve the housing of those struggling the most. The CSJ has embarked on a programme of research and policy to develop an ambitious but credible vision for truly affordable housing in the 2020s.

4 At time of writing, September 2021. MHCLG, Live Table TA1 TS, Households in temporary accommodation, 2021; Shelter, The impact of homelessness and bad housing on children's education, 2018 ; Local Government Association, The impact of homelessness on health, 2017

5 MHCLG, English Housing Survey 2019 to 2020: headline report, 2021

6 National Housing Federation, Housing Issues During Lockdown, 2020

7 Institute for Fiscal Studies, Why has in-work poverty risen in Britain?, 2019

8 MHCLG, English Housing Survey 2019 to 2020: private rented sector, 2021

9 The PRS has doubled in size since the millennium. MHCLG, English Housing Survey 2019–2020, 2021

10 Including both Housing Benefit and the housing element of Universal Credit.

## Any new vision for affordable housing must resonate with the public

They build these houses that people can't afford... when they sold off the council houses there was nothing.

Carol, North West

I think we should build more social housing. Looking at my kids, I can't see them getting on the property ladder without it, not for a long while. It would just be a help and it would boost the economy.

Trevor, South East

A range of recent publications have used estimates of 'housing need' to inform proposals for the Government to increase the delivery of 'social rent' homes to 90,000 annually, up from around 6,500 at present.<sup>11</sup> Rarely, however, has the proposal for a low-cost rented housebuilding programme been tested considering public opinion today.

Given the electoral earthquakes felt in recent years, whether 2016's vote to Leave the European Union or 2019's Conservative majority gained by victory in former Labour strongholds, understanding public attitudes is essential to developing policy that is credible, desirable, and politically achievable. The realignment of traditional party demographics and introduction of new political identities, moreover, requires more sophisticated analytical techniques than conventional polling to do this.

In 2020–21 the CSJ partnered with Stack Data Strategy to carry out a nationally representative poll of 5,000 English adults, as well as a combination of cluster analysis and principal component analysis (PCA) to segment respondents into distinct groups for further investigation. With 'spoke questions' and regression modelling, Stack Data Strategy identified six segments of the population whose shared attitudes provide important implications for housing policy: New Conservatives; Shire Tories; Metropolitan Elites; Liberal Centrists; Aspirational Individualists; and the Disengaged Middle.<sup>12</sup>

**This exercise revealed that the New Conservative segment – whose votes underpinned Boris Johnson's electoral majority in 2019 and are expected to be a key determinant of the next election – is highly supportive of government intervention in low-cost rented housebuilding (alongside policies such as Leaving the EU, investing in the NHS and reducing immigration).** Two-thirds of New Conservative voters (67 per cent) said that social housing should be made a government priority, over twice as many as the Shire Tory segment who have constituted the traditional Conservative vote.<sup>13</sup>

The research also found that:

- a quarter of the English population said they found it either fairly or very difficult to pay their housing costs, this rising to 43 per cent of private renters;

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<sup>11</sup> A useful compendium of recent proposals is HCLG Committee, Building More Social Housing, 2020

<sup>12</sup> Please note that this segmentation analysis is an indicative technique used to identify clusters with shared attitudes; it should not be assumed that all individuals gathered in this way voted for the same party in the GE 2019 as the majority in their segments (or indeed voted at all), nor that these are static groups.

<sup>13</sup> Stack Data Strategy found that 27 per cent of the Conservative vote in 2019 was cast by 'New Conservatives', compared to 25 per cent being cast by 'Shire Tories.' See Part Three of this report for the full demographic breakdown of the segmentation.

- 60 per cent said they think the housing crisis has worsened ‘significantly’ due to the pandemic;
- less than one in four people (24 per cent) believe the Government’s definition of affordable housing is truly affordable to local people;
- just under two thirds (63 per cent) believe the Government needs to supply low-cost homes to rent to end the housing crisis;
- 55 per cent said building social housing should be a priority of the Government;
- 58 per cent said building more low-cost homes to rent would ‘level up’ the country;
- 55 per cent of people said ‘affordability’ should be the primary aim of housing policy, while 11 percent said ‘eventual ownership’; and
- across all segments uncovered in the analysis, agreement outweighs disagreement that ‘a robust social housing scheme reduces the strain on health and social services’ – with strong majority support in most segments.

In short, this research suggests that there is no simple left-right divide in England on what is known today as ‘social housing’, following the seismic realignments in political affiliation seen in recent years. This presents a major opportunity for the Government to reset the agenda on truly affordable housing and address the social, economic and fiscal problems associated with the hidden housing crisis – with considerable public support.

Given the scale of disillusionment over current ‘affordable housing’ policy also revealed in the polling, **we recommend the Government initiates a process of rapid evidence gathering to reshape social and affordable housing policy in the 2020s, with the publication of the Levelling Up white paper.** In the next report in this series, the CSJ will publish a raft of policy proposals which we hope the Government will consider in this initiative and in its efforts to Build Back Better.

# Introduction

The United Kingdom stands today in the midst of marked political change. Brexit, the coronavirus pandemic, and the 'red wall' shifts in electoral support at the 2019 election have contributed to, and revealed, stark changes in public opinion and party affiliation.

As parties' voter bases change, it is more important than ever for them to understand how different groups think about key issues. Similarly, think tanks and organisations developing policy proposals for the advancement of social justice must ground these in public opinion if they are to stand a viable chance of being adopted. With this in mind, this report examines one of the most significant and challenging policy issues today: the quality and affordability of housing.

Today's 'housing crisis' is often thought to concern the difficulty of getting on the ladder to homeownership as rents and house prices continue to rise dramatically. However, there is a further, 'hidden' housing crisis which leads to miserable social outcomes such as low-income, poor health and homelessness. Furthermore, this hampers people's life prospects for tomorrow, leading to an acute feeling of them, their community, and their children being "left behind".

**Part One** examines the changes in housing tenure that have produced this crisis, including the rise of extremely expensive private rented sector accommodation. We consider both the financial and social impact of this change for families in England, as well as the fiscal implications as governments of all stripes have become more reliant on housing benefit. We show that for those employed with modest incomes, high housing costs are undermining the gains of work, and examine the way poor quality and overcrowded accommodation exacerbates poverty and deprivation.

However, to view the current crisis merely through an economic lens is to miss crucial aspects of it. It is also a social and political issue. The crisis we highlight in Part 1 needs a truly visionary policy response. This is only possible through a rigorous understanding of public opinion in the context of recent seismic attitudinal and political shifts.

**Part Two** remedies this lacuna in political understanding by detailing the results of a major national survey examining up-to-date attitudes towards social and affordable housing in England. We situate the housing crisis in the context of shifts towards what has been described as the 'politics of belonging',<sup>14</sup> and present top-line survey results on attitudes to affordability, current housing policy, social housing, new developments, and a prospective programme of low-cost rented homebuilding.

**Part Three** goes deeper by examining the findings of a segmentation analysis of public opinion on housing. By looking beyond basic demographic indicators and clustering people by their views across a range of social, cultural and economic questions, we can understand more clearly

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<sup>14</sup> See: Onward, The Politics of Belonging, 2019



how wider attitudes and demographics relate to opinion on social housing. This provides insight into how the dramatic shifts of opinion and political support seen in recent elections relate to views on housing and, in turn, how this might affect the ways parties respond to their support bases' preferences.

This report will be followed a second report – currently under investigation at the Centre for Social Justice – on how the Government and the housing sector can learn from this polling and deliver a new vision for social housing.

part one

# The hidden housing crisis



## chapter one

# The hidden housing crisis

## 1.1 Introduction

There isn't enough ... I was waiting for somewhere and I lived in one room with two children. I was classed as 'overcrowded' and I still waited for three years.

**Annie, North West England**

It has become hackneyed to describe the state of housing in England as a 'crisis'. For many, the phrase has become synonymous with the growing chasm between the average wage and price of a home.<sup>15</sup> Yet the plight of those struggling to get on the housing ladder, serious though this is for our society and economy, reflects merely one dimension of the housing crisis in England. Indeed, while this aspect has received considerable attention from both politicians and the media, there is another – darker – side to the story.

That is, the rise of expensive, insecure and poor-quality housing for families with far less to begin with. As we show in this report, the collapse in the supply of decent, affordable homes for people living on modest to low incomes has not just made the dream of homeownership even less attainable, it has tightened the grip of poverty. It has made it harder to start and maintain healthy families, to thrive in work, and to provide an educational foundation for children. Meanwhile the fiscal consequences are stark, as housing benefit spending has risen dramatically to account for seismic changes in the way our nation is housed.

Together this constitutes the hidden housing crisis which, as we set out in Chapter One, carries alarming implications for social justice in England.

## 1.2 Housing tenure has changed significantly

Exposing the underbelly of the housing crisis means appreciating the extent to which housing in England has changed in recent decades.

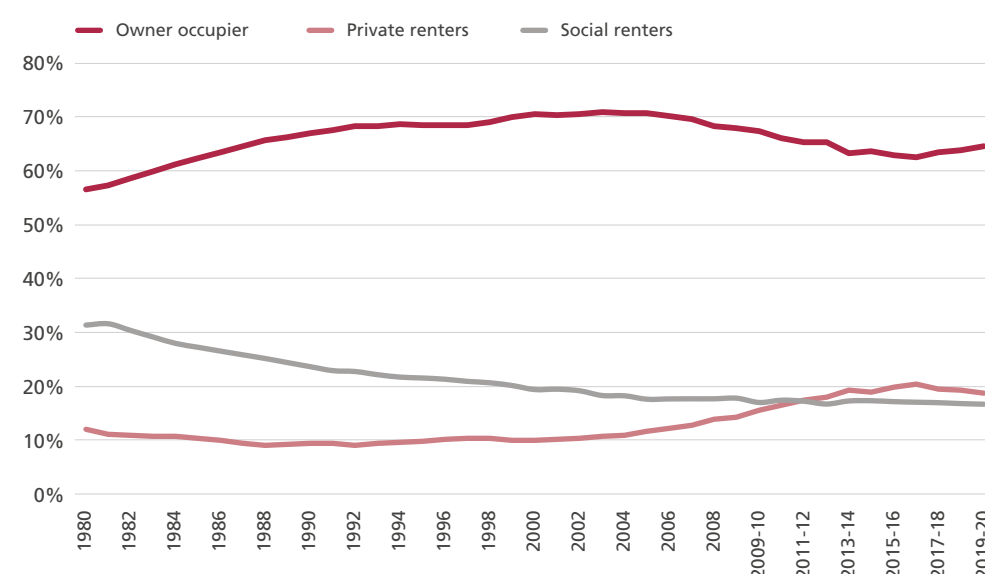
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<sup>15</sup> Guardian, 'House prices hit record high despite cut in stamp duty break', 7 September 2021

Over the course of the twentieth century, English society transformed from one primarily composed of private renters in the Edwardian era to one of ‘mass homeownership’.<sup>16</sup> But while owner-occupancy remains the most common housing tenure (at 65 per cent of households), recent decades have seen seismic shifts in the rented sectors of the housing system.

In the early 1980s, just under a third (31.7 per cent) of households lived in homes let by either a council or a housing association. Today this has fallen to 16.7 per cent, the social rented sector having contracted from 5.4 million households to 4 million.<sup>17</sup> Over the same period we have seen explosive growth in the private rented sector (PRS). Where this accommodated just one in ten households in the early 1980s, the PRS has since doubled to house nearly one in five (19 per cent). This represents an increase of 2.4 million households since 2000.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 1. Trends in tenure (%), 1980 to 2019–20



Source: English Housing Survey

A large proportion of the growth of the PRS can be explained by the increase in ‘would-be homebuyers’ spending more time renting: in 2004, 9 per cent of those aged 34–44 lived in the private rented sector; by 2020 this had tripled to 27 per cent. Meanwhile, the rate of owner-occupancy in this age band fell from 74 per cent to 56 per cent.<sup>19</sup>

Yet a less remarked upon driver of growth in the PRS has been the influx of those on low to modest incomes who might once have lived in a council or housing association home, but now struggle to access social housing due to the limited, shrinking stock and increased demand.<sup>20</sup> Today, 1.15 million households sit on official social housing waiting lists; the Local Government Association estimate that this could double to two million as economic impact of Covid-19 continues to materialise.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> MHCLG, Live Table FT1101, 2021

<sup>17</sup> MHCLG, Live Table FT1101, 2021

<sup>18</sup> MHCLG, Live Table FT1101, 2021. The DWP’s HBAI dataset shows the number of individuals living in the PRS to have more than doubled from 5.1 million in 1999 to 12.8 million in 2019.

<sup>19</sup> MHCLG, English Housing Survey, Annex Table 1.4, 2021

<sup>20</sup> CSJ analysis of DWP, HBAI, 2021. Data for GB up to 2002 and for the UK thereafter

<sup>21</sup> MHCLG, Live Table 600 ; Local Government Authority, National Federation of Almos, and the Association of Retained Council Housing, ‘Building Post Pandemic Prosperity’, Nov 2020

As such, the PRS now accounts for a much larger proportion of people living in ‘relative low income’ – that is, below 60 per cent of the median income. The tenure shift for this group has been particularly stark: in 2000, social rented housing provided 40 per cent of homes for those of working age on relative low incomes while the PRS housed 18 per cent. By 2020, the number of working age households on relative low incomes living in social rented housing had fallen to 33 per cent while the PRS had grown to 32 per cent.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the private rented sector is an important part of the mixed ecosystem of housing in England. However, The Government has accepted that it requires systemic reform to account for the different types of households now living in it. While the liberalisation of private renting introduced in the 1980s was well-suited to transient workers and students, there are now 1.6 million families raising children and 371,000 older households living in the PRS.<sup>23</sup> In 2021 the Government will introduce a Renters Reform Bill to improve the security of tenancies for privately rented families.

But while the security of the PRS has been a welcome focus of government in recent years, it is also the case that the private rented sector is much more expensive than other tenures. As such, the tenure shift described above has had profound implications for both the costs of living for people on low incomes and the Government’s welfare expenditure as this group is supported through housing benefits. We explore the former in Section 1.2 and the latter in Section 2.3.

### 1.3 High housing costs are undermining the benefits of employment

Despite the Government’s pre-pandemic success in vastly reducing the number of workless households and increasing incomes for households on lower wages,<sup>24</sup> it remains a key policy challenge to ensure that earnings are not consumed by expensive housing costs. This was noted by the former Prime Minister Theresa May in the foreword to the key white paper *Fixing our broken housing market* (2017) and more recently by the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, a 2019 study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found housing costs to have undermined positive steps to increase incomes in recent years, such as rising minimum wage levels.<sup>26</sup> It concluded: ‘the factor that has increased in-work poverty the most has been increased housing costs for lower income households compared to higher income households.’<sup>27</sup>

The latest research on housing affordability among low-income private renters has been conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). Focusing on 1.8 million low-income private renting households, they have found that 55 per cent of these – close to one million – are struggling to afford their rents.<sup>28</sup> Of these households, 624,000 have rents which are ‘unaffordable’ where this is defined as spending more than 30 per cent of household income on costs of accommodation (a widely-accepted definition). Crucially, this is measured *after* housing

<sup>22</sup> CSJ Analysis of DWP, HBAI, 2021

<sup>23</sup> MHCLG, English Housing Survey, Annex Table 1.4 and 1.5, 2021

<sup>24</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies, Barriers to homeownership for young adults, 2018

<sup>25</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, *Fixing our broken housing market*, 2017; BBC News, Boris Johnson on housing costs and planning law changes, 6 August 2020

<sup>26</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies, Why has in-work poverty risen in Britain?, 2019

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Renters on low incomes face a policy black hole: homes for social rent are the answer, 2021

benefit is factored in. More than a fifth (22 per cent) of the overall group (and more than half of the group whose rents are unaffordable) in fact spend 40 per cent or more of net income on housing costs, representing an major squeeze on household budgets.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to those whose rents are formally 'unaffordable', many experience 'affordability pressures'. This means that although they spend less than 30% of household income on rental costs (after housing benefit), their gross rental levels are disproportionately high as compared to their incomes.<sup>30</sup> The JRF point out that those in this group have incomes that are so low that 'the vast majority of this group are in [relative] poverty after housing costs'.<sup>31</sup>

Looking at the issue of work and housing affordability, the JRF analysis further bolsters the evidence that housing costs are undermining the financial benefits of employment for many low-income families. They note that '748,000 families who cannot afford their rent have one or more adult in work, two-thirds of whom work full-time'.<sup>32</sup> This means that 'four in five low-income, private renting households who are in work find too much of their earnings are eaten up by high rents'.<sup>33</sup>

Once these statistics are analysed by household composition, the findings are even more concerning. Among three categories of household with unaffordable rents analysed by JRF – couples with children, single adults living alone, and single parent families – all fall below the after housing costs (AHC) poverty line for their household type once housing costs are taken into account.<sup>34</sup> This is most acute for couples with children who fall £102 per week on average below the line.

One might think that affordability issues are at their most acute in London and the South East of England where rental costs tend to be highest, but the JRF analysis shows that high numbers of private renters with low incomes in the North and Midlands are still facing 'substantial affordability pressures'.<sup>35</sup> They point out that the differences in rental costs between north and south are also counterbalanced by the fact that, among privately renting households, a substantially larger proportion are on low incomes in the north than in the south: 55 per cent in the North and 48 per cent in the Midlands, as compared to 35 per cent in the South and 25 per cent in London.<sup>36</sup> Housing affordability must be understood as a crucial component of regional inequality in the UK today.

This analysis is further corroborated through original polling of 5,000 adults in England carried out by Stack Data for the Centre for Social Justice and presented in this report. It confirms that people are struggling with housing costs – and particularly private renters. We explore the survey's findings in detail in Part Two and Three of this report. The survey found that:

- Nearly two thirds (63 per cent) of private renters said housing costs in their local area were fairly high or very high;

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29 Ibid

30 Ibid

31 Ibid

32 Ibid

33 Ibid

34 Ibid

35 Ibid

36 Ibid

- 43 per cent of private renters said it is difficult to pay rent every month; and
- One in ten private renters say it is very difficult to pay rent. This translates to around 1.3 million people.

In short, the migration of households into the private rented sector has had major consequences for families' cost of living – this is indeed the case for both households on low and median incomes, and those living in areas well beyond London where the conversation around affordable housing has naturally often centred.

## 1.4 Homelessness is a growing blight on our society

At the sharpest edge of the hidden housing crisis are those without a home at all. A key consequence of England's changing tenure balance has been the rapid increase in homelessness seen in recent years.

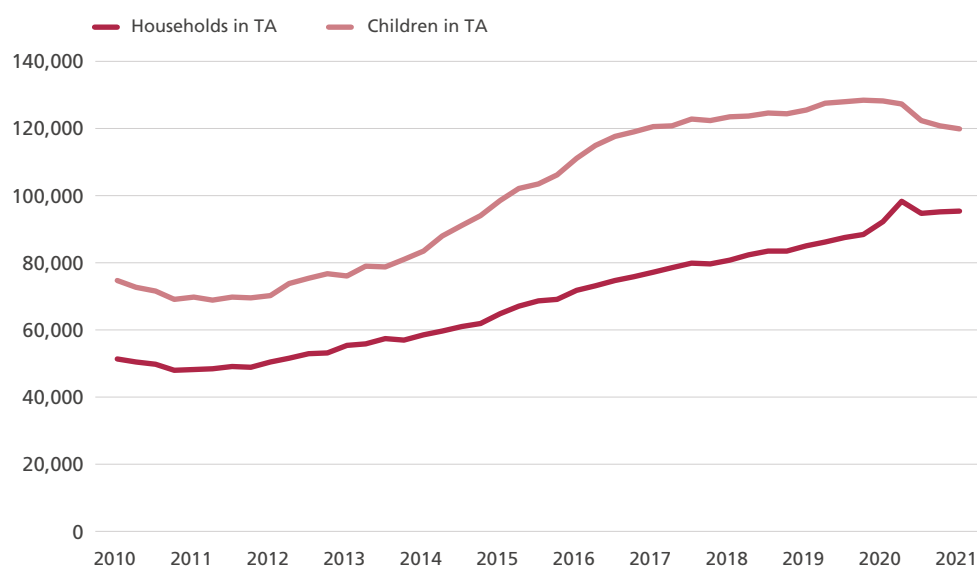
Despite the Government's effective 'Everyone In' programme, it remains the case that rough sleeping has risen at an alarming pace in the past decade. In 2019, the total rough sleeper count was 141 per cent higher than in 2010 with 4,266 sleepers on any given night. Recent government initiatives in response to the Covid-19 pandemic have successfully and commendably brought the numbers of people sleeping rough down to the snapshot figure of 2,688 – a 37 per cent decrease in those sleeping rough since last year.<sup>37</sup> In our *Close to Home* report, we set out costed proposals for a national Housing First programme to build on the gains of the pandemic and help end rough sleeping by 2024.<sup>38</sup>

Yet most people who are considered homeless are not sleeping rough on the street but are living in emergency or 'temporary' accommodation. This can range from temporary self-contained flats, to hostels with shared facilities, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) or converted office blocks.

<sup>37</sup> MHCLG, Annual Rough Sleeping Snapshot, Autumn 2020. Accessed 2021

<sup>38</sup> CSJ, *Close to Home*, 2021

Figure 2. Households and children in temporary accommodation



Source: MHCLG, Statutory Homelessness Live table TA1

As a larger proportion of low-income households have experienced less secure and more expensive private rentals, official data shows that the termination of a private tenancy has become the principal trigger for statutory homelessness in England.<sup>39</sup> In the absence of sufficient social housing locally, the number of families housed in ‘temporary’ accommodation (including hotels and B&Bs) has reached 95,000, rising from 51,000 in 2010.<sup>40</sup> Within these households are over 120,000 children, whose significantly worsened educational outcomes and mental health has been highlighted by the Children’s Commissioner as a consequence of the associated disturbance to their lives.<sup>41</sup>

## 1.5 Expensive, poor quality, and overcrowded housing is contributing to social disadvantage

Poor housing worsens everything, stable housing fixes lots.

CSJ Alliance Charity, North East

The impact of the lack of decent, affordable and secure housing goes far beyond reducing the amount of money households have to live on; this also has a wider social impact. The cost of housing is directly related to housing quality and standards. For many, being unable to afford decent housing means having to live in poor quality homes unfit for habitation or overcrowded conditions to reduce costs, to the detriment of physical and mental health. Analysis of the English Housing Survey<sup>42</sup> shows that around one in nine children today – that is, 1.36 million – are living

39 MHCLG, Live Table 774\_England, 2021

40 MHCLG, Live table TA1 TS, England, 2021

41 MHCLG, Live Table TA1 TS, Households in temporary accommodation, 2018; Shelter, *Chance of a Lifetime*, 2006

42 MHCLG, English Housing Survey 2019 to 2020: Annex Table 1.24: The EHS estimates are three-year averages of survey data as single-year estimates are not sufficiently reliable. An average of 829,000 households – or 3.5 per cent of all households – lived in overcrowded conditions in the period between 2017/18 and 2019/20.



in over-crowded accommodation.<sup>43</sup> An estimated 150,000 families with children in England share properties with just one bedroom.<sup>44</sup> Nearly a quarter of private rented homes (23.3 per cent) are officially deemed 'non-decent' by Government (that is, falling short of required standards of health and safety, repair, and thermal adequacy), compared to 16.3 per cent of social rented homes and 12.3 per cent of owner-occupied homes.<sup>45</sup>

If you're a family of five sharing one room, how can you expect a child to engage in their learning or be able to do their homework when they're at home? Attainment is not just about digital [access], it's also about the housing issue.

CSJ Alliance Charity, London

In a roundtable meeting of members of the CSJ's Alliance of small charities, we heard from a range of non-housing organisations that their clients almost always perceived a housing issue as the most pressing, taking priority over other (often serious) problems they faced. The fear of homelessness emerged as one of the most significant burdens on the mental health of their clients.

There is increasingly strong evidence to show housing problems being linked to broader social issues such as family breakdown, low productivity, chronic ill-health, disrupted child development, poor educational outcomes, and problem debt.<sup>46</sup> A study conducted by the JRF found that households on low incomes under the combined pressure of expensive rents and housing insecurity were more likely to respond poorly to 'complex life events' such as relationship breakdown, job insecurity, and the onset of poor health or caring responsibilities than those in stable and affordable housing.<sup>47</sup>

Yet the tenure shift and attendant issues with housing affordability and quality is not only marked by its social impact, but also its fiscal consequences, which we explore below.

## 1.6 Housing benefit expenditure is 'taking the strain' – but at immense cost

Housing benefit will underpin market rents – we have made that absolutely clear. If people cannot afford to pay that market rent, housing benefit will take the strain.

Sir George Young, Housing Minister, 1991

Given the shape (and costs) of the English housing system, historically the Government has intervened by supporting the delivery of tens of thousands of low-cost rented homes annually. However, in recent decades multiple governments have decided to reduce the supply of low-cost rented homes on the supply-side and shift the primary source of government intervention to the demand-side, in the form of housing benefit. This way, housing benefit would 'take the strain' of the market according to one Housing Minister at the time.

43 MHCLG, English Housing Survey 2019 to 2020: headline report, Annex Table 1.24

44 Replace footnote with: National Housing Federation, Housing Issues During Lockdown, 2020

45 MHCLG, English Housing Survey, Dwelling Stock: stock of non-decent homes, England, 2021

46 See, for example, the Social Metrics Commission report *Measuring Poverty 2020*, 2020 for a composite examination of factors leading to poverty (esp. pp.44–45 & pp.78–79). A useful summary is provided by S Bowman, J Myers and B Southwood, 'The housing theory of everything', Works in Progress, 2021

47 JRF, 'Housing and Life Experiences: Making a Home on Low Income', 2018

However, as the number of low-income households living in the private rented sector has grown dramatically, this has contributed extraordinary and highly inefficient costs to the welfare system.

The 'strain' taken by housing benefit as the supply of truly affordable homes has collapsed (see below, Figure 3) hit £26.1 billion in 2020.<sup>48</sup> For context, this represents four times the Government's budget for building homes in the same year – or twice the national police budget. By 2021, in the fallout of the pandemic, this had risen to 'almost' £30 billion according to the Department for Work and Pensions (this figure excluding the additional £1 billion also invested to restore the Local Housing Allowance rates to the 30th percentile).<sup>49</sup>

Critically, housing benefit is on average 25 per cent more expensive in the private rented sector than the social rented sector (and even more so in more expensive areas). And so the annual housing benefit spend on private rented housing support more than doubled to £9.3 billion in the 10 years between 2005–06 and 2015–16 as the sector grew. This has averaged approximately £8 billion every year thereafter.<sup>50</sup> While data is not available for 2020–21, housing benefit spending on the PRS this year is likely to exceed £10 billion – a record high.<sup>51</sup>

As the CSJ has argued previously, this outlay is highly inefficient. Housing benefit spent on private rents exits the public purse in the form of an income transfer to private landlords, critically producing scant *additional* housing in the process, whereas spending directed at social landlords is reinvested into the construction of new homes. Simultaneously, owing to the scarcity of available social housing, councils have become reliant on expensive private providers of temporary accommodation, with total annual costs rising to £1.1 billion.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, it has been estimated that every new social home built realises £780 in annual housing benefit savings.<sup>53</sup>

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48 DWP, Benefit Expenditure Caseload Tables, 'Outturn and Forecast: Spring Budget 2021'

49 Will Quince, Parliamentary Questions – Benefit Claimants: Rent Arrears, Vol 690 (March 8, 2021) & Office for Budgetary Responsibility, Housing Benefit Spending

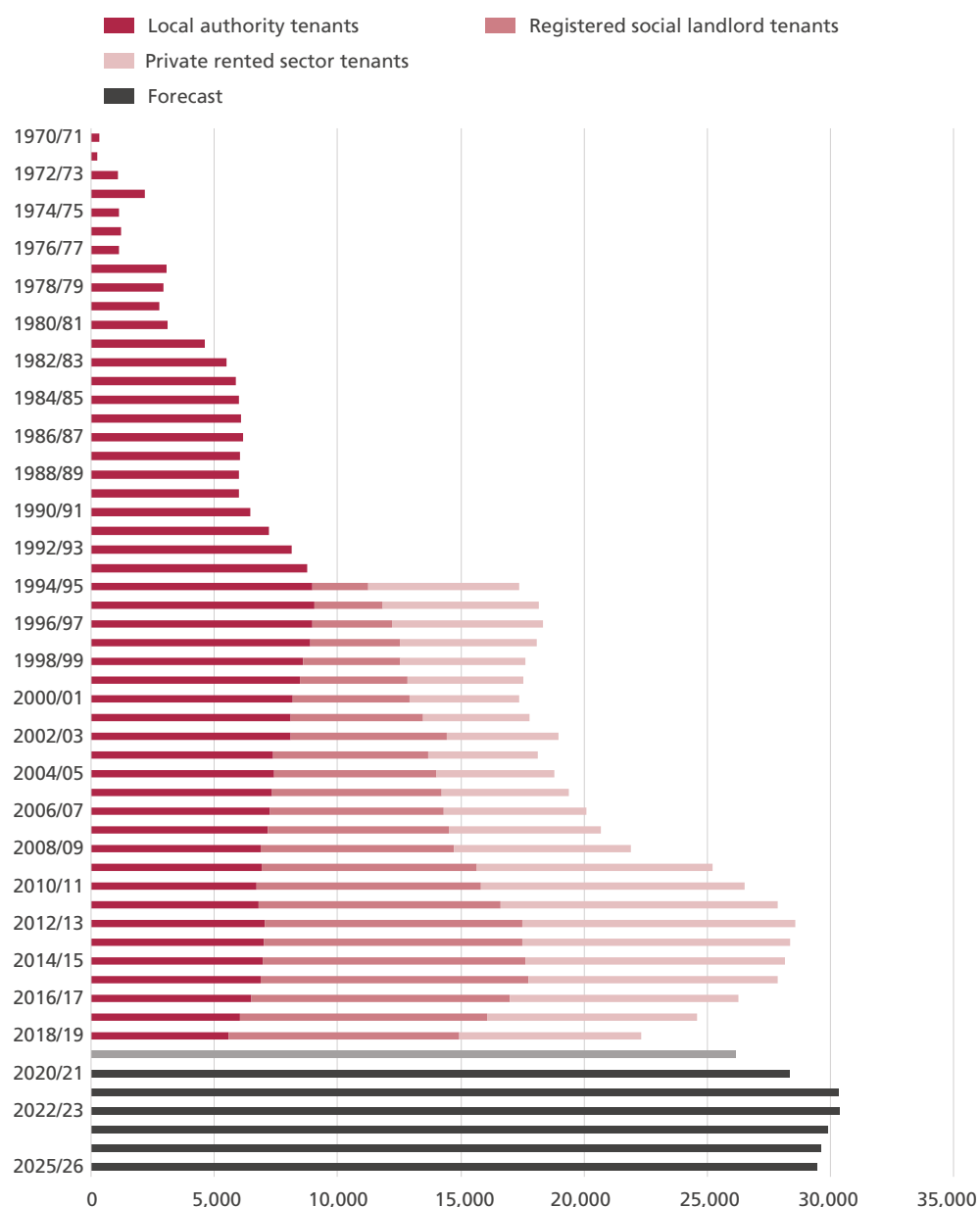
50 DWP, Benefit Expenditure Caseload Tables, 'Outturn and Forecast: Spring Budget 2021'.

51 Including the housing element of universal credit

52 Shelter, 'Cashing In', 2020

53 Local Government Association, Comprehensive Spending Review 2020: LG submission, 2020

Figure 3. Housing benefit expenditure (£ million real terms)



Source: DWP, Benefit Expenditure Caseload Tables, Outturn and Forecast: Spring Budget 2021

Consequently, private renters are growing as a proportion of the claimant population. In 2019, around a fifth of existing benefit claimants were renting in the private rented sector where rents are high – often surpassing housing benefit allowances and passing on high housing costs to low-income tenants.<sup>54</sup> This has risen to a third after Covid-19.<sup>55</sup> Given the rising number of older private renters – and families renting for longer periods – the CSJ has learned that the Government has been warned by internal forecasters that the total bill could reach £50 billion by 2050.

<sup>54</sup> Affordable Housing Commission, 'Making Housing Affordable Again', 2020

<sup>55</sup> Resolution Foundation, 'This time is different – Universal Credit's first recession: Assessing the welfare system and its effect on living standards during the coronavirus pandemic', 2020

Housing benefit plays an important role in support families with the high costs of the private rental market as seen above. However, its role in taking the strain of the profound growth of the PRS fuelled by lower-income households is unsustainable and fiscally inefficient. Whilst it is true that public spending on housing costs are still larger in the social rented sector, crucially, as mentioned, the significant difference is that public funds spent in the social rented sector tend to produce additional social housing, marking a significant difference between the sectors.

As we have seen, the hidden housing crisis – far from excluding people from home ownership alone – carries with it a range of social, economic, and fiscal costs. These are holding back the gains of employment and making it harder for families to reverse the pathways to poverty. But we have also found ourselves with a deeply inefficient reliance on housing benefit. In Chapter Two we argue that a new vision for affordable housing is desperately needed.

## chapter two

# A new vision for affordable housing is needed

## 2.1 The supply of truly affordable homes has collapsed

They build these houses that people can't afford... when they sold off the council houses there was nothing.

Carol, North-West England

The causes of the hidden housing crisis are complex, spanning several decades and governments of all stripes. In forthcoming research, we will examine the wide range of factors involved, including the planning system, pressures on demand, social policy choices and macro-economic currents. At its core, however, is the collapse of the supply of truly affordable housing over a twenty-year period, in the face of significant and growing demand. We explore the headlines below.

It has become a point of near consensus that a key driver of the housing crisis is a shortage of homes in England relative to both demand and 'need'.<sup>56</sup> The latest authoritative studies suggest there is 'housing need' of somewhere between 1–1.5 million homes,<sup>57</sup> requiring the annual delivery of new homes to reach 340,000 per year until at least 2031 to account for new household formation, concealed households and the backlog of existing need for suitable housing.<sup>58</sup> In London alone, recent Savills estimates suggest as many as 100,000 new homes are needed annually.<sup>59</sup>

Recent governments have adopted 300,000 new homes a year as a target (with varying degrees of formality). The current Government has realised significant gains in the number of homes delivered annually. Net additional dwellings in 2019–20 reached 243,000, a record high since the millennium. Still, the long-held 300,000 a year target has not been achieved since 1969 (see Figures 4 and 5). Meanwhile there have been prolonged periods of limited supply, for

<sup>56</sup> With one notable exception being Ian Mulheirn of Oxford Economics, who argues that there is, in fact, a surplus when looking at the national household formation compared to supply. This is typically disputed by focusing on the impact of new supply of localised markets and the abundance of concealed households.

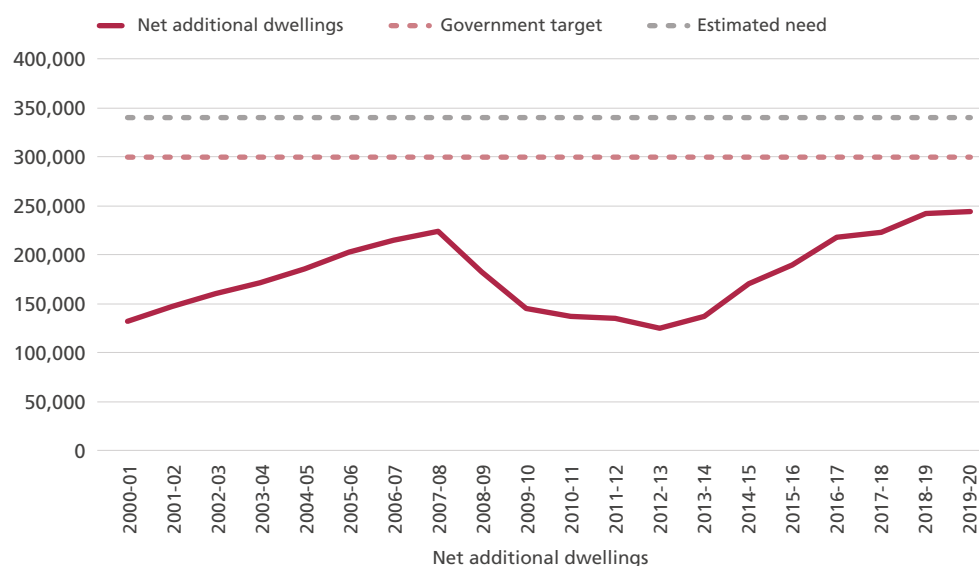
<sup>57</sup> Major studies include the Barker Review (2004), Shelter/KPMG study (2014), Redfern study (2016) and the Herriot-Watt study (2019).

<sup>58</sup> House of Commons, Tackling the Undersupply of Housing, 2021

<sup>59</sup> London Councils, Delivering on London's Housing Requirement, 2021

example between 2001 and 2010 where an average of 144,000 new homes were completed annually – 100,000 fewer per year than in the 1970s.<sup>60</sup> In addition, recent prolonged periods of low interest rates, as well as fiscal schemes to support new homeowners, have added pressure on the demand-side of the market as well.

Figure 4. Net additional homes and estimated ‘housing need’



Source: MHCLG Live Table 120, ONS Household projections for England<sup>61</sup>

To its credit, the Government has advanced ambitious proposals to increase the supply of homes. This includes major proposed reforms to the planning system as set out in the ‘Planning for the Future’ White Paper (2020). The planning reforms are welcome and include a simplified and more reliable process for funding affordable housing than the existing system, a key recommendation of the CSJ Housing Commission.<sup>62</sup> A range of organisations have also made innovative policy proposals to increase the supply of private market housing, including through innovative tenancy ownership and gentle densification schemes.<sup>63</sup>

However, focusing on the gross number of homes delivered does not tell us much about the *types* of homes being built, and for whom they best cater. For while additional housing supply at the higher end of the market can trickle down – eventually – to reduce demand at the lower end,<sup>64</sup> the scale of need at the lower end of the market is so high that the Government intervenes to support the delivery ‘sub-market’ or ‘affordable homes’ at reduced rents and prices. £11.5 billion in central government grant has been committed to the Affordable Homes Programme 2021–26.

<sup>60</sup> NAO, Housing in England: overview, DCLG, 2017

<sup>61</sup> House of Commons, ‘Tackling the under-supply of housing in England’ 2021

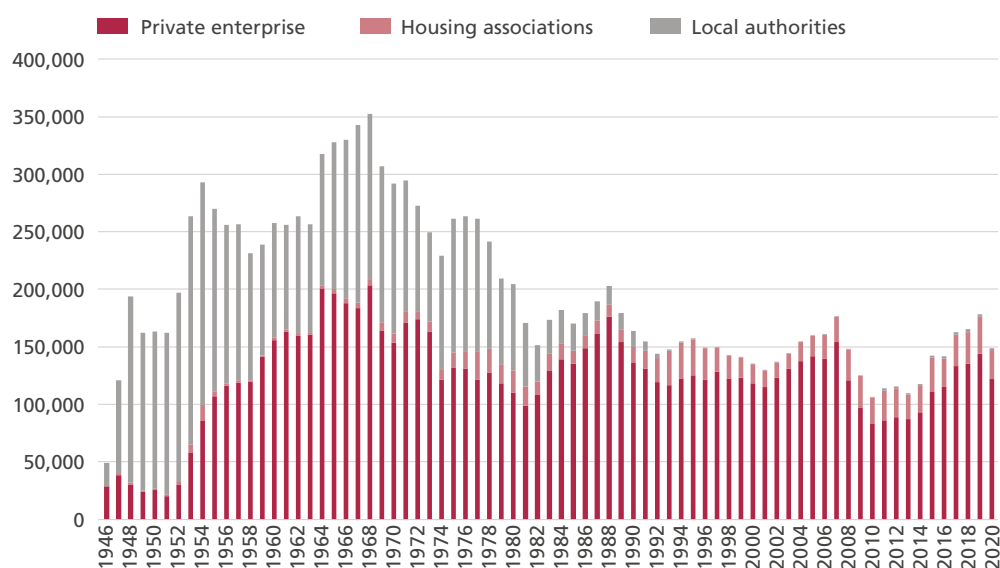
<sup>62</sup> CSJ, A Social Justice Housing Strategy, 2018

<sup>63</sup> CPS, Help to Build: An emergency plan to support housing supply, 2020 CPS, Reshaping Spaces: Building Back Better, 2021; and Policy Exchange, Helping Generation Rent become Generation Buy, 2021

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, a recent study demonstrating this in San Francisco: Bennington, Kate, Does Building New Housing Cause Displacement?: The Supply and Demand Effects of Construction in San Francisco, 2020

Historically, state intervention in delivering 'affordable housing' took the form of 'social housing' – provided by either local authorities or housing associations to meet the demand for affordable and secure housing at the lower end of the income distribution (see Figure 5). However, since the late 1980s there has been steep decline in the delivery of new social housebuilding.<sup>65</sup> By 2019–20, social rented housing delivery was just over 6,600 while the Government has focused on the delivery of 'affordable rented' housing (see p 27). Around 28,000 'affordable rented' homes (set at 80 per cent of market rents) were delivered in 2020, in contrast to the 40,000 social rented homes completed in 2010 and 100,000s built annually in the 1960s.<sup>66</sup> We look at the changing definition of affordable housing in more detail below.

Figure 5. Permanent dwellings completed in England

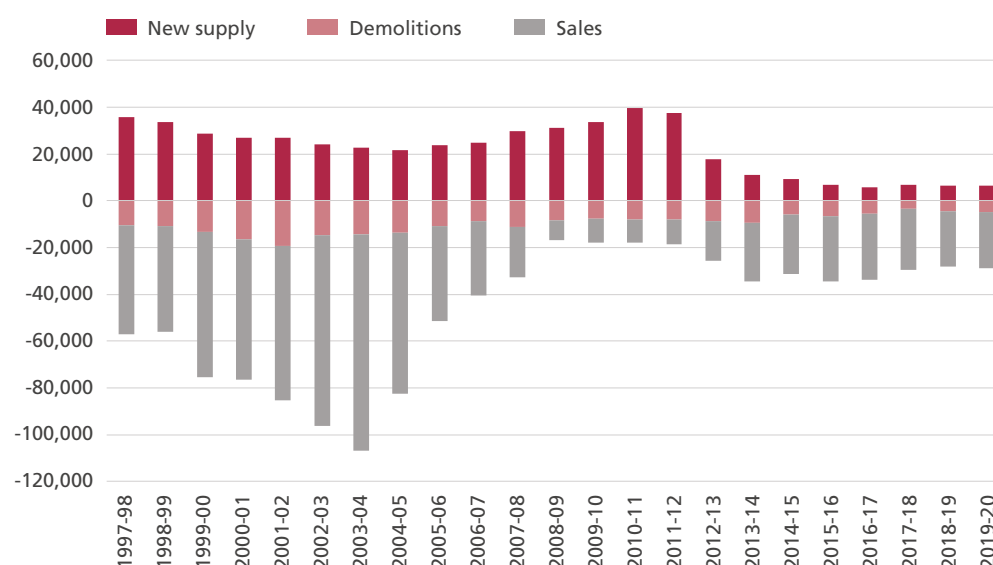


Source: MHCLG Live Table 244

<sup>65</sup> MHCLG, Live Table 213 & 244, 2021

<sup>66</sup> MHCLG, Live Table 1000C

Figure 6. New supply, sales and demolitions of social rented housing in England



Source: MHCLG Live tables 1000c, 678 (sales) and 684 (demolitions)<sup>67</sup>

Critically, while the supply of new social housing has collapsed, the existing stock is also shrinking rapidly. Sales, demolitions, and conversions from social rent to less affordable tenures, including private rent, mean that approximately 31,000 units of social housing are lost each year. Right to Buy has provided millions of social renters with a pathway to home ownership. However, the lack of a replacement for homes sold has denied thousands of others this transformative hand-up. When newly delivered social rented housing is factored in, we have still seen a net loss of around 17,000 social rented homes every year.<sup>68</sup>

## 2.2 The meaning of 'affordable housing' is exhausted

There is no single statutory definition for 'affordable housing'.<sup>69</sup> But key to the Government's supply of 'affordable housing' in the last decade has been the introduction of 'affordable rent' and 'affordable homeownership' products, as the supply of traditional forms of social housing has been vastly diminished. Newer products, such as Shared Ownership, have been criticised for being unsuitable and out of reach for many low-income households – and as such testing the appropriateness of the 'affordable housing' category.<sup>70</sup> In Part Two of this report we find that less than a quarter of the public believe 'affordable housing' is 'truly affordable to local people'.

<sup>67</sup> MHCLG Live tables 1000c, 678 & 684; House of Commons, 'Tackling the under-supply of housing', 2021

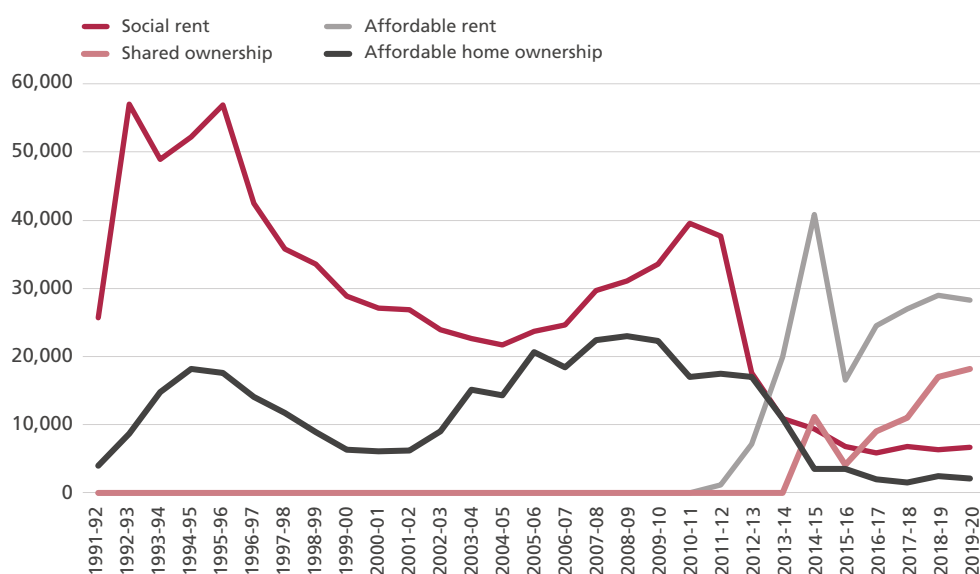
<sup>68</sup> House of Commons, 'Social rented housing (England): past trends and prospects', 2021

<sup>69</sup> The National Planning Policy Framework includes at least eight different types of affordable housing in its overall definition.

<sup>70</sup> House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee, Building More Social Housing, 2020



Figure 7. Additional affordable homes provided by product type



Source: MHCLG Live Table 1000

'Affordable rent' was developed in 2010 in response to reduced capital funding available for the development of new social housing (this was cut by 60 per cent in the 2011 Budget). It is defined as homes that cost no more than 80 per cent of the average local market rent.<sup>71</sup> In this model, 'affordability' is determined by market forces and stands in contrast to the 'social rent' model which is calculated using local income data.

A major investigation into affordable housing in England found that the affordable rent model – which now accounts for approximately a quarter of new general lettings by housing associations – is in fact mostly *unaffordable* for low-income workers.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, in 2000, social rent accounted for 79 per cent of total new affordable homes, falling to 58 per cent in 2009/10 and to just 11 per cent in 2019/20.<sup>73</sup> The £8.6bn Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) allocation announced in August 2021 indicated that grant funding for social homes would increase on previous AHPs – translating to 29,600 new social rent homes over five years. However, around half of the AHP allocation remains allocated for the more expensive home ownership products, and this allocation still results in a net *loss* of social homes when taking into account demolitions and sales. Even with 10,000 social homes delivered per year in the coming decade, as optimistic estimates predict including council builds, this still represents a nine-fold shortfall on one widely accepted estimate of need.

'Affordable rent' was developed with the intent of maximising new social housing delivery in the context of significantly reduced grant. However, the method of linking affordable rents to market rents has had the effect of pricing out low-income renters from higher-cost areas while forcing housing benefit to 'take the strain' of more expensive rents. As a seemingly ever-expanding range of affordable housing products are introduced – from social rent to affordable

71 House of Commons, 'Affordable Rents, England', 2015

72 Affordable Housing Commission, 'Making housing affordable after Covid-19: A follow up report from the Affordable Housing Commission': AHC research found that while a household earning around the national living wage in social housing is paying around 25 per cent of their income on rent, the figure is more than 40 per cent for an Affordable Rent home.

73 MHCLG, Live Table 1000, 2021

rent, Starter Homes to Shared Ownership and most recently First Homes – all with significantly varying degrees of accessibility for people on low to modest incomes, it is perhaps unsurprising that we found less than a quarter of the public to believe ‘affordable housing is truly affordable for local people’ (see Part Two, Chapter 5.1.)

## 2.3 Conclusion

The present housing crisis makes it extremely difficult for low-income citizens to make a house a home. As we have seen, poor quality and exorbitantly expensive housing has serious detrimental impacts on employment, health, and children’s education. At the sharpest end of this issue is homelessness, including the rise in rough sleeping and the 120,000 children in 95,000 families in temporary or emergency accommodation. On many official measures, the term ‘affordable housing’ is meaningless to those on modest incomes.

The causes of this situation are complex. Critical, however, is the collapse in supply of truly affordable homes. Right to Buy has – laudably – created great prosperity and stability for many beneficiaries, but the social housing stock has not been sufficiently replenished. Meanwhile, the private rented sector – comprising many inadequate dwellings – has ballooned while the social rented sector has fallen from 31.7 per cent to just 16.7 per cent of all homes since the 1980s. Given the profound challenge many renting families face and the scale of homelessness outlined in Part One of this report, it is vital that we redress this imbalance with new thinking and as much energy as driving up rates of homeownership.

Housing benefit payments have ‘taken the strain’ of social housing demand, but this constitutes an enormous waste of taxpayers’ money. Private rents are increasingly exorbitantly expensive. Every new social home built realises £780 annually in housing benefit savings. Furthermore, it creates a long-term asset of enormous public value for generations to come.

This situation needs to change, and in the following sections we demonstrate that there is considerable public appetite for a renaissance in low-cost rented housebuilding from across the political spectrum.

A man with a beard is speaking at a podium, gesturing with his right hand. The background is blurred, showing other people seated at a table. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

part two

# Public attitudes to housing and the Government's policy response

## chapter three

# Housing and ‘the politics of belonging’

### 3.1 Introducing Part Two and Three

Housing is the first of the social services. It is also one of the keys to increased productivity. Work, family life, health and education are all undermined by overcrowded homes. Therefore, a Conservative Government will give housing a priority second only to national defence. Our target remains 300,000 houses a year.

**Conservative Party manifesto, 1951**

As set out in Part One of this report, the hidden housing crisis has had far-reaching and devastating consequences for both individuals and families. Yet recent policy has overwhelmingly prioritised the ‘just about homeowners’ over whom former Prime Minister Theresa May once called the ‘just about managing’. Alongside any strategy to increase rates of homeownership, a new vision for truly affordable housing is desperately needed.

In previous research the CSJ has called on the Government to rediscover low-cost, rented housebuilding as a weapon in the arsenal of new housing supply, as indeed it was for decades following the Second World War. Re-adopting this approach would put thousands more people with low to modest incomes on a more realistic path to ownership, reduce our reliance on housing benefit and improve the foundations for thousands of children growing up in temporary accommodation.<sup>74</sup>

However, amid seismic changes in the political landscape reflected in 2016’s Brexit vote and 2019’s General Election, any contemporary vision for affordable housing must be informed by the prevailing attitudes and aspirations of the nation.

Recent research has identified a tectonic shift towards what has been described as ‘the politics of belonging’.<sup>75</sup> Advocates argue that this is shaped, in part, by the growing rejection of the liberalism that characterised British politics since the breakdown of the ‘post-war consensus’.<sup>76</sup> For where ‘freedom’ was one of the prioritised organising principles of the post 1979 era, this

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<sup>74</sup> CSJ, A Social Justice Housing Strategy, 2018 ; CSJ, Bounce Back Britain, 2020

<sup>75</sup> Onward, The Politics of Belonging, 2019

<sup>76</sup> Onward trace the ‘freedom’ paradigm from the 1960s using key legislative and policy milestones, e.g. The Abortion Act 1967, Privatisation begins 1983, GP Patient Choice 1992, 50 per cent university drive 2002, Equality Act 2010.

carries much less currency in an environment where people increasingly prioritise ‘security’. Indeed, largescale polling finds that British voters tend to prioritise living in ‘a society that focuses on giving people more security’ (65 per cent) than one that ‘focuses on giving people more freedom’ (35 per cent).<sup>77</sup>

These changing political winds might explain the electoral support seen recently for political campaigns promoting ‘security’, ‘place’, ‘community’, and ‘control’.<sup>78</sup> This has translated into policies appealing to people’s sense of ‘somewhere’ rather than ‘anywhere’, in the popular distinction drawn by David Goodhart.<sup>79</sup> The Conservative Government, for example, has emphasised controlling immigration, reenergising state intervention in the economy to protect (and promote) localised industries, and prioritising skills and apprenticeships over university attendance. Crystallising this transition is the logic underpinning the ‘levelling up’ agenda: that opportunity should be spread where people *already* live, a far cry from the instruction to get ‘on your bike’ as often heard in the heyday of liberalism.

Meanwhile, housing policy has arguably not yet undergone a ‘post-liberal’ transition – with much of the basis of the housing system shaped by liberal policies introduced under Margaret Thatcher, New Labour and the Coalition Government. For example, the liberalisation of the private rented sector under Thatcher, the incentivisation of buy-to-let landlordism under Blair, and the widening of Right-to-Buy and drastic reductions in the supply of social rented housing under Cameron. Theresa May’s Government, notably, experimented with a more ‘securitist’ housing policy, scrapping most of the provisions of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, announcing more security for private renters and abolishing restrictions on councils’ ability to borrow to build social housing.

However, one reason why housing policy has not fully adapted to the changing attitudinal landscape is that we lack up-to-date and sophisticated polling and analysis of public attitudes to both housing and housing policy. In Part Two and Three of this report, we attempt to correct this anomaly.

In Part Two, we reveal the headline results of a largescale, nationally representative poll that sought to identify what the English public believes about housing affordability and housing policy. In Part Three, using cutting-edge data analytical techniques, we explore the ways attitudes to housing interweave with other beliefs in order to develop a more sophisticated understanding of public opinion than through single demographic markers alone.

## 3.2 Methodology

Between the 5th and 9th of December 2020, Stack Data Strategy and the Centre for Social Justice polled a nationally representative sample of 5,000 English adults on a range of issues related to housing. This included exploring the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, attitudes towards social housing, opinions on Government housing policy, and attitudes to a wide range of social, economic and cultural questions.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. See also: Paolo Gerbaudo, *The Great Recoil: Politics after Populism and Pandemic*, Verso, 2021

<sup>78</sup> Vote Leave’s ‘Taking Back Control’ slogan perhaps being the most prominent example of this.

<sup>79</sup> David Goodhart, *Road to Somewhere*, 2018

In addition to the polling, Stack Data Strategy conducted a segmentation of the English public to identify their underlying attitudes and beliefs. Two key groups from this segmentation were then recruited for focus groups on the 8th of March, covering topics such as satisfaction with the quality of housing and views on the future of social housing. Finally, Stack Data Strategy also conducted a Multilevel Regression with Poststratification (MRP) analysis to map how responses varied across the country, and the distribution of key segments.

## chapter four

# Attitudes to housing affordability

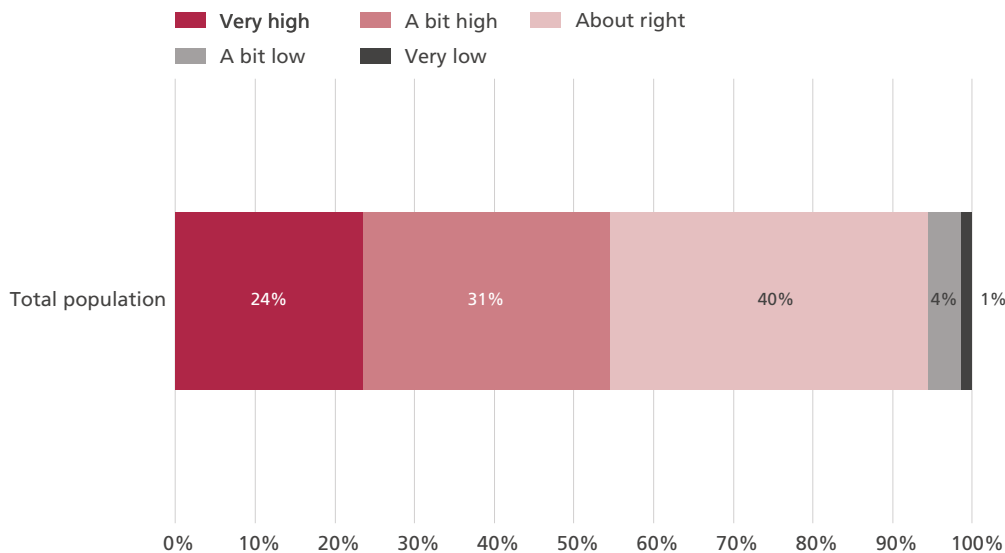
## 4.1 A large proportion of the country is concerned about the affordability of housing

I think... living in this area, whatever is built is just not going to be affordable. Local people don't think it's going to be affordable for them.

Miles, South East

A large proportion of the English public think housing is expensive. More than half (55 per cent) of all respondents said that housing costs in their area were either 'a bit high', or 'very high'. Meanwhile, 40 per cent said that housing costs were about right, and only five per cent of those surveyed thought that housing costs in their area were 'low'.<sup>80</sup>

Figure 8. 'What do you think of housing costs in your area?'

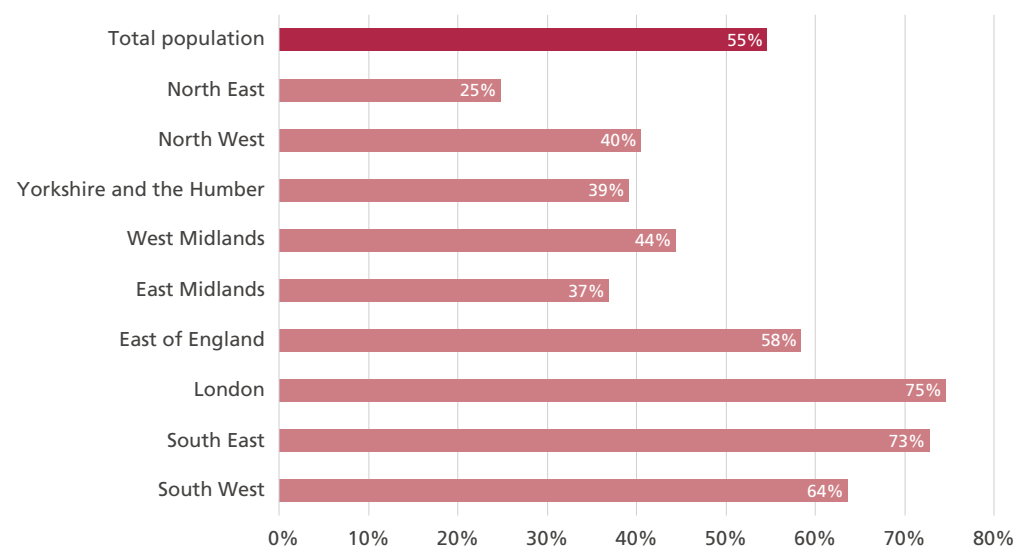


Source: CSJ / Stack Data Strategy

<sup>80</sup> Excluding those who answered, 'don't know'.

While the data indicates that there is a national perception of housing costs being too high, underlying this is regional variation. Around three quarters of the population said that housing costs in their area are too high in London and the South East (73 per cent and 75 per cent, respectively); in the North East, where housing costs are most affordable, it remains the case that a quarter of all respondents believed housing costs are too high.<sup>81</sup>

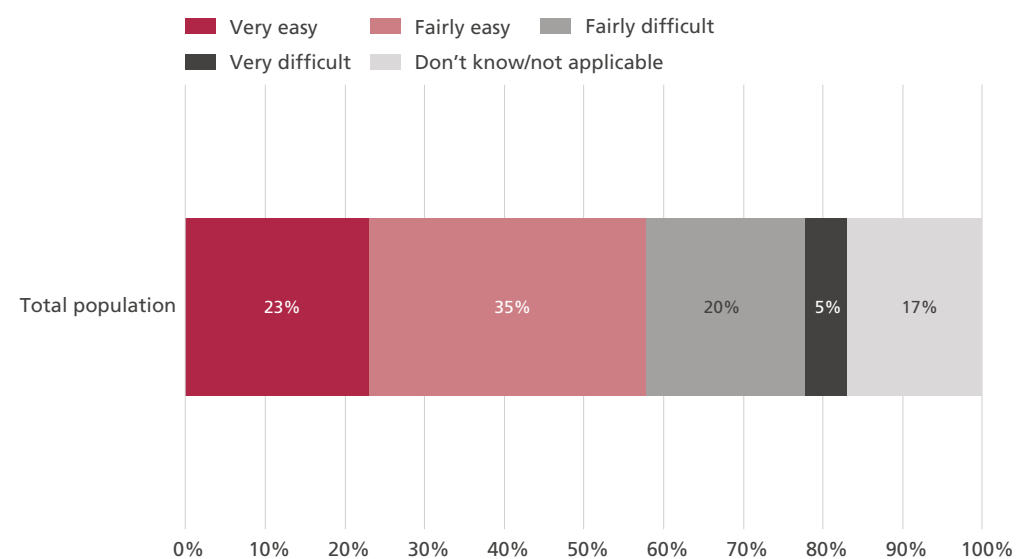
Figure 9. 'Housing costs in my area are "too high"'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Beyond the perception of local housing costs, a significant minority of respondents also indicated that they personally were struggling to pay. A quarter of the population said they found it either fairly or very difficult to pay these.

Figure 10. 'How easy or difficult do you find it to pay your housing costs?'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

<sup>81</sup> Excluding those who answered, 'don't know'.



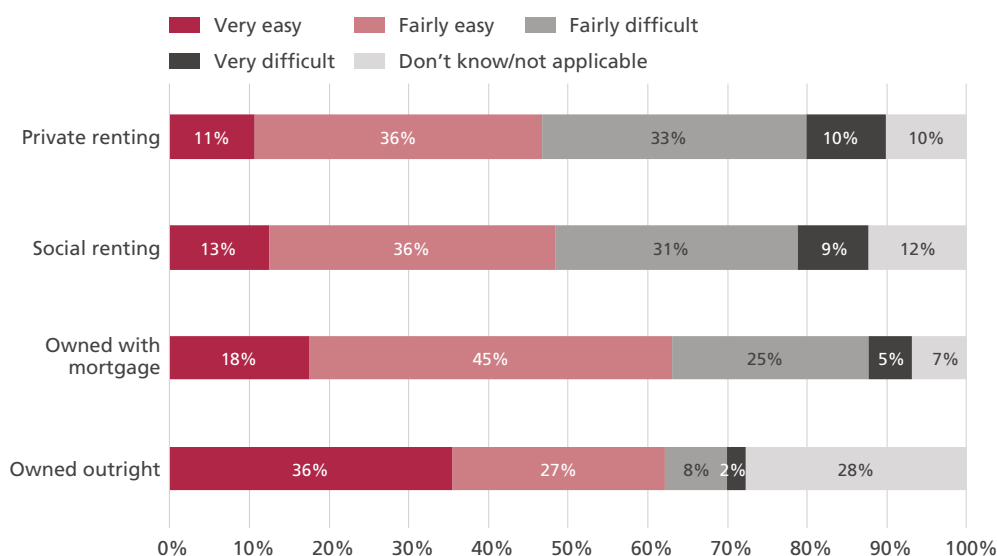
## 4.2 Private renters and people with low savings are the worst affected

While national averages are revealing, looking at the population through the lenses of housing tenure and levels of savings illuminates more pronounced problems with affordability. Most salient, given the profound shifts analysed in Part One of this report, are the differences observable across housing tenure.

We found that 43 per cent of private renters find it fairly or very difficult to pay their housing costs. This is nearly double the national average of 25 per cent. 40 per cent of social renters also found it difficult to pay their housing costs, which is likely attributable to the demographic make-up of social renters due to residualisation of the sector.

Despite the data showing affordability problems are predominant among those living in rented accommodation, a significant minority of home owners also struggle to pay their mortgage. Nearly a third of homeowners with a mortgage (30 per cent) find it fairly or very difficult to pay their housing costs. The only group who paid their housing costs comfortably were outright homeowners, with 10 per cent finding it fairly or very difficult to pay their housing costs – more than four times fewer than their privately renting counterparts.

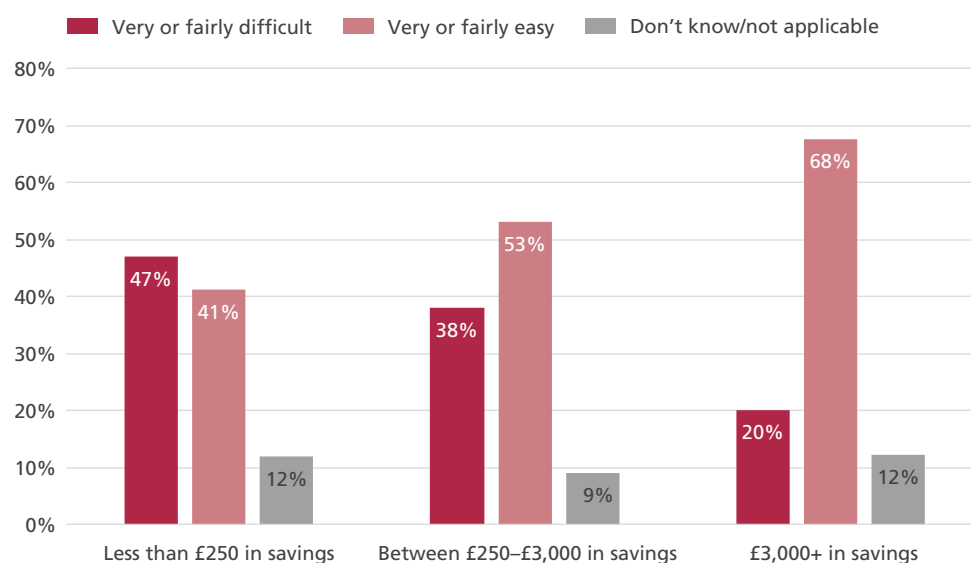
Figure 11. 'How easy or difficult do you find it to pay your housing costs?' (by tenure)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Levels of savings are also correlated with how easy people said it was to pay for housing. Figure 12 shows that nearly half (47 per cent) of those with less than £250 in savings find it difficult to pay their housing costs, compared to 38 per cent of those with savings between £250–£3,000 and 20 per cent with more than £3,000.

Figure 12. 'How easy or difficult do you find it to pay your housing costs?' (by savings)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

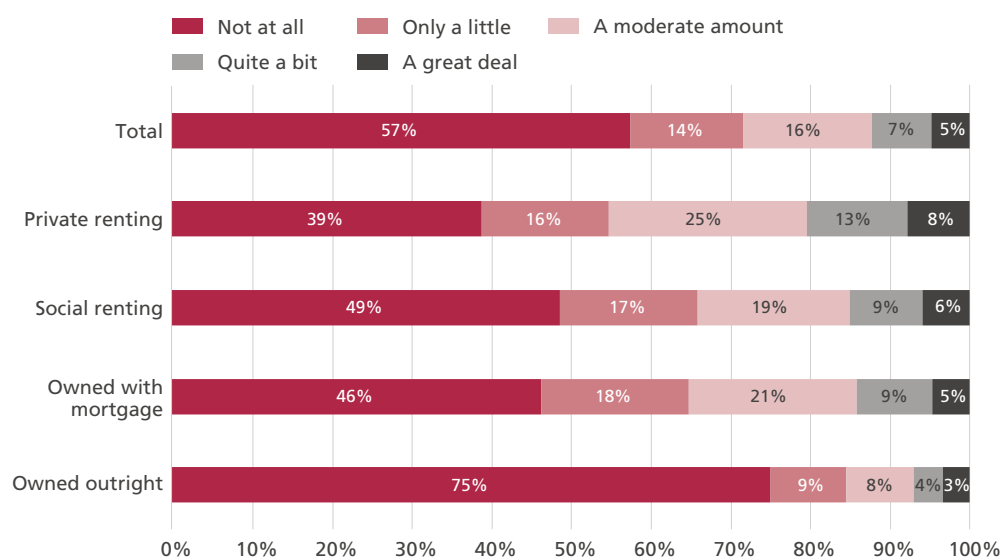
The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated financial difficulties for renters and homeowners alike. Excluding those answering 'don't know', more than half of social renters (51 per cent) and mortgaged homeowners (54 per cent) said that the pandemic had a negative impact on their ability to keep up with their rental or mortgage payments, despite these tenures being considered relatively stable and secure.

Private renters were the worst affected. 61 per cent said that the pandemic had a negative impact on the stability of their housing situation. That private renters should face the greatest difficulties is unsurprising, given that 62.3 per cent of them.<sup>82</sup> An estimated 400,000 eviction processes are currently underway, with implications for the homelessness figures explored in Chapter 1.4 of this report.<sup>83</sup> The majority of these evictions are likely to be of renters in the private rented sector.

<sup>82</sup> MHCLG, English Housing Survey, Annex Table 2.14, 2019-20

<sup>83</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, As 400,000 renters face eviction, JRF warns the UK risks a 'two-tier recovery', 2021

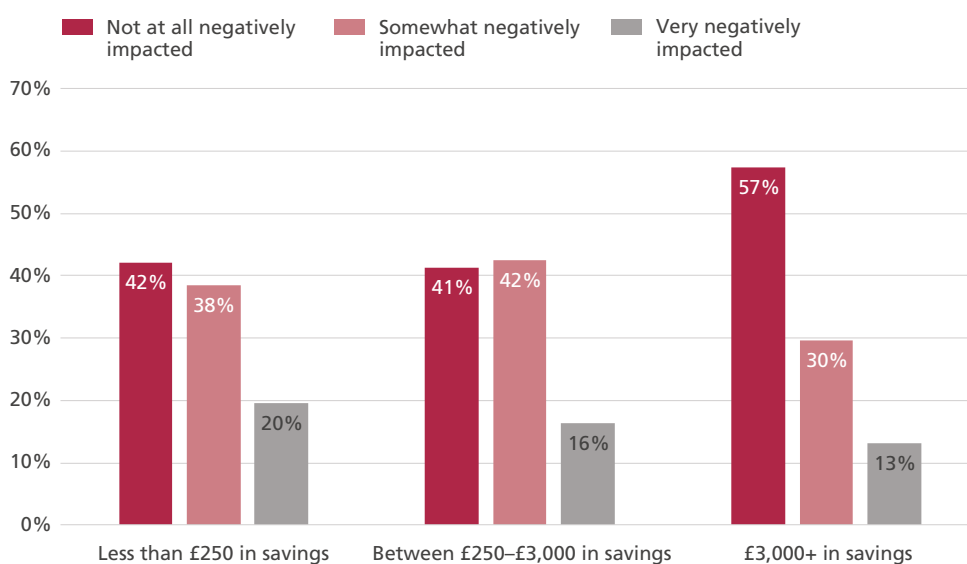
Figure 13. 'To what extent has Covid-19 negatively impacted the stability of your housing situation?' (by tenure)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

The polling data shows that the impact of the pandemic was not uniform, affecting in particular those on low income and young people. Both groups tend to have less in savings, reducing their resilience to income shocks. Removing the 'don't knows', 59 per cent of those with less than £3000 in savings found that the pandemic had either somewhat or significantly impacted their housing stability. In comparison, 43 per cent of those with savings greater than £3,000 found that Covid-19 negatively impacted the stability of their current housing situation.

Figure 14. 'To what extent has Covid-19 negatively impacted the stability of your housing situation?' (by savings)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

This survey clearly indicates that significant portions of the English public are struggling to keep up with their housing payments, with private renters and those on low incomes being most negatively affected. In addition, a majority of the public agrees that housing costs in their local area are too high, a belief shared by many who are struggling to cover their personal housing costs. In the next section, we consider how the public's response to housing affordability translates into public opinion about housing policy.

## chapter five

# Attitudes to housing policy

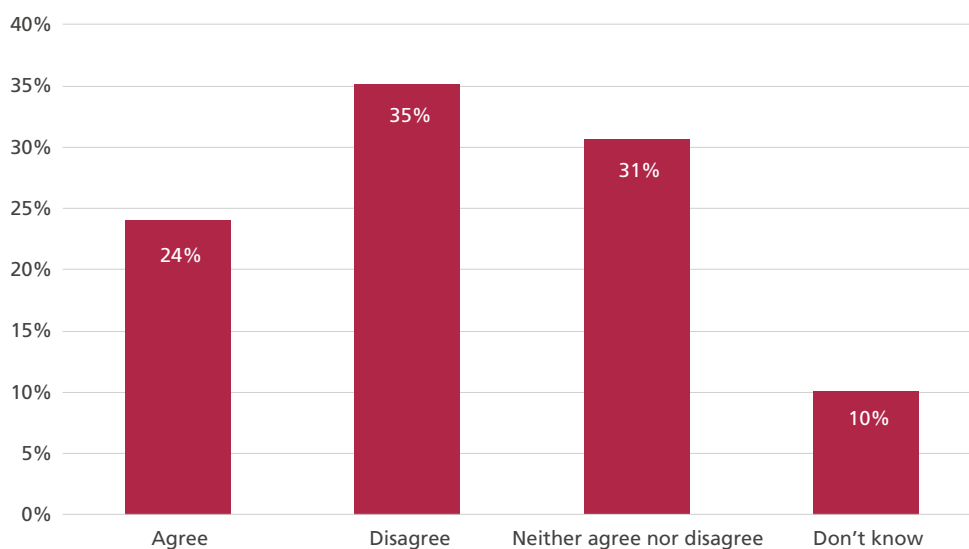
## 5.1 The public believes that affordable housing policy is off the mark

Affordability is right there at the top. I think affordability and decent quality are the two main things for social housing. I think a decent home at the right price is almost the right of everyone who is prepared to work.

**Trevor, North West**

When asked if the UK government's definition of affordable housing is truly affordable to local people, more than one third (35 per cent) of the public disagreed approximately and one quarter (24 per cent) agreed. Notably, 41 per cent of the public answered 'don't know' or 'neither agree nor disagree'. There currently is not a single statutory definition of 'affordable housing' (a vagueness some argue ministers have found convenient when probed on specific affordable housing types); this may go some way towards explaining the high rate of respondents indicating indecision or uncertainty.

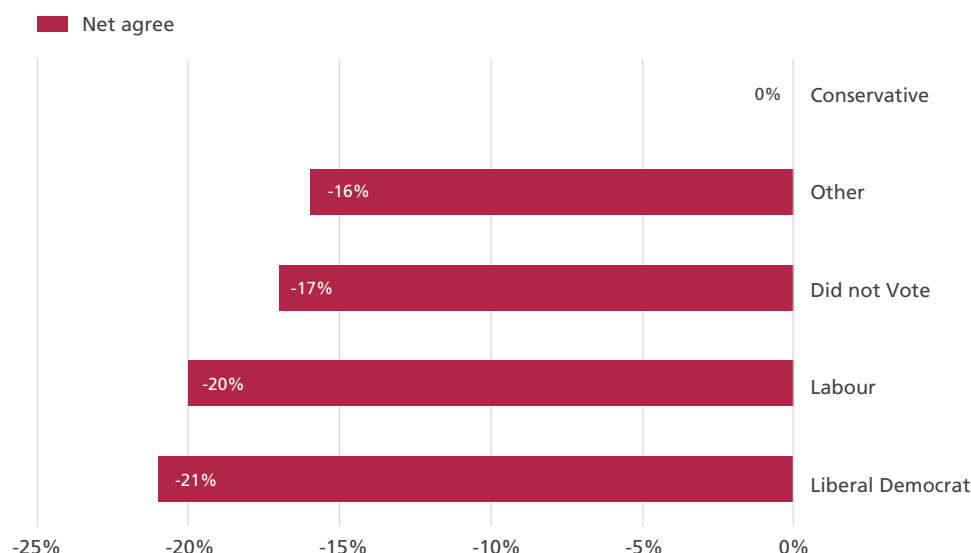
Figure 15. 'The UK government's definition of affordable housing is truly affordable to local people'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Respondents were grouped based on the way they voted in the 2019 General Election. No groups based on political affiliation net agreed with the statement 'the Government's definition of affordable housing is truly affordable'. Conservative respondents were more equivocal, with 33 per cent of Conservatives agreeing with the statement, and an equal 33 per cent disagreeing.

Figure 16. Net agreement with 'The UK government's definition of affordable housing is truly affordable to local people' (by GE 2019 vote)

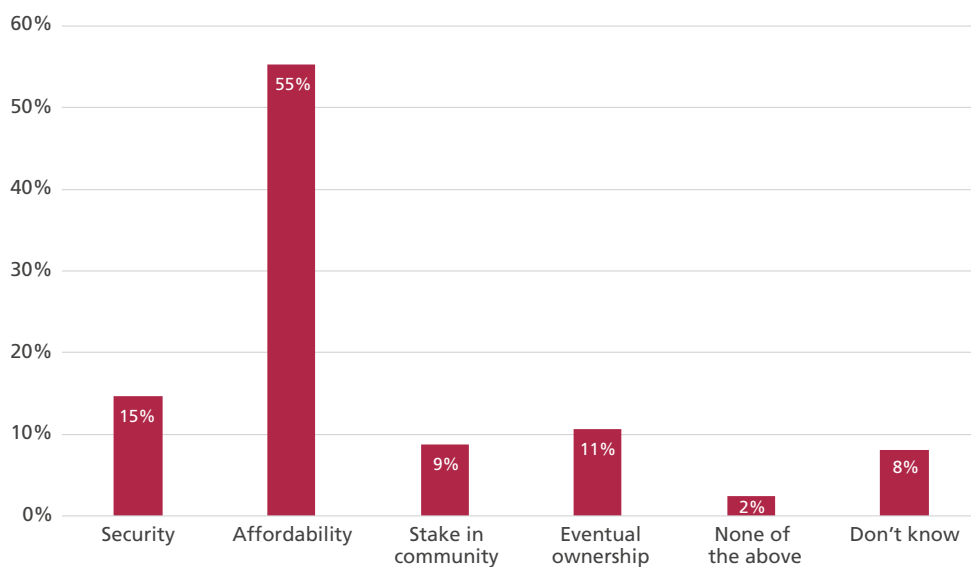


Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

The public were also asked to weigh in on what they believe the primary goal of housing policy should be. Regarding tenure preference, homeownership remains the most desirable tenure type across the public, with 71 per cent saying that they would like to live in an owned home versus 10 per cent who would like to live in private rented housing and 10 per cent who would like to live in social rented housing. On this basis, it may be safe to assume that respondents would place eventual home ownership high up on the priority list.

Yet, despite homeownership being the gold standard in housing desirability, just 11 per cent of respondents said that 'eventual ownership' should be the primary aim of housing, with 55 per cent preferring 'affordability'.

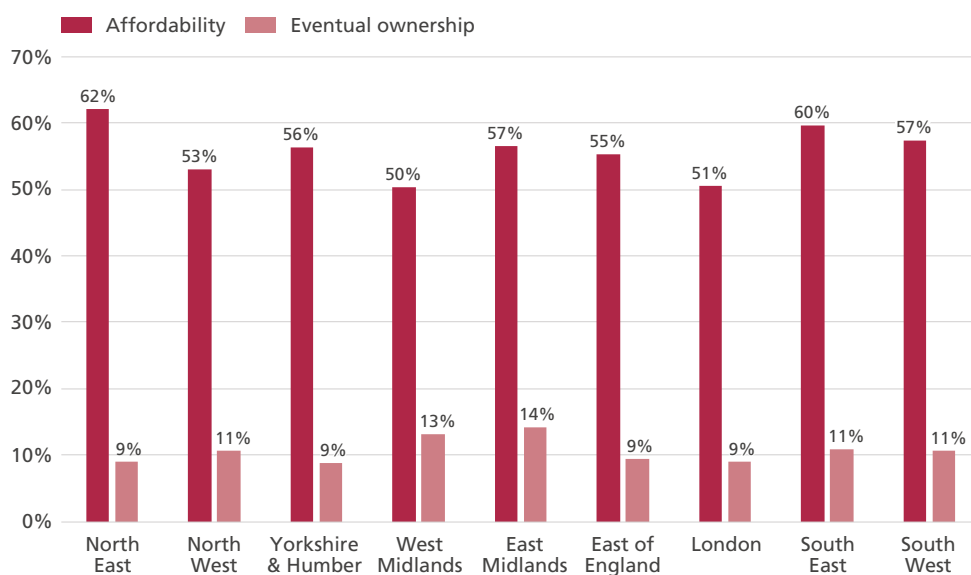
Figure 17. 'What should the primary goal of housing policy be?'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

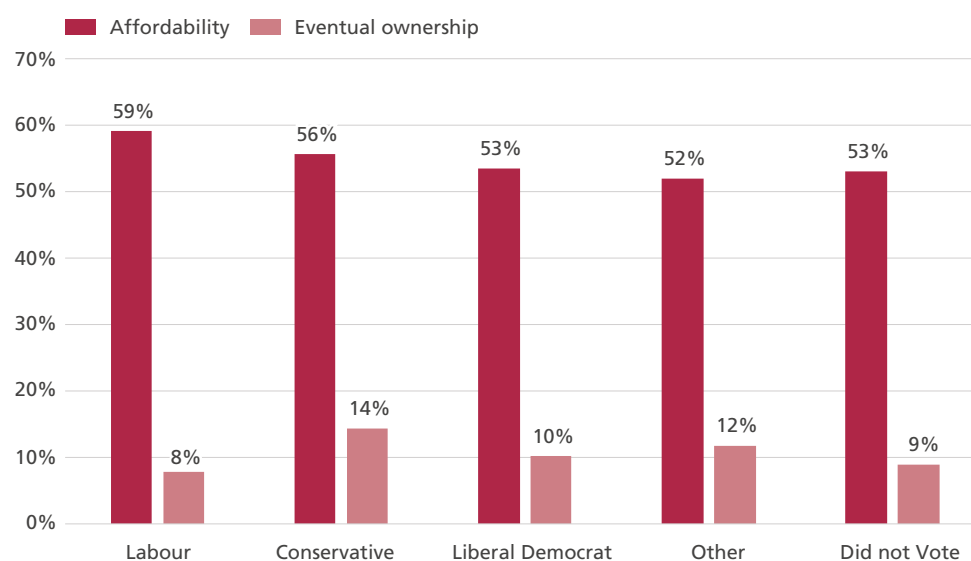
Prioritising affordability over eventual ownership holds true across regions and political parties with over 50 per cent of respondents in each category opting for affordability as the primary goal of housing policy. This does not discount or diminish the public's desire to own their own home, but perhaps points to the overarching affordability problem as identified earlier in this report.

Figure 18. 'What should the primary goal of housing policy be?' (by region)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Figure 19. 'What should the primary goal of housing policy be?' (by GE 2019 vote)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

## 5.2 The public believes that not enough is being done to meet the country's housing needs

It definitely is about making rented housing more affordable. I mean if you think back to generations previously, there were so many affordable, rentable houses. [Back] then there were individuals who were allowed to buy their house, but they just weren't replaced and then they were gone off the market. I guess we called it council houses back in the day, but I like that sort of idea to make [housing] more affordable for people.

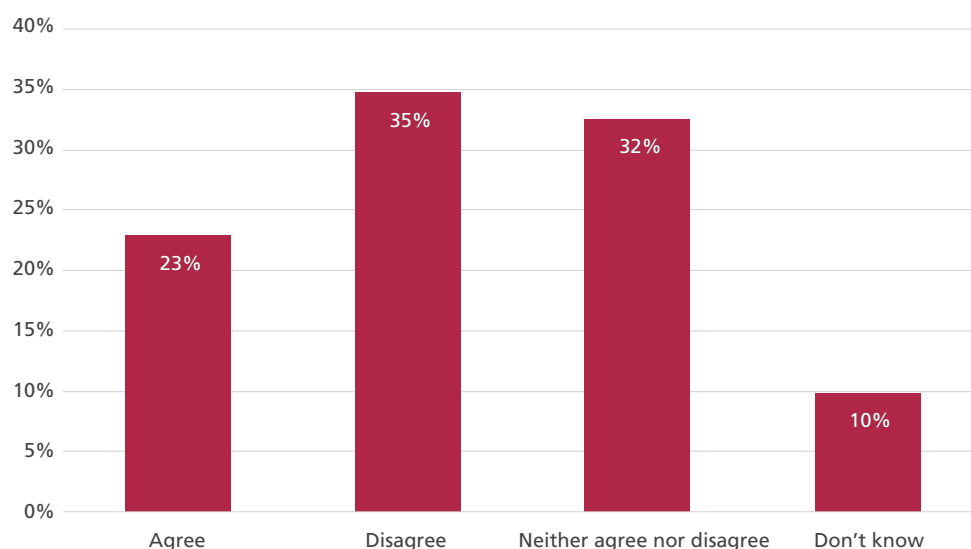
**Graham, South East**

Having established what the public believes the purpose of housing policy should be, we now move to look at how effective the public believes the Government has been in addressing key issues such as housing supply.

The public does not believe that the government is supplying the right type of housing to address the country's current housing needs with overall net disagreement of 12 per cent that the right type of housing is being supplied.



Figure 20. 'The UK government is supplying the right types of housing to address the country's housing need'



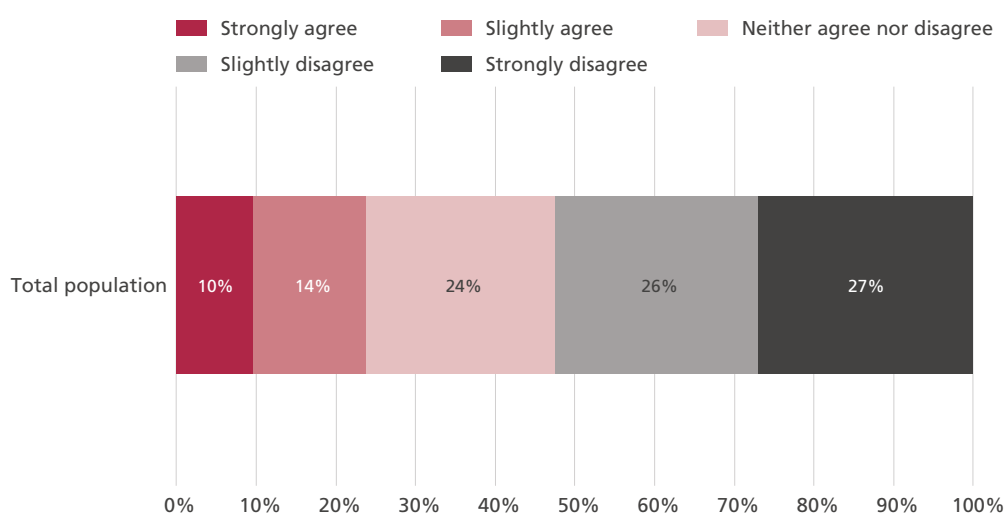
Source: CSJ/Stack Data

In addition to not believing that the government is building the right *types* of homes, 53 per cent of respondents disagreed that the Government is building enough social rented homes to meet demand, more than double those who believe that enough social rented homes are being built (24 per cent).

I think [social housing] goes some ways towards helping people, but because there's not enough of it, there seems to be an imbalance between the needs of the local population and then what's available, so there's a bit of a shortfall from what I can tell.

Helen, South East

Figure 21. 'The government is building enough social homes to meet demand'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data

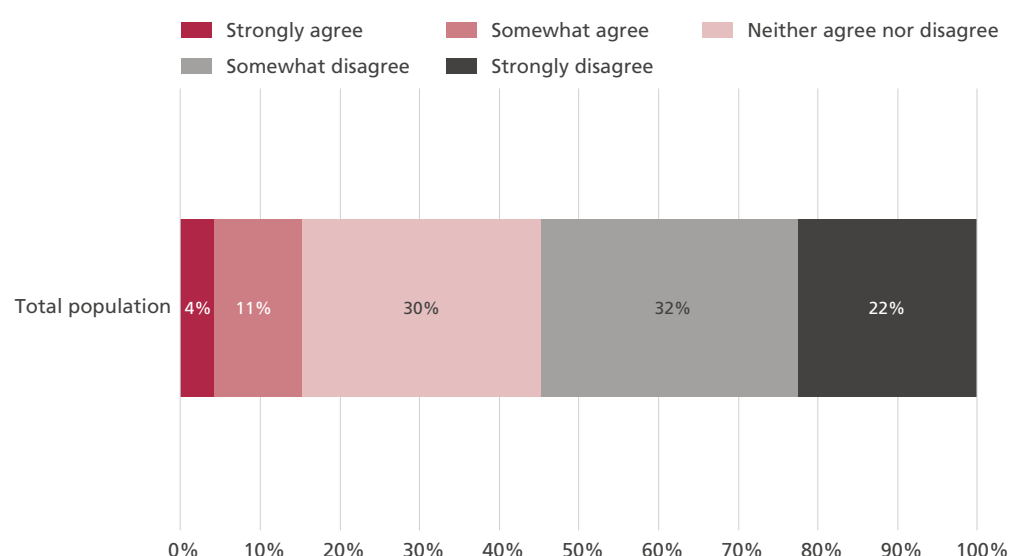
Of those social homes available to meet demand, the public does not believe that the current system to allocate them is fair and just.

Just 16 per cent of the public said that social housing allocations are fair and just versus 54 per cent that said they are not. We should remain cautious about drawing a conclusion from this data, as the precise nature of perceived unfairness is unclear, and nor is it clear how people understand the allocation system to operate. However, focus group evidence suggests the main source of unfairness derives from the long waiting lists for available housing – which currently stands at 1.15 million. The national social housing waiting list is currently 1.15 million.<sup>84</sup>

There [could be] 100 people bidding for one house. So how they do the criteria for who gets it is beyond me. I've got friends who have been on the waiting list for ages and just can't get into the social housing. So, you get [put on the] list but some people wait for years to get somewhere. If there was more housing, it would be fairer for everyone.

Tina, North West

Figure 22. 'The current social housing allocation system in the UK is fair and just'

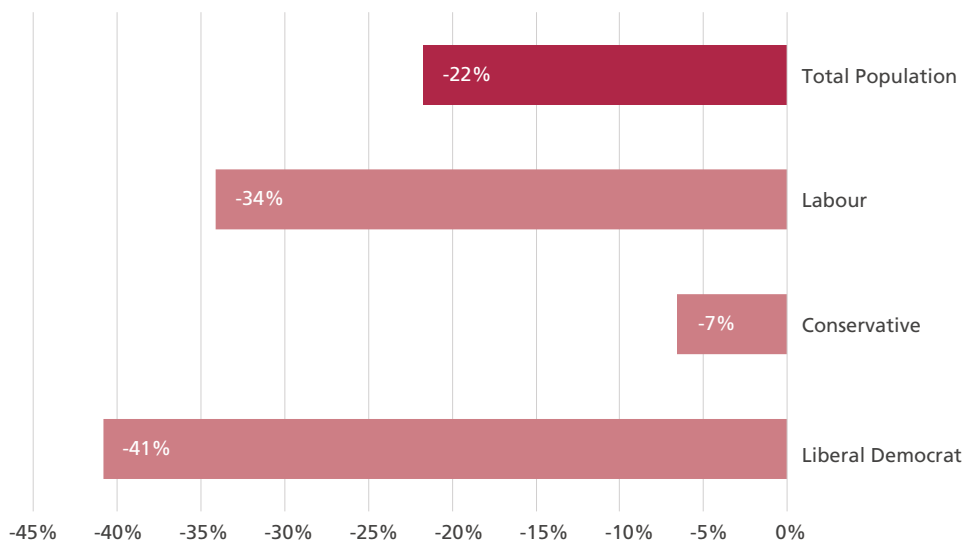


Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Along the same lines of equal opportunity and fair distribution of resources, the public does not believe that the government has been successful at tackling social inequality (with overall net disagreement of 22 per cent). While social inequality encompasses a wide range of issues, many of which are themselves politically polarising, it is notable that when controlling for political affiliation, respondents also net disagreed that the government has been successful in tackling social inequality.

84 MHCLG Live Table 600 & Local Government Authority, National Federation of Almos, and the Association of Retained Council Housing, 'Building Post Pandemic Prosperity', Nov 2020

Figure 23. Net agreement with 'The UK Government has been successful in tackling social inequality'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy. 'Don't knows' removed.

The public are largely aligned in their belief that the Government's definition of affordability is out of sync with reality, that current housing policy is not adequately addressing key housing issues, and that the Government should put affordability at the heart of its housing policy.

While there is agreement that the Government is not building enough low-cost rented homes (in the form of 'social housing'), public attitudes relating specifically to this tenure including its purpose, function and form are rarely explored. Similarly, while considerable attention has been given to the question of resistance to new developments, we must combine qualitative and quantitative evidence to reach a more advanced understanding of the key barriers and opportunities for housing policy. We turn to these now.

## chapter six

# Attitudes to social housing and new housing developments

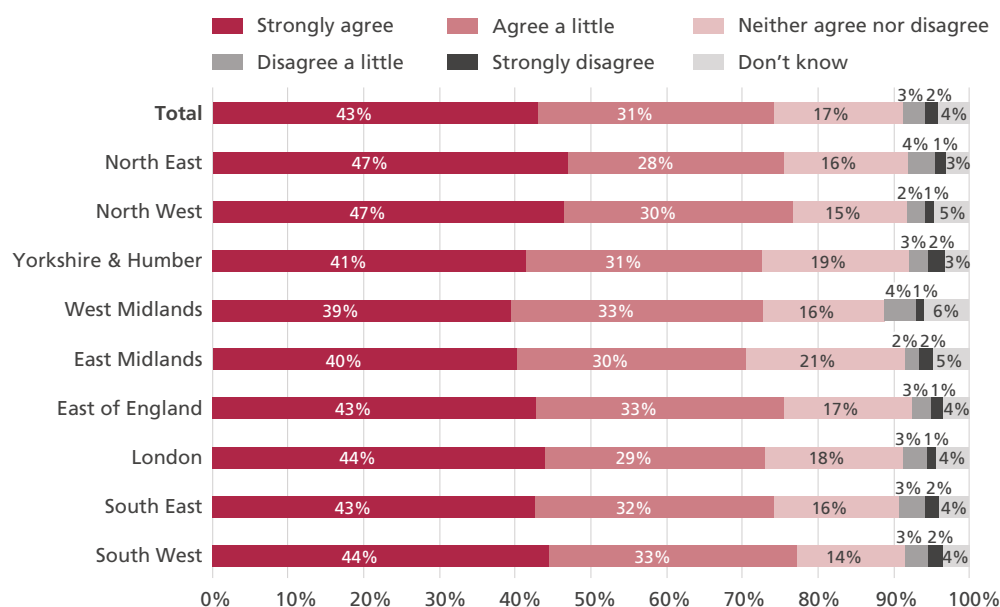
### 6.1 Social housing is seen as providing a net benefit to communities, offering affordable and secure housing for those who need it

I think [building more social housing] is a great idea. In theory I think it will spill out and help solve a lot more issues around family and social activity and productivity in general.

**Miles, South East**

In this research, respondents strongly agreed that social housing is a key part of our social safety net. 74 per cent agreed that 'social housing is an essential resource to help provide a safety net for the most financially vulnerable in society'. This holds true across England with 70 per cent or more of respondents across all regions agreeing.

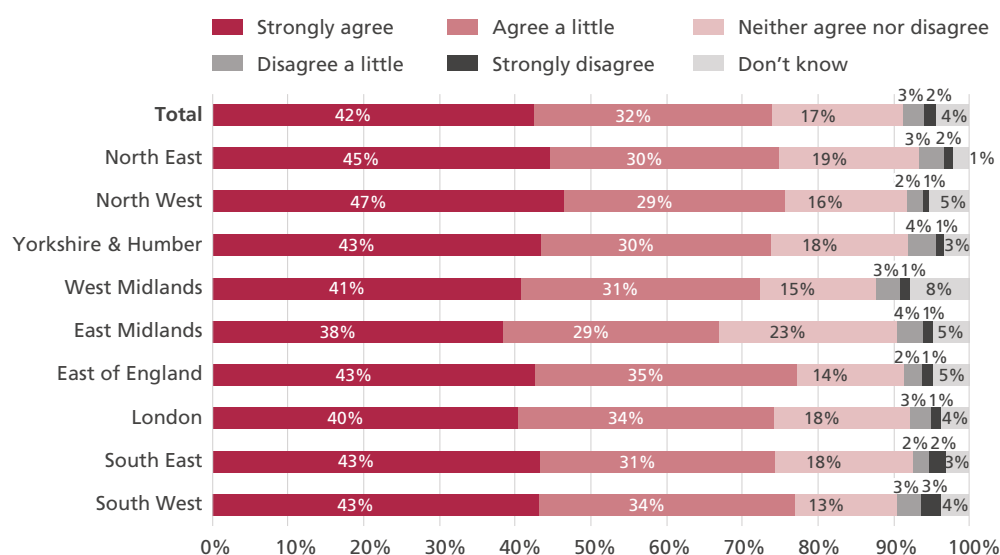
Figure 24. 'Social housing is an essential resource to help provide a safety net for the most financially vulnerable in society'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Likewise, respondents view social housing as an essential resource to support those with non-financial vulnerabilities, such as old age and/or disability, with 74 per cent of the adult population agreeing and only 5 per cent disagreeing. This again holds true across the regions.

Figure 25. 'Social housing is an essential resource to help provide a safety net for people with non-financial vulnerability (e.g. old age and/or disability)'

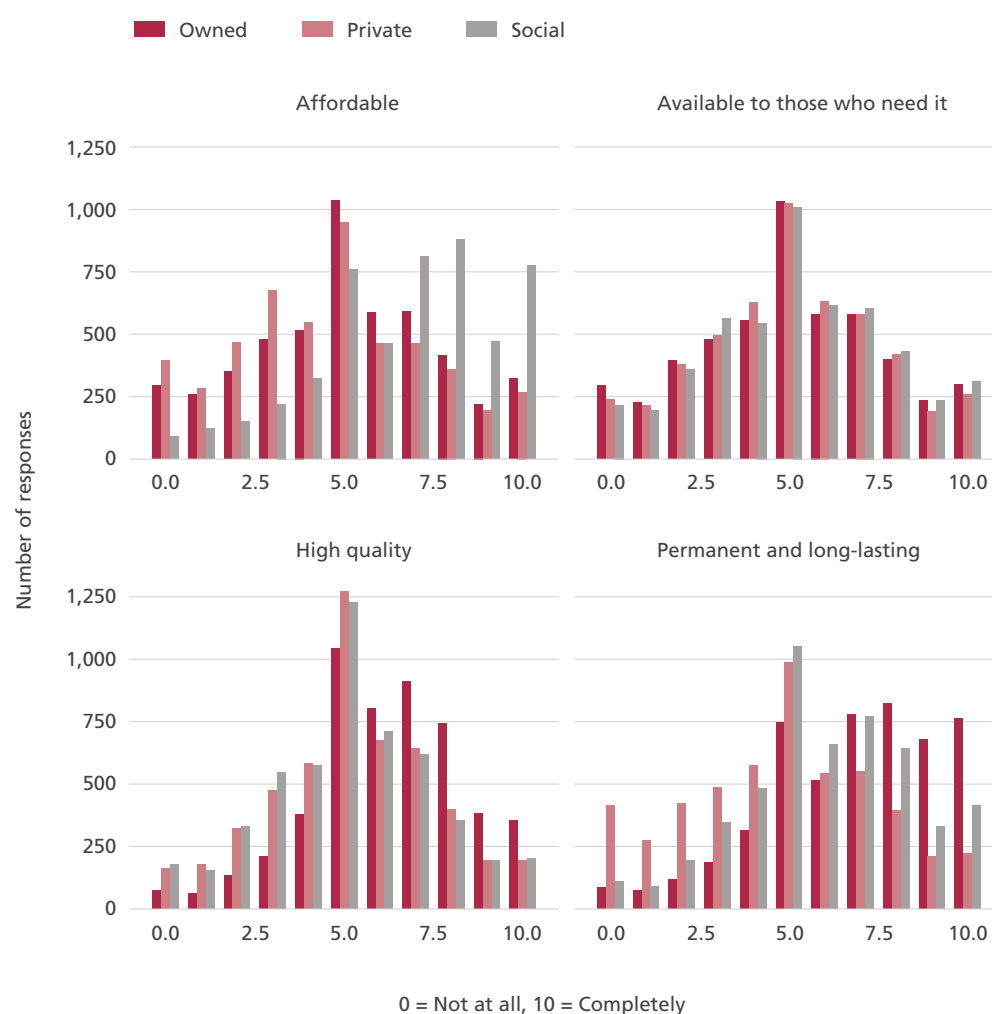


Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

As to achieving these purposes, respondents were asked to rate social housing on its affordability, availability and quality in comparison to other tenures.

In comparing social rented accommodation to private rented accommodation, which for most is the realistic comparison considering that home ownership remains out of reach for many, social housing was viewed as preferable on several dimensions. Social housing was perceived as being far more affordable than either private rentals or owned homes, as well as more permanent and long lasting than private rentals. Quality is the one area where social housing lagged behind owned homes, while remaining on par with those that are privately rented.

Figure 26. Social Housing, Private Rented Housing, and Owned Housing rated in terms of 1. Affordability, 2. Availability to those who need it, 3. Quality, and 4. Permanence (0 means not at all, and 10 means 'completely').



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Council houses [used to be] for people who couldn't afford mortgages and deposits and now have to go into private rental, which is, you know, expensive.

**Carol, North West**

## 6.2 Social housing mostly prompts positive associations, with caveats

In the past, [social housing was] solid. I was brought up in a council house and they were lovely. They had downstairs toilets, gardens, three bedrooms, a lounge, bathroom – it was amazing.

**Annie, North West**

To understand whether the public has generally positive or negative perceptions of social housing, the public was asked to identify their top associations with social housing based on a variety of words commonly associated with housing of all types.

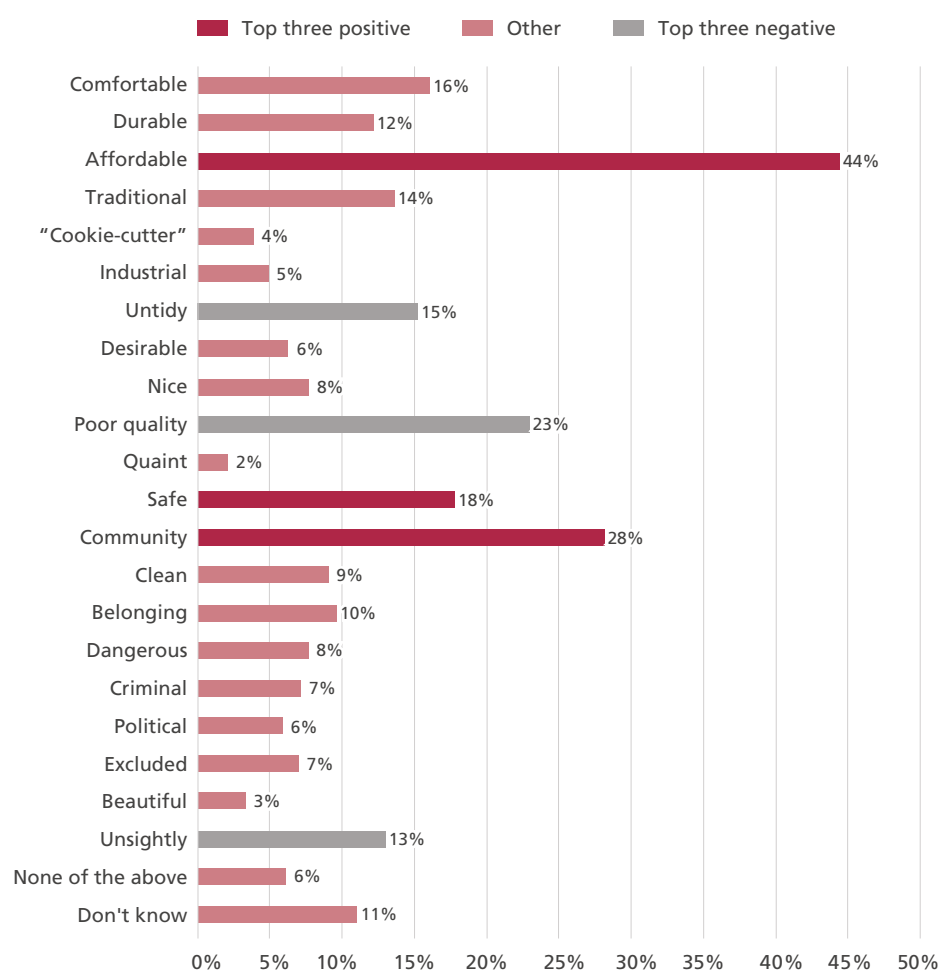
The two most popular word associations are both positive, and the majority of responses that achieved the highest scores indeed are positive as well. Based on the words provided, the public most highly associates social housing with being 'affordable' (44 per cent) and providing 'community' (28 per cent). Other popular positive answers include 'safe' (18 per cent) and 'comfortable' (16 per cent).

In these new estates rather than [those] blocks of flats, they make nice communities, where there was just land before. People feel safe and there are new buildings and it's warm and they've got people round them [who] are in the same boat as them, so it becomes a sort of community.

**Billy, North West**

The most common negative associations identified were 'poor quality' (23 per cent), 'untidy' (15 per cent) and 'unsightly' (13 per cent), all of which point towards both the quality and age of much of the housing itself, and the state in which it is kept by councils, housing associations and residents. Negative words like crime (7 per cent), danger (8 per cent), and exclusion (7 per cent) were not highly associated with social housing.

Figure 27. Words associated with social housing



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

In addition to looking at social housing as a 'place', we asked respondents to identify their top associations with the 'people' who live in social housing as well.

Again, the most popular answers represented are either neutral or positive in their judgement. Indeed, the top answer respondents gave for why people live in social rented housing is because of problems with affordability – 47 per cent said that social housing tenants were 'neither able to afford private rents or to buy a home'. The following top 3 answers are equally neutral or positive – 45 per cent of respondents said they were 'normal people like the rest of us', 'financially disadvantaged' (42 per cent), and 'have just fallen on hard times' (39 per cent).

In a lot of social housing, you have a varied type of demographic – you have young kids and single mothers and people who have come from abroad seeking asylum [and] young professionals just stepping out on their first venture in getting their own place. So, I think new social housing can create community.

Sarah, South East



Stigmatisation played a small role in clusters, with 27 per cent of respondents thinking that those living in social housing are unemployed, 16 per cent saying they were never likely to move and 13 per cent said saying they were taking advantage of the government. When conducting qualitative research this also emerged: while most people had a clear understanding of the purpose of social housing and did not stigmatise social tenants, this began to break down and negative associations began to become more prominent as participants were pressed. respondents emphasised the importance of ensuring a mix of household types.

I think if you're approaching social housing from the view point of just thinking about what high risk groups of people to put in there, then I don't think that is the basis necessarily to get the best community. I mean, you know, a young family who are on a low income may be a complete priority and the right people to live in social housing, but how do you draw them out and get them in? I know if you just put the same groups... I don't think the social community will develop in the right way if you just group people and put them in. You need the mix of people in there.

**Miles, South East**

However much they are considered unsavoury, understanding such attitudes is essential for any policymakers attempting to develop a new vision for truly affordable housing.

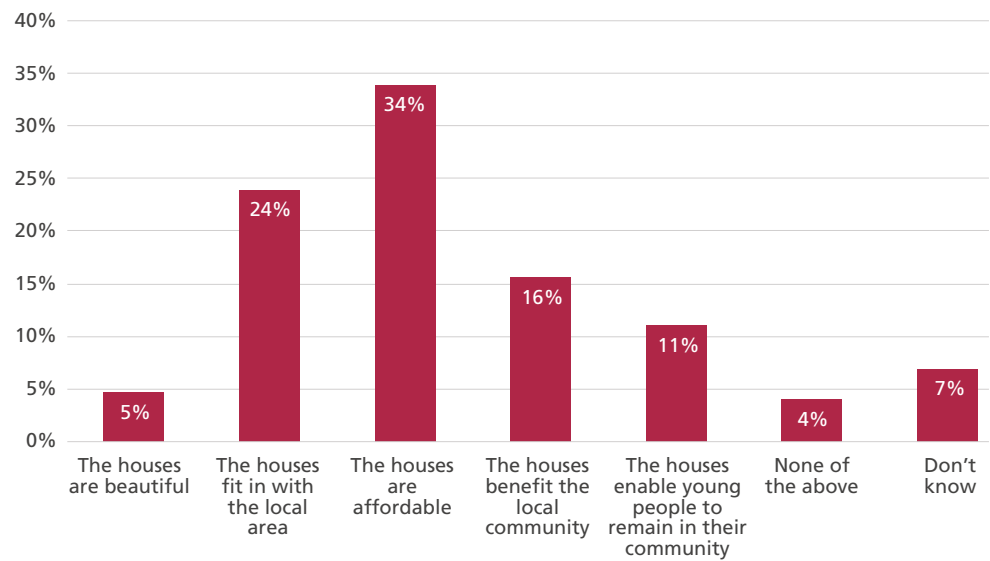
### 6.3 The public has concerns about social housing being built in their local communities, but these are not insurmountable

To me, community is absolutely important - along with affordability. A decent quality house that the family or the single person or whoever lives there is going to take pride in and enjoy living. They won't feel threatened in any way and can get on and get on with their life...

**Billy, North West**

To uncover what may be concealed or unconscious perspectives on social housing, we asked questions that required respondents to think about how they would feel if a new social housing development were built to be in their local community. When considering this scenario, the affordability of the new homes was the primary concern (34 per cent), but there was also a strong focus on maintaining the existing community, with 'houses that fit in with the local area' (24 per cent) and developments needing to 'benefit the local community' (16 per cent) and enable 'young people to remain in their community' (11 per cent).

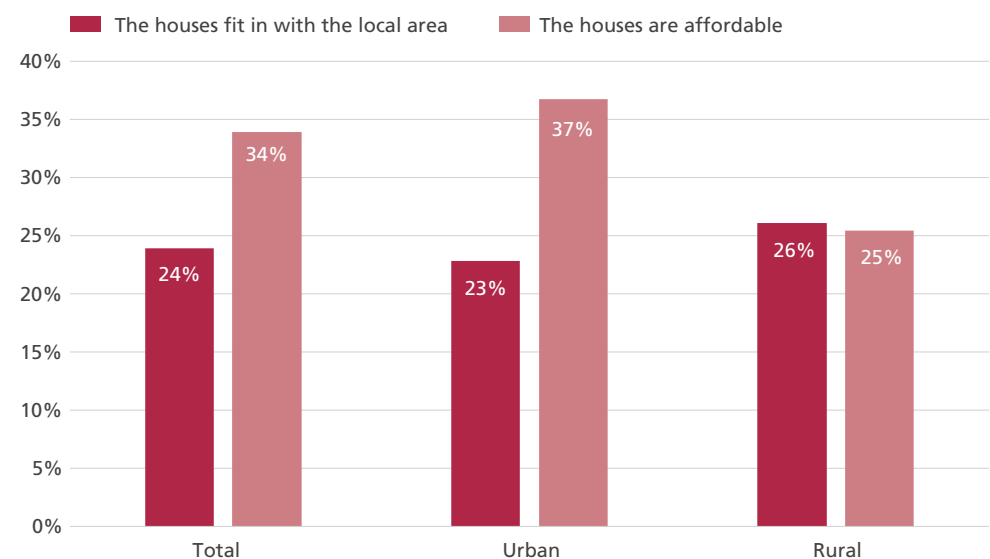
Figure 28. 'What matters most to you about new housing in your community?'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

However, when controlling for different demographics, different results emerge. While the top two highest results remained the same, for those living in either completely or mostly urban settings, affordability matters significantly more (34 per cent) than that of the second highest option: houses that fit in with the local area (24 per cent). Whereas in completely or mostly rural settings where affordability pressures tend to be lower, 'houses that fit in with the local area' are marginally preferred (1 per cent) over 'affordability'.

Figure 29. 'What matters most to you about new housing in your community?' (by area)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Perspectives also differ from the averages when looking at age. Affordability matters most (40 per cent) to younger people aged 18 – 44 years versus houses that fit in with the local area (18 per cent). But for those 65 and older, houses that fit in with the local community matter significantly more (32 per cent) than affordability (24 per cent).

Figure 30. 'What matters most to you about new housing in your community?' (by age)

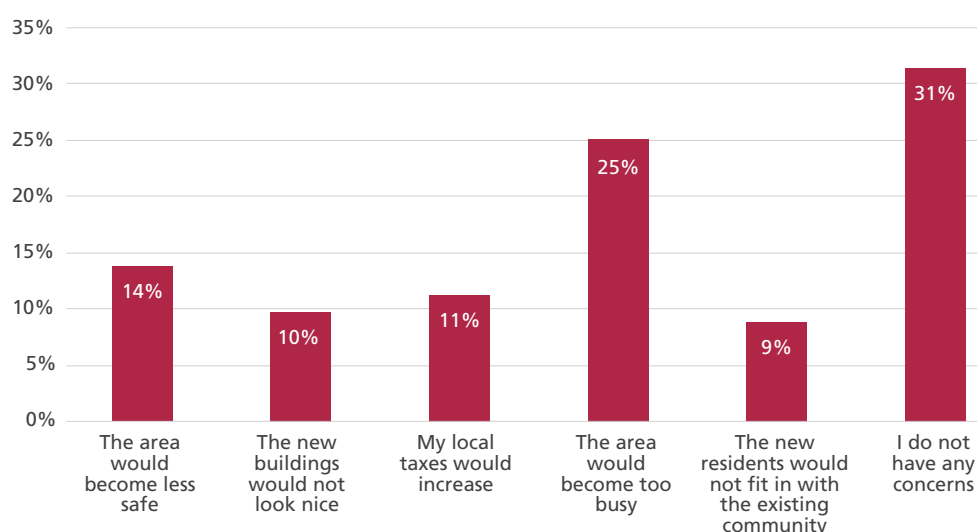
	The houses are beautiful	The houses fit with the local area	The houses are affordable	The houses benefit the local community	The houses enable young people to remain in their community	None of the above	Don't know
<b>Total</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>7%</b>
18–24	13%	15%	38%	14%	9%	5%	8%
25–34	9%	17%	42%	11%	6%	3%	12%
35–44	6%	22%	39%	16%	6%	4%	8%
45–54	3%	23%	37%	16%	10%	5%	6%
55–64	1%	29%	27%	17%	14%	4%	6%
65+	1%	32%	24%	18%	18%	3%	3%

Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

As important, if not more important, as what *matters* most to the public in relation to a new social housing development, is what *concerns* arise when respondents are informed of a new social housing development being built in their local area. While new social housing does not typically take the form of mono-tenure developments today, this wording was used to elicit responses relating specifically to new low-cost rented housing in an area.

Nearly one third of respondents (31 per cent) said that they did not have concerns about new social housing being built in their local area. One quarter of respondents identified the area becoming too busy as their biggest concern, pointing to an issue with local infrastructure surrounding general housing development rather than any kind of stigma or negative association with social housing specifically.

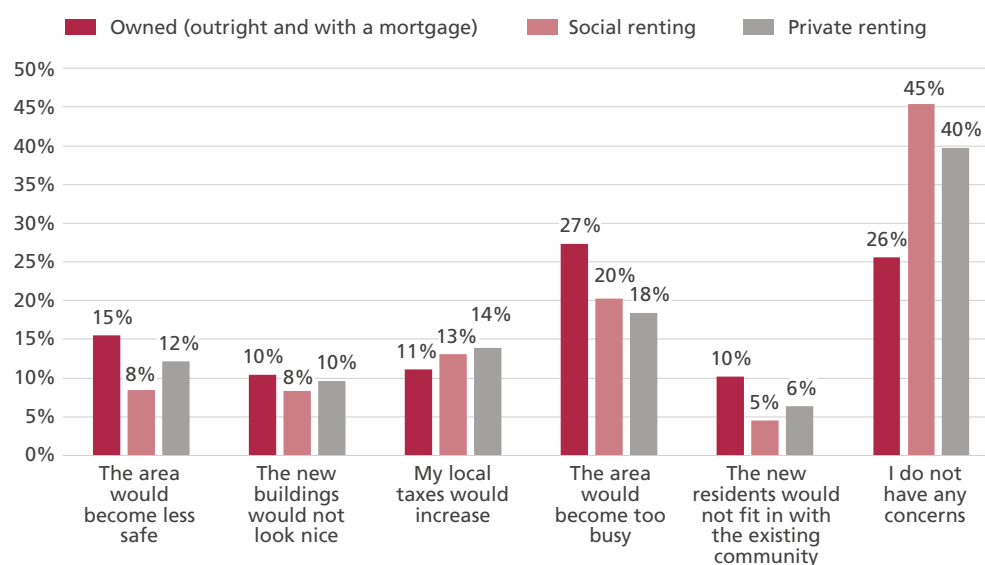
Figure 31. 'There is a new social housing development being built in your area. What is your biggest concern?'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Yet a not insubstantial 14 per cent said they would be concerned that the area would become less safe. When looking at the underlying demographics, distinctions emerge. Social renters and private renters are most welcoming of new social housing developments in their local area, with 45 per cent and 40 per cent respectively saying they had no concerns, followed by 20 per cent and 18 per cent who said the area would become too busy. Social renters were least concerned about safety (8 per cent) with private renters showing slight concern about the issue (12 per cent).

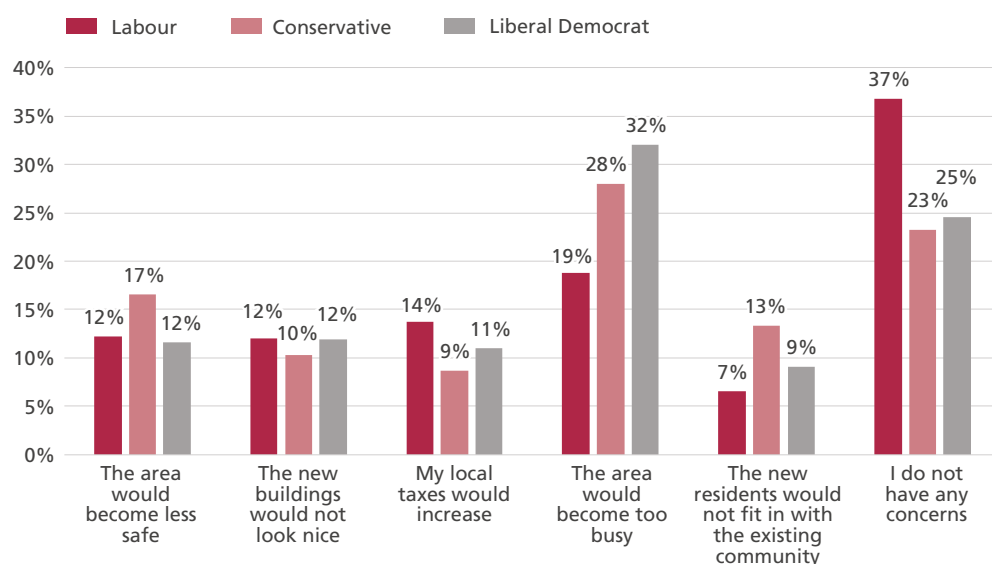
Figure 32. 'There is a new social housing development being built in your local area. What is your biggest concern?' (by tenure)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Additionally, when looking at the political breakdown, those who voted Conservative in the 2019 election show warmth to new social housing development with nearly one quarter (23 per cent) stating that they have no concerns about new social housing in their local area. Liberal Democrats are most concerned about the area becoming congested (32 per cent) and Conservatives are most concerned that the area would become less safe (17 per cent).

Figure 33. 'There is a new social housing development being built in your local area. What is your biggest concern?' (by GE 2019 vote)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Despite traces of underlying concerns or negative connotations, the data points to an existing national consensus that social housing represents an important part of the social safety net, especially for those who are struggling with the cost of living and experiencing non-financial vulnerabilities.

## chapter seven

# Attitudes to a low-cost rented homebuilding programme

### 7.1 The public is supportive of the Government investing in low-cost rented housing, but with caveats

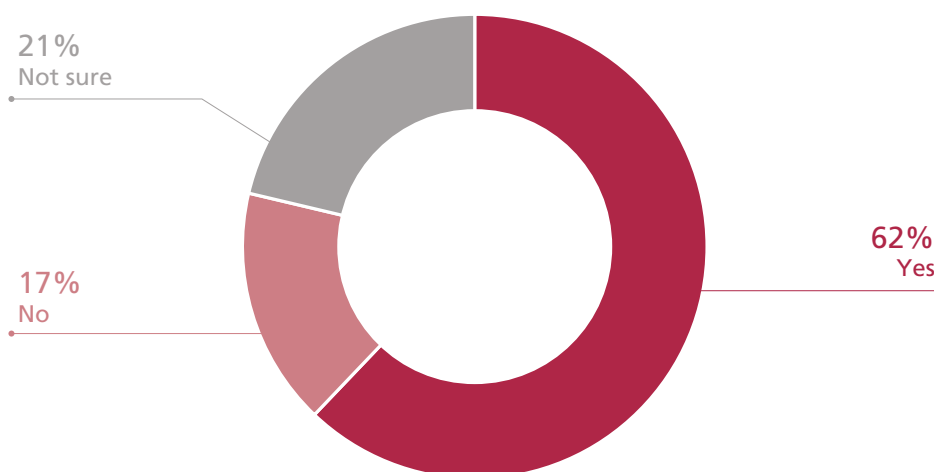
I think we should build more social housing. Looking at my kids, I can't see them getting on the property ladder without it, not for a long while. It would just be a help and it would boost the economy.

**Trevor, South East**

Given what we have seen in Part One regarding the profound social impact of the hidden housing crisis, and what we've learned about public opinion so far in Part Two, next we look at public opinion on the delivery of low-cost rented homes as government policy.

Before narrowing the questioning to 'low-cost homes for rent', specifically, we asked using the more commonly used phrase in current Government policy to represent sub-market housing provision: 'affordable housing'. We found that, when asked about the direction and focus of current government policy, a substantial majority of the public (62 per cent) agreed that affordable housing should be a priority of the current government, with only one sixth of respondents disagreeing.

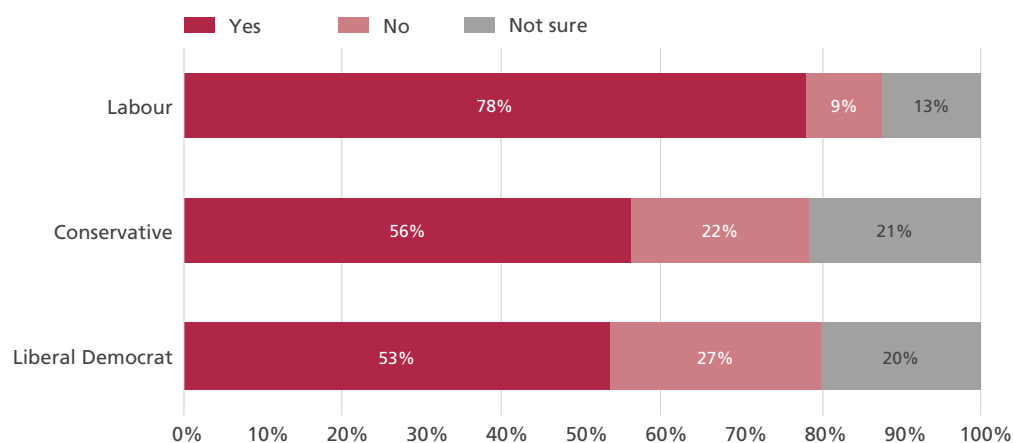
Figure 34. 'Do you think that affordable housing should be a priority of the current UK Government?'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

The national average is not obstructing divided views across politically affiliated groups. Majorities in all three major parties said that affordable housing should be a priority of the current UK government with both Conservatives (56 per cent) and Liberal Democrats (54 per cent) agreeing, while 78 per cent of Labour voters also agreed.

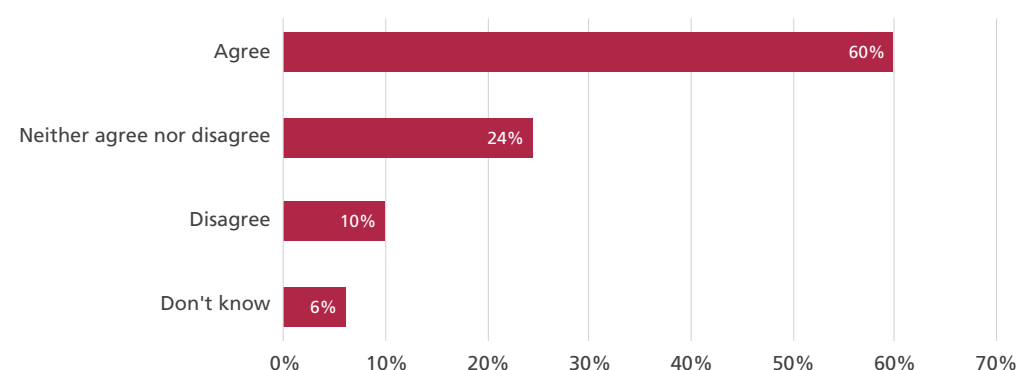
Figure 35. 'Do you think that affordable housing should be a priority of the current UK government' (by GE 2019 vote)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

When exploring what this prioritisation could look like, the poll also indicates that a large proportion of the public is supportive of the overarching statement that the Government needs to be setting out additional funds and policies to tackle the housing crisis – with net 50 per cent agreement.

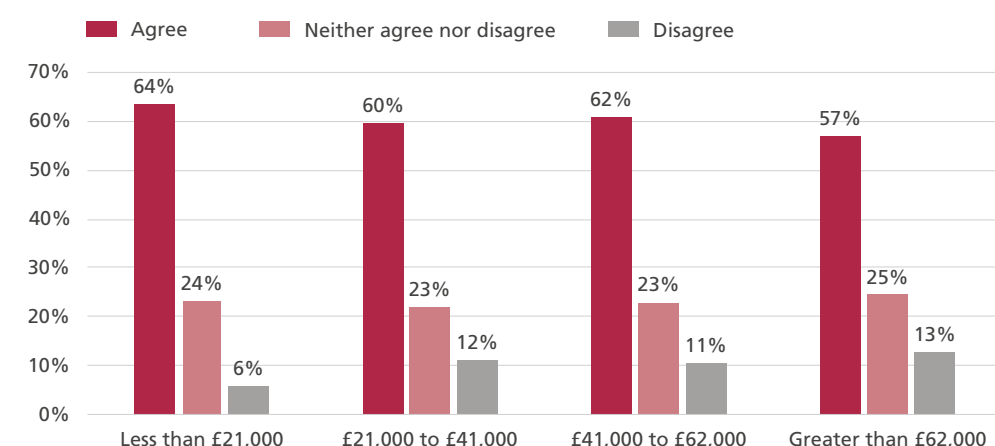
Figure 36. 'The UK government need to be putting in additional funds and policies to tackle the current housing crisis'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Strong consensus holds across nearly all demographics. The public, across the income spectrum, largely agree that the govt needs to be putting additional funds and policies into tackling the housing crisis. However, those on the highest incomes (greater than £62,000) net agree by 14 per cent less than those on the lowest incomes (less than £21,000), perhaps reflecting their lack of need for such housing while also recognising its benefit to society. One in four in each income bracket, as in the nationally representative poll, said that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

Figure 37. 'The UK government need to be putting in additional funds and policies to tackle the current housing crisis' (by income group)

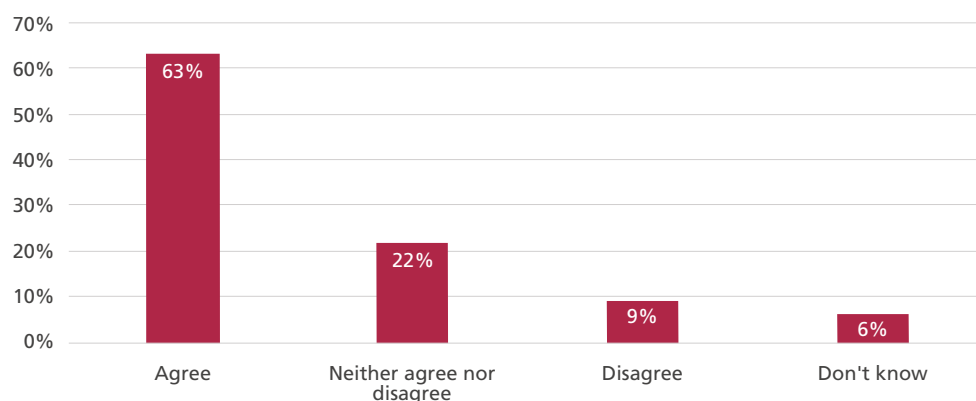


Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

More specific questioning relating to *how* funds and policies should be deployed is also suggestive. Net 54 per cent of the public agree that the Government needs to 'supply low-cost homes to rent' to solve the housing crisis – a 4 per cent increase on the more generalised question regarding whether the Government should invest more to end the housing crisis. In addition, those who 'neither agree nor disagree' shrank by 2 per cent – potentially pointing to a 'plan' of policy solutions resonating more with the public.



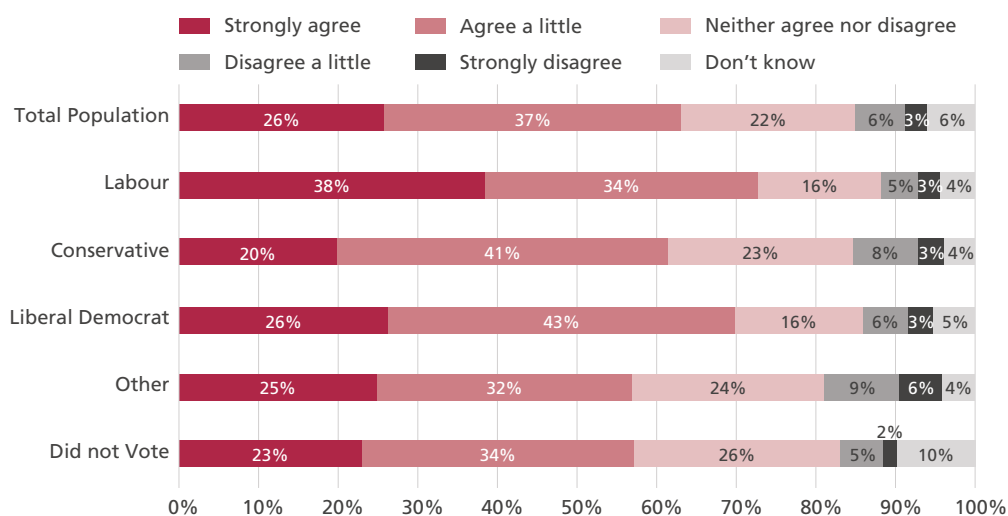
Figure 38. The UK Government needs to supply low-cost homes to rent to solve the housing crisis



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Across all major parties, support for the Government to build low-cost homes to rent to solve the housing crisis is over 60 percent with net agreement sitting at or above 50 per cent. Those without a political home (did not vote or voted 'Other') displayed less enthusiasm, pointing either to political disengagement or high commitment to singular or specific issues which drove their support for an 'Other' political party.

Figure 39. 'The UK Government needs to supply low-cost home to rent to solve the housing crisis' (by GE 2019 vote)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Notably, Conservative opinion here remains on par with the rest of the population – they are largely supportive of the Government building 'low-cost homes to rent' to solve the housing crisis, but are slightly less enthusiastic in their agreement, with fewer choosing 'strongly agree' (1 in 5) than the national average (1 in 4).

Only 11 per cent of Conservatives said that they disagree that low-cost rented homes need to be supplied to solve the housing crisis. Liberal Democrats are also supportive of the statement, which stands in comparison to their slight apprehension to 'social

housing' being built in their local area due to the impact on congestion. This may indicate a hesitation towards any and all new housebuilding due to its impact on the efficiency of the local community, and not a hesitation towards low-cost rented housing in particular.

Notably, when asked if the government should supply 'social housing' to solve the housing crisis rather than 'low-cost homes to rent', Conservative and Liberal Democrat support dips, though by a small margin. With this change of framing, Conservative support shrinks by 3 per cent and Lib Dem by 4 per cent.

Table 40. 'The UK government needs to supply social housing to solve the housing crisis'

GE2019 vote	Strongly agree	Agree a little	Neither agree not disagree	Disagree a little	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<b>Total</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>6%</b>
Labour	38%	33%	18%	4%	3%	4%
Conservative	19%	39%	26%	9%	5%	3%
Liberal Democrat	27%	38%	22%	5%	4%	4%
Other	27%	33%	21%	10%	6%	4%
Did not vote	23%	29%	29%	7%	2%	10%

Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

The fact that a plurality of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat voters net agree that both 'social' and 'low-cost rented' housing should be supplied to solve the housing crisis is striking, particularly given well-established associations around tenure and political affiliation (we explore this theme further in Part Three).

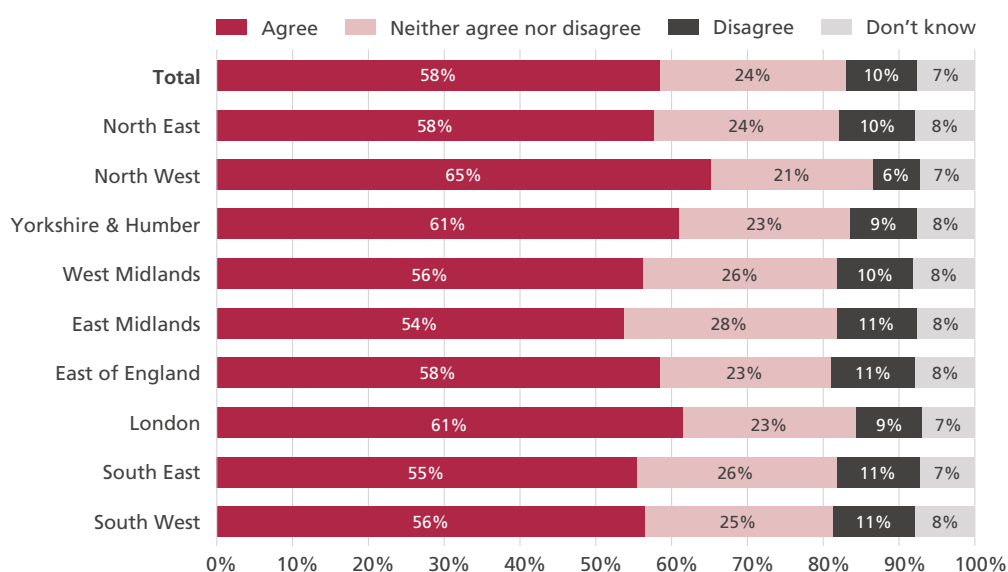
I think when people get a foothold in their life and their community and they feel good about themselves it will help them to do better in life, and that can be contagious.

Trevor, South East

In addition, as 'levelling up' has risen to the top of the policy agenda, the public believes that building low-cost housing can help the Government deliver on that promise. More than 50 per cent of respondents across the nation see building low-cost housing as a tool that could help to 'level up' the England.

There is strong agreement in the North-West (65 per cent) and Yorkshire and the Humber (61 per cent), both of which are regions that might expect to benefit from a focus on 'levelling up'. But Londoners also strongly agree (61 per cent) that building low-cost homes would level up England, pointing to low-cost rented housebuilding as being a policy area that could unite different demographics around the levelling up agenda.

Figure 41. 'Building more low-cost rented homes would help to 'level up' England'

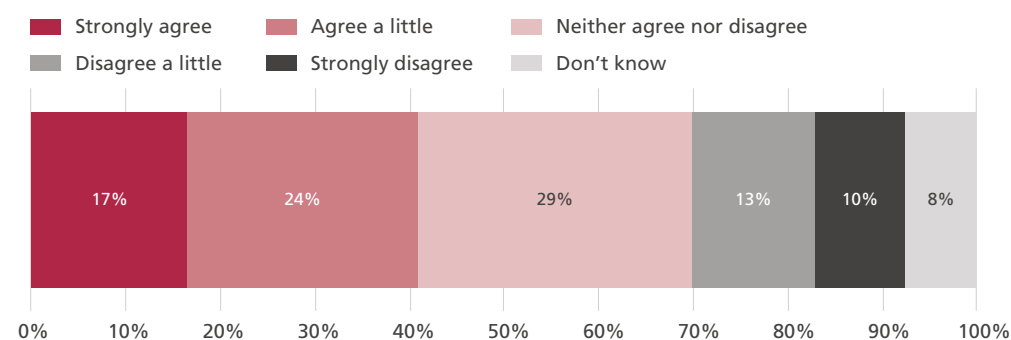


Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

While a substantial number of respondents choosing 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know' is to be expected in any poll from the portion of the public that is politically disengaged, it could in this case also indicate that the public is not certain of the meaning of 'levelling up' or how it can be achieved in practice.

While there is a consensus on what policy should be implemented to solve the housing crisis, there is less clear agreement on *how* it should be implemented. When asked if the Government should increase borrowing to build these low-cost rented homes, disagreement increased to 23 per cent and respondents answering 'neither agree nor disagree' increased to nearly a third of the sample. 41 percent agreed with the statement, which, while significant given strong public resistance to borrowing, is less agreement than seen in response to 'what to do' questions rather than 'how to do it' questions. This highlights a division in public opinion regarding the practical implementation of generally well supported policies.

Figure 42. 'The Government should increase borrowing to build more low-cost rented homes'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

The CSJ will be exploring the available policy options in depth in the next report in this series.

part three

# Understanding the electorate's views on social housing



## chapter eight

# Introducing six segments of the English public

## 8.1 Introduction

The polling presented in Part Two suggest a public that is aware of and frustrated by high housing costs, that understands and appreciates the purpose of social housing as it exists currently, that generally believes social housing is good for society, that wants to see more low-cost rented housing built to solve the housing crisis, and that believes truly affordable housing should be a priority of this government.

These attitudes, though varied, broadly hold across party lines, suggesting that concern about the lack of affordable housing has emerged as a point of wide consensus. Even so, against a rapidly changing political landscape and once in a generation events such as Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to look deeper than demographic indicators in isolation (including how people voted in the last election), recognising that there will be diverging and shifting opinions both between and within the main parties voters.

Why does this matter? Because any new vision for truly affordable housing must both be grounded in public opinion and appreciative of the distinctive segments of the English electorate. Only then can policies be developed which command support among the most salient electoral groups, increasing their chances of being adopted and addressing the hidden housing crisis.

Here, we identify and explore politically salient segments of the population and their perspectives on, beliefs about, and response to low-cost rented housing and government housing policy (see below, pp. 66–67). This equips the Government with a sophisticated picture of the new electorate's perspectives on social housing, shedding much needed light on how affordable housing policy should be shaped in the 2020s.

## 8.2 Introducing the segments

### Box 1. Methodology

Stack Data Strategy employed a combination of cluster analysis and principal component analysis (PCA) to effectively segment the 5,000 survey respondents into distinct groups for subsequent analysis. Using spoke questions, clustering analysis and regression modelling, we were able to create groupings or 'segments' of the English population that may view various issues through a similar ideological and political lens. Finally, these were named based on their most recognisable attributes.

Six key segments of the population emerged following the combination of cluster analysis and principal component analysis applied to the respondents (see Box 1, above). The full demographic data for each segment are presented in the Appendix. Below we provide a portrait of each key segment.

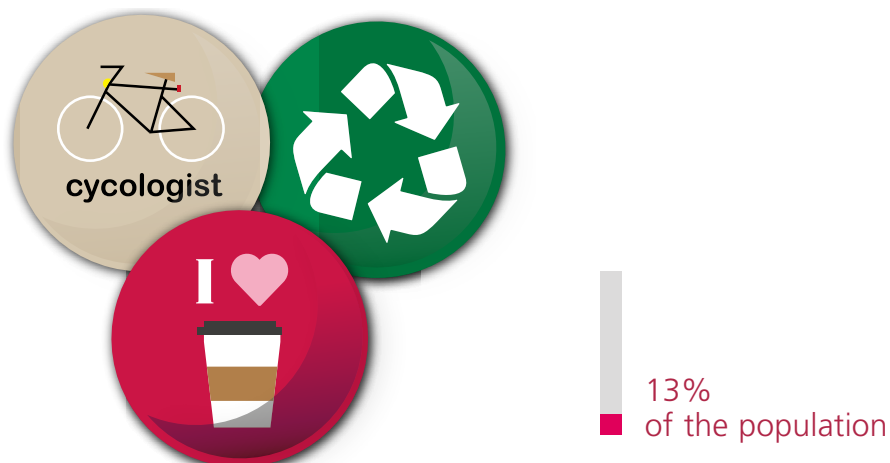
### New Conservatives



This older, patriotic, Leave-voting group are primarily homeowners (although many are social renters), with modest incomes and/or retired status. They are concentrated in former 'Red Wall' constituencies in Yorkshire and the North East, but are also well represented across the South East, East Anglia and West Midlands. Galvanised by their Leave vote in the 2016 Referendum, much of this group moved towards the Conservative party gradually, and then suddenly, over the course of 2015-2019.

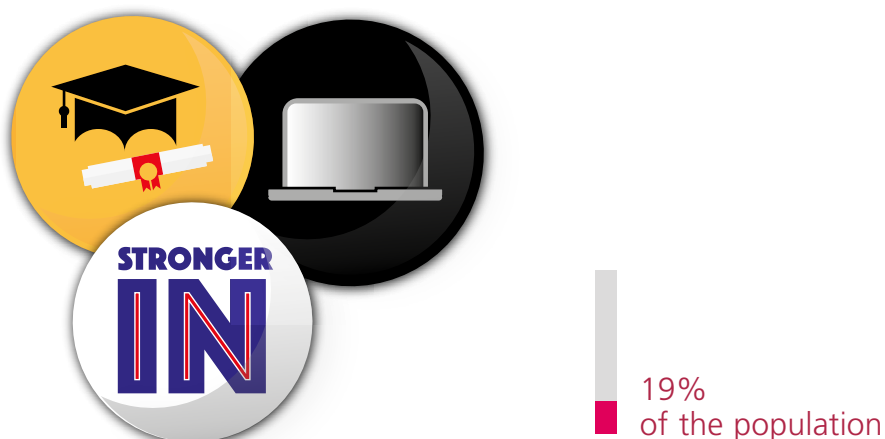
They are the new bedrock of the Conservative coalition and the type of voters the party is likely to increase its reliance on in the next election. They are culturally conservative but hold less strongly liberal positions on economics and distributional questions than other Conservative voters. Their distinctive prioritisation of security over freedom perhaps translates into their favourable stances towards both social housing and the NHS, as well as their belief that zero-hours contracts should be scrapped. Notably, despite being majority homeowners, they have the largest portion of social renters of all the segments, as well as lower education levels and lower incomes than other segments.

## Metropolitan Elite



This wealthy, well-educated and heavily left-leaning group are vociferous supporters of progressive social policy and are highly critical of the Government's approach to current problems. Vocal, passionate and politically active, the Metropolitan Elite form a key part of Labour's new support base, also rallying to them the Liberal Democrats and the Greens in the aftermath of Brexit. While unlikely to benefit from most social housing policies personally, they are defined by their progressive views and believe support for them is an important moral litmus test.

## Liberal Centrists



Prosperous but sometimes deemed politically homeless, this is a group who would have likely been sympathetic to David Cameron's premiership from 2010–2016 but have been left without a clear political home in the aftermath of Brexit. 'Liberal Centrists' are slightly older, moderate on economic issues, and lean towards Remain. Previously they would have been part of the 'soft' Conservative coalition, but the recent realignment of the British electorate has left them detached and considering their future. Despite their broadly socially progressive views and warmth towards social housing, unrestrained support for social housing is stymied by an undercurrent of stigma and 'nimbyism'.

## Shire Tories



Older, male, home-owning and Leave supporting, this segment is characterised by its strong beliefs, strong support of the Conservative party, and strong opposition to most progressive policies or significant changes in the country. They are concentrated in the English Shires and form the traditional 'right' wing of the Conservative coalition, being right leaning on both social and economic issues. They recognise some benefits of social housing, but their strong beliefs about fairness make them the coldest of all groups to the idea of building more social housing. As the Government works to consolidate their base voters, it has been speculated that 'Shire Tories' will increasingly find themselves in competition with the 'New Conservatives'.

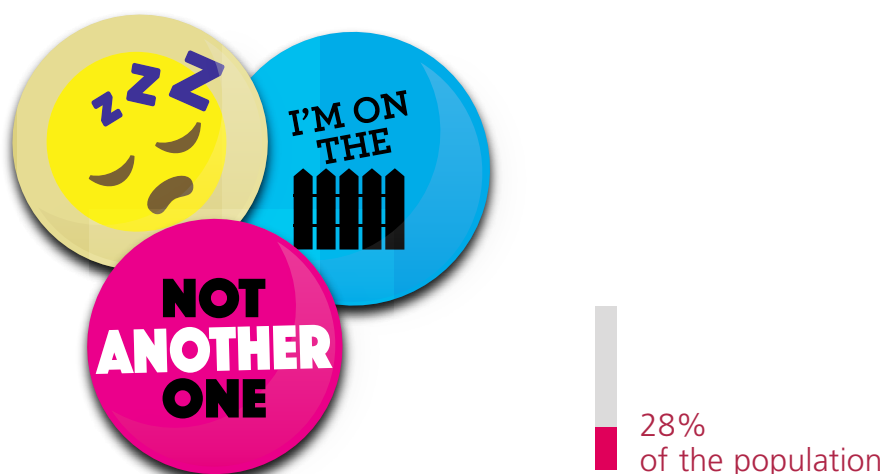
## Aspirational Individualists



Young, urban, and ethnically diverse, 'Aspirational Individualists' have lofty ambitions and don't see a glass ceiling despite their low incomes. This group see themselves as living in a global world, with values that reflect this – they support overseas aid and speak positively about the impact of both globalisation and immigration. Despite this, they are fiercely individual, believing that benefits are too readily available in the UK and are hostile to paying more in taxes. Their ambition and optimism mean that while they see housing and social policies as important issues, they believe the government has it under control (or don't know any better), and do not place too much expectation or obligation on the government to do more.



## Disengaged Middle



The Disengaged Middle are the largest, most demographically varied group but are drawn together by a common thread – they avoid engaging with politics and current affairs, sitting on the fence or answering ‘don’t know’ in almost all cases. This group represents the large portion of the country that rarely votes, is not that active on policy questions, and which views politics as largely secondary to their lives.

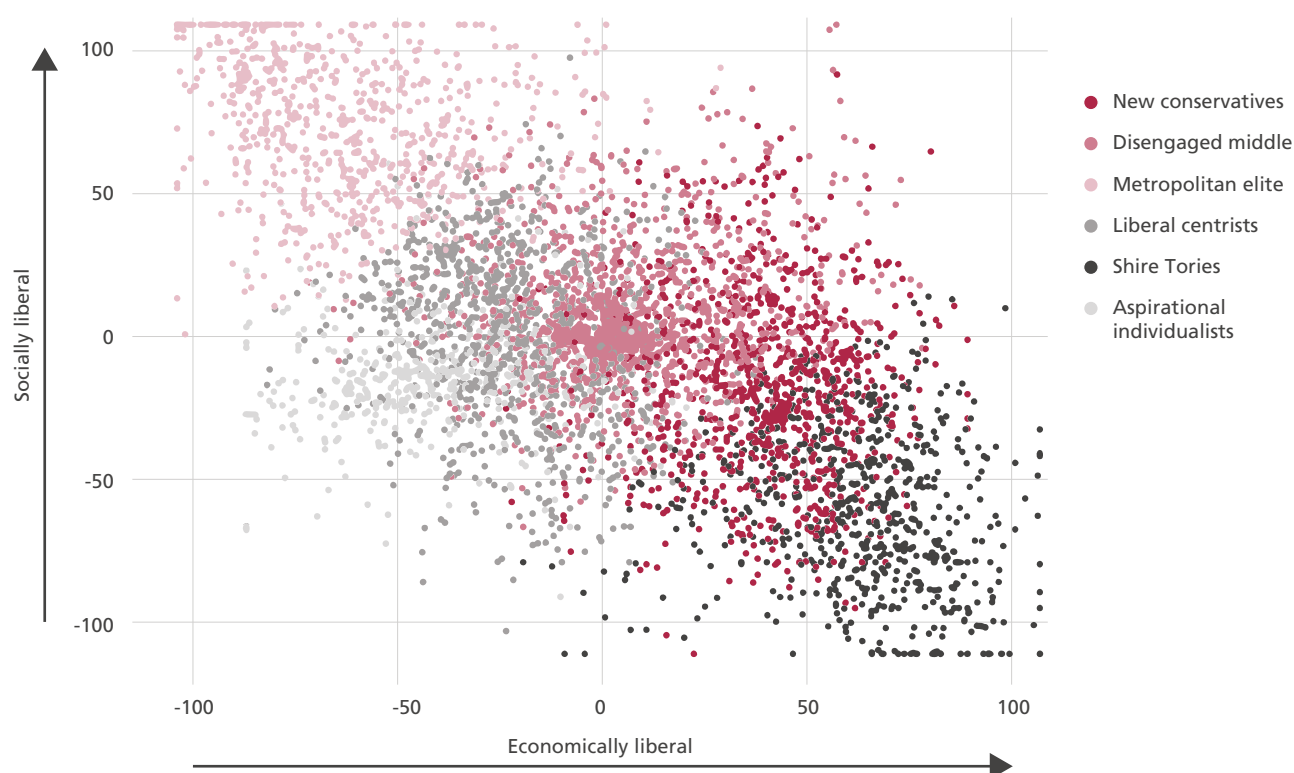
### 8.3 Understanding the segments: ‘spoke questions’

Traditional party loyalties have been increasingly tested in recent years by changing cultural attitudes and new political identities, such as those shaped by individuals’ stance on EU membership. Boris Johnson’s parliamentary majority in 2019, as many have noted, was in no small part driven by formerly Labour strongholds embracing the Conservative Party – at least in order to ‘Get Brexit Done’. Indeed, although the left-right political divide continues to shape the electoral choices in England, this divide is evolving as old distinctions and certainties start to shift, demanding new methodologies to untangle and understand this new electorate.

Therefore, the commonalities and distinctions between the segments are better captured by looking at multiple dimensions together. Stack Data Strategy’s attitudinal ‘spoke questions’ determine the extent to which respondents endorse things such as inequality and discrimination, feminism, legalisation of cannabis, NHS funding, taxation, globalisation and overseas development, allowing them to determine where individuals fall on the social liberalism versus economic liberalism spectrum. Taken together, we achieve more variation than looking at voting behaviour or any other demographic factor on its own.

Below, the range of responses are clustered by the economic and social views of each segment and are plotted across two axes. The x-axis represents a measure of ‘economic liberalism’ drawn from their views on topics such as zero-hours contracts and taxation. The y-axis represents a measure of ‘social liberalism’, from their attitudes towards topics such as welfare and feminism. Those at the top left of the chart are socially liberal but economically illiberal (they support progressive social causes and support greater government intervention in the market), while those at the bottom right are more socially illiberal and less economically liberal.

Figure 43. Segments by economic and social liberalism



- The **Metropolitan Elite** are located at the top left of the chart, opposite to the Shire Tories who are on the bottom right. These two groups share firmly held, confident political beliefs and are vocal and visible about them, but are at opposite ends of the political spectrum. The Metropolitan Elite prioritise public services spending and are extremely supportive of social movements and policies such as immigration, feminism, and the need to address discrimination against ethnic minorities in the UK.
- **Shire Tories** are clustered at the bottom right of the chart and, like the Metropolitan Elite, are highly ideological. However, the Shire Tories support economic liberalism but not socially liberal policies. This group favors lower taxes, less spending on public services, thinks the NHS has become too costly, and that benefits are too readily available. In terms of social concerns, they believe immigration is a net negative, that feminists have gone 'too far', and that discrimination of ethnic minorities is inflated.
- **Liberal Centrists** are less obviously ideological. Their politics are present, but more moderate than other segments. They have gently liberal economic and social values; they share high levels of trust in institutions and civic engagement, they don't support higher taxes and spending towards overseas development, but are somewhat warm to globalisation. Furthermore, they are warm towards the NHS but less so towards other public services.
- **Aspirational Individualists** are split across many issues and have somewhat traditionally conflicting views. This group of young, urban professionals are supportive of specific social policies such as immigration and feminism, but believe that discrimination

against ethnic minorities and global warming are exaggerated. In addition, they are supportive of the NHS but not of other public services yet are very warm to globalisation and overseas development funding.

- **New Conservatives** have similar views to the Shire Tories but are slightly less economically liberal, preferring bigger government and strong institutions, and are slightly more socially liberal. Of note, the 'New Conservatives' diverge from the Shire Tories in terms of the NHS, which they are extremely supportive of and would pay higher taxes to support, but are more closely aligned on issues like immigration. They do, though, feel threatened, and their desire for cultural, economic and social security drives their relatively high political engagement.
- The **Disengaged Middle** share lower levels of participation and interest in politics and sit on the fence regarding almost every policy issue.

## chapter nine

# Understanding the different segments' attitudes to social housing

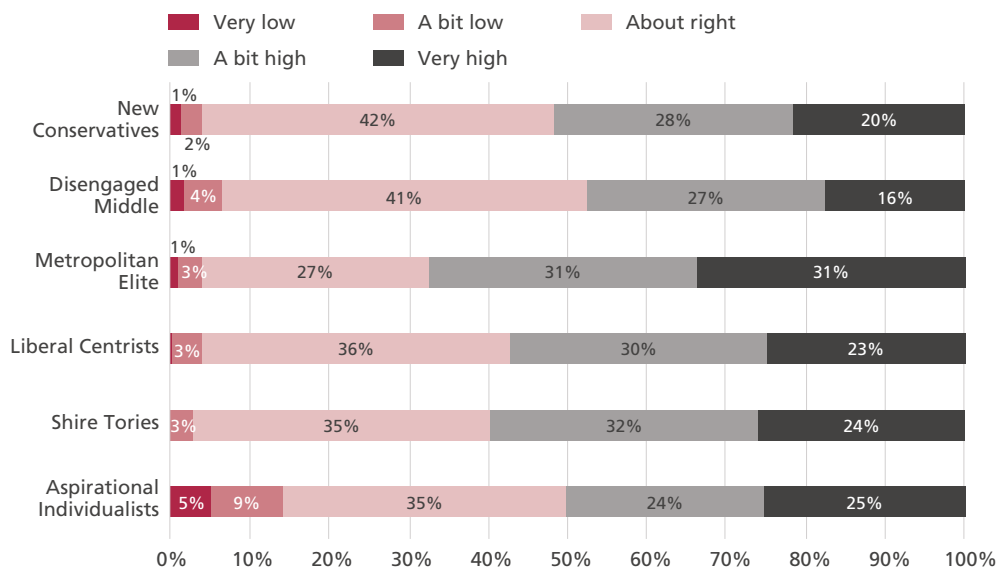
### 9.1 Introduction

Although the segments span the gamut of political opinion, it is noteworthy that we see considerable alignment on issues of social housing, although with some significant differences. In this Chapter, we explore the key commonalities and differences between segments in their views on a range of key questions, and we devote particular attention to the views of the most politically salient segments of the electorate as emerged in the 2019 General Election.

### 9.2 There is considerable common ground across the segments that housing costs are high, and that there is an under-supply of social housing

Across the segments, there is broad recognition that high housing costs are problematic. Every segment believes that housing costs in their area are a bit high or very high. Every segment also agrees by a large margin that due to the economic pressure caused by Covid-19, the housing crisis has worsened significantly.

Figure 44. 'What do you think about the housing costs in your area?' (by segment)

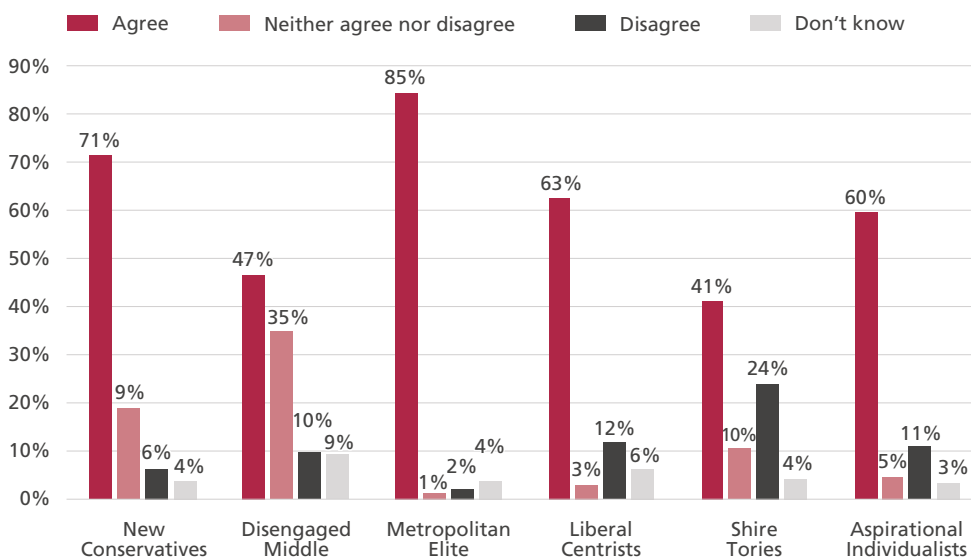


Source: CSJ/Stack Data

Outside of those who neither agree nor disagree, the majority of all segments agree that the government needs to supply social housing to solve the housing crisis, although the majority is slimmer for Shire Tories, as is the case with most of their views on social housing.

Notably, 71 per cent of New Conservatives either slightly agree (36 per cent) or strongly agree (35 per cent) that the government needs to supply social housing to solve the housing crisis versus 6 per cent who either slightly or strongly disagree. This is in contrast to the 41 per cent of Shire Tories who slightly agree (30 per cent) or strongly agree (11 per cent), while 14 per cent disagree a little and 10 per cent strongly disagree.

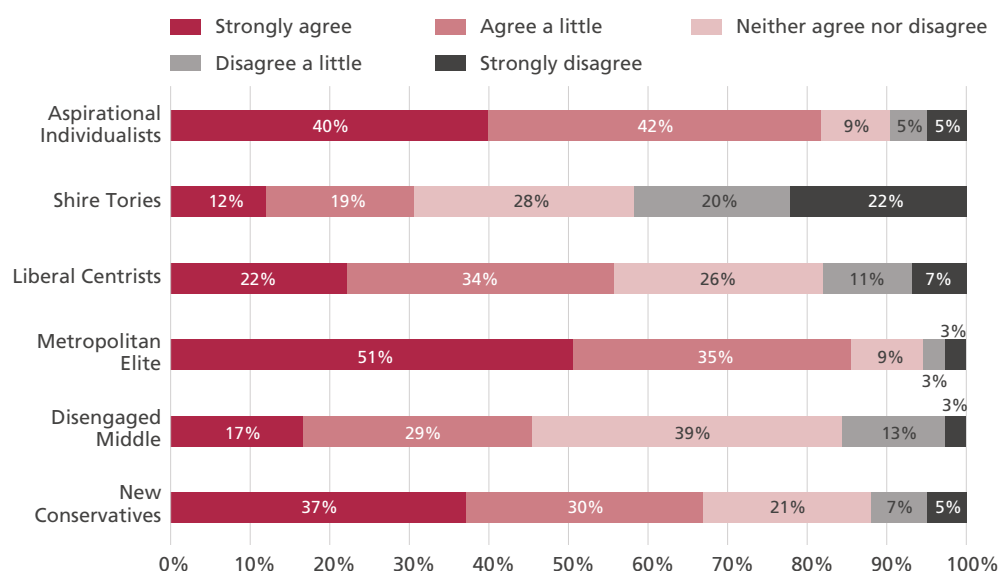
Figure 45. 'The UK Government needs to supply social housing to solve the housing crisis' (by segment)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

When considering, though, whether social housing should be a *priority* of the government there is less obvious agreement. Four out of five segments believe by substantial margins that social housing should be a priority, with the fifth segment, the Shire Tories, only disagreeing by a small margin (42 per cent), countered by a not insubstantial 31 per cent of Shire Tories agree that social housing should be a government priority.

Figure 46. 'Social housing should be a priority of government' (by segment)

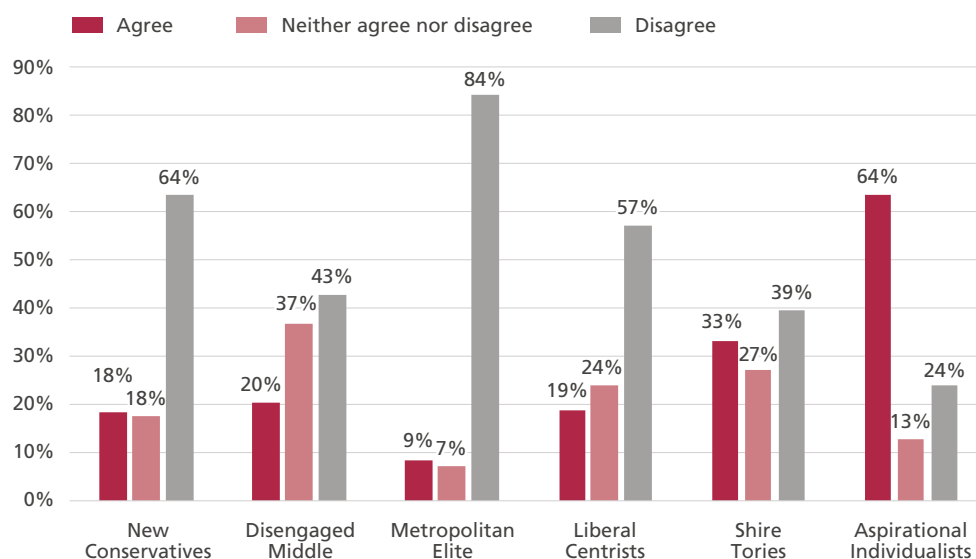


Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

As well as all segments seeing social housing as key to ending the housing crisis, most agree, including the Shire Tories (39 per cent) and Liberal Centrists (57 per cent) in number, that the government's current social housing delivery is insufficient to meet demand.

Yet the Aspirational Individualists remain unconvinced on this point. Despite their strong agreement that social housing should be a priority of the government, 64 per cent believe that the government is building enough social housing to meet demand. This may be explained by their concentration in urban centres where new development is highly visible and concentrated.

Figure 47. 'The Government is building enough social housing to meet demand' (by segment)

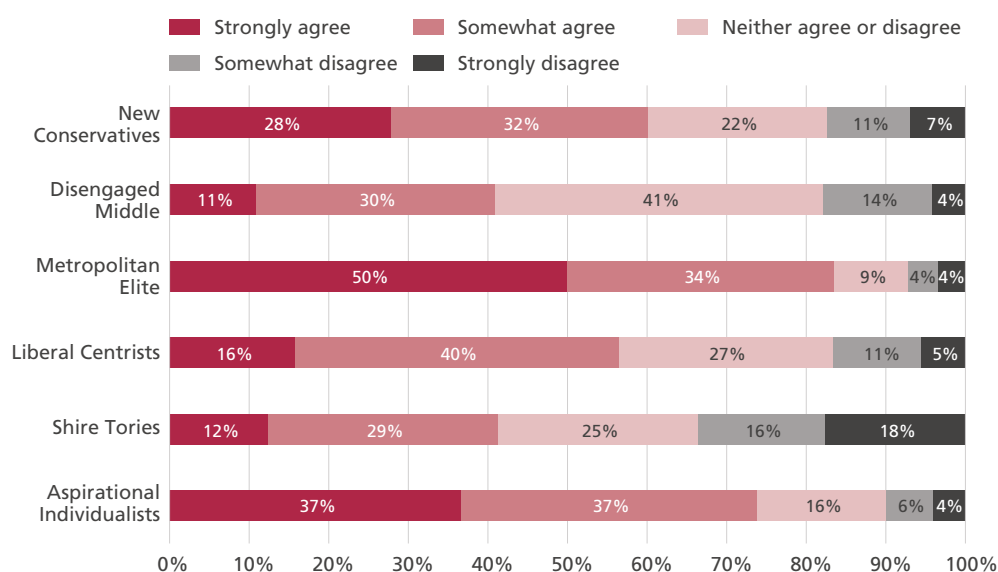


Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Moving from broad brush policy questions to questions on the purpose and impact of social housing, all segments, including the Shire Tories, recognise to a larger or smaller extent the positive role social housing plays in supporting residents to achieve stability and reducing strain on health and social services.

41 per cent of Shire Tories agree versus 34 per cent who disagree that a robust social housing scheme reduces the strain on health and social services, while 60 per cent of New Conservatives agree (32 per cent somewhat agree and 28 per cent strongly agree) versus only 10 per cent who disagree.

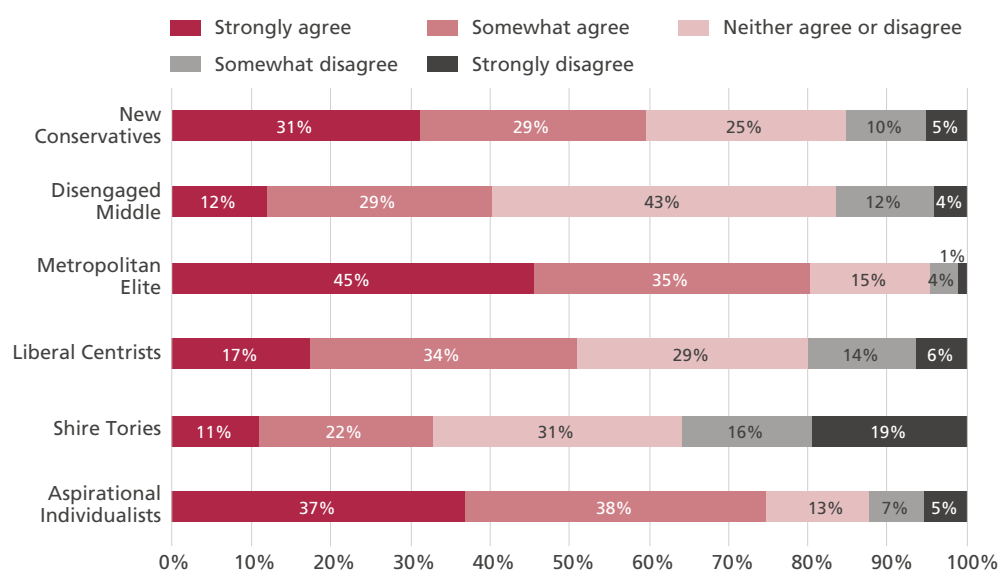
Figure 48. 'A robust social housing scheme reduces the strain on health and social services' (by segment)



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

That said, as expressed in the general poll results, the segments are slightly less convinced that social housing plays a positive role in communities in comparison to its positive impact on health and social services. Still, the majority of New Conservatives, Liberal Centrists, Aspirational Individualists, and Metropolitan Elite believe that social housing achieves a positive social and economic role in a community. The Disengaged Middle are split between agreeing (41 per cent) and neither agreeing nor disagreeing (43 per cent) and the majority of Shire Tories disagree, but only by a slim margin (33 per cent agree, 31 per cent neither agree nor disagree, 35 per cent disagree).

Figure 49. 'Social housing plays a positive social and economic role in a community'



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

Broad agreement across the segments on the positive social, economic, and health impact of social housing, along with a consensus that social housing supply is not meeting demand and should be prioritised by government, may imply that there is less of a 'culture war' around social housing that previously believed. Any new vision for social housing should be conscious of the commonalities between segments, despite them varying in degrees of agreement. However, policy design, strategic messaging and framing based on segments' individual features will be key in coalescing support for social housing across a diverse electorate.

For example, the segments split when considering their primary concerns over new social housing developments in their local area with variations of nimbyism appearing. Aspirational Individualists are the most concerned about the potential for tax increases (25 per cent) and new developments looking unattractive (22 per cent), Shire Tories worry about safety (23 per cent), and Liberal Centrists about increased traffic (31 per cent). But despite this, the majority of the segments said they had 'no concerns at all' about a new social development in their local area.



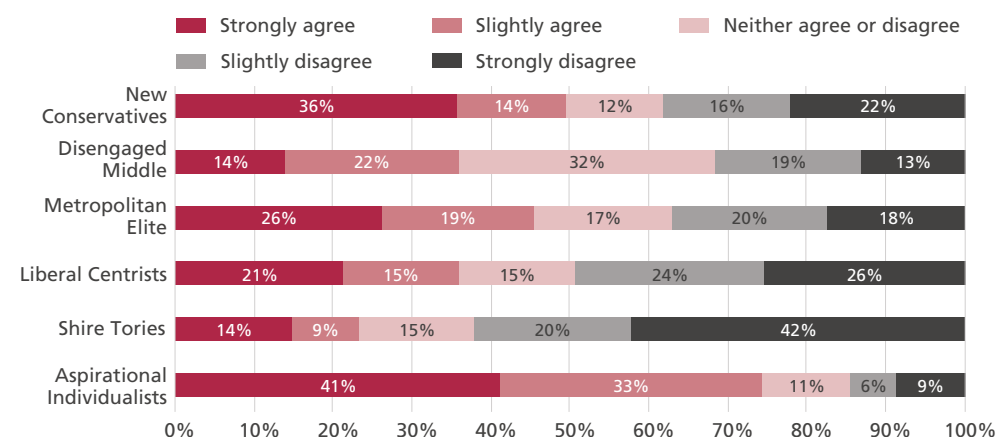
Figure 50. 'Biggest concerns about a new social housing development being built in the local area

	There is a new social housing development being built in your local area. What is your biggest concern?					
	The area would become less safe	The new buildings would not look nice	My local taxes would increase	The area would become too busy	The new residents would not fit in with the existing community	I do not have any concerns
New Conservatives	14%	7%	6%	26%	10%	37%
Disengaged Middle	12%	11%	17%	22%	6%	32%
Metropolitan Elite	6%	9%	6%	22%	5%	52%
Liberal Centrists	15%	8%	7%	31%	11%	28%
Shire Tories	23%	5%	6%	30%	19%	17%
Aspirational Individualists	17%	22%	25%	17%	3%	17%

Source: CSJ/Stack Data

More granular policy questions illuminate division between the segments. When asked whether a social housing tenancy should last a lifetime, 50 per cent of New Conservatives agree to some degree, versus 62 per cent of Shire Tories that disagree. The Aspirational Individualists agree to the largest extent (74 per cent) With the Metropolitan Elite and Liberal Centrists falling somewhere in the middle with 45 per cent and 36 per cent respectively. The Government had once planned to phase out providing lifetime tenancies in social housing altogether and to replace this with rolling tenancies of five-year fixed terms for new tenants and those who inherited a tenancy. These plans were abandoned in August 2018 with the launch of the Social Housing Green Paper.

Figure 51. A social housing tenancy should last for the lifetime of the tenant



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

While the poll suggests broad belief in the role that building more social housing would play in addressing the housing crisis, when faced with the prospect of social housing being introduced to the public's local community, notes of stigma and nimbysm appear – although these did not appear to be insurmountable when discussed in focus group. The concept of 'social housing' (in broad terms) draws significant support from all segments, but certain policies such as lifetime tenancies in the social rented sector remain divisive.

### 9.3 Understanding the views of politically salient segments reveals an opportunity for the Government to develop a new vision for truly affordable housing

To understand the challenges of developing a vision for affordable housing with this shifting electorate, we have isolated three key groups that are each in their own way integral to both major parties' success at the next election: the 'New Conservatives', the 'Liberal Centrists', and the 'Shire Tories'. Figure 52 shows how the main parties 2019 election votes are broken down by segment.

Figure 52. GE 2019 vote by segment

Vote 2019	Segments					
	New Conservatives	Disengaged	Metropolitan Elite	Liberal Centrists	Shire Tories	Aspirational Individualists
Labour	10%	22%	31%	21%	2%	13%
Conservative	27%	23%	2%	15%	25%	7%
Liberal Democrat	4%	22%	27%	35%	1%	10%
Other	17%	26%	16%	14%	13%	13%
Did not Vote	17%	40%	8%	18%	9%	8%
Did not Vote	17%	40%	8%	18%	9%	8%

Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

As is evidenced in the segmentation, there is significant nuance between groups regarding their political attitudes as well as their opinions on social housing. However, to develop effective policy proposals to overcome the barriers to addressing England's hidden housing crisis, we need to be aware of the opportunities for

#### 9.3.1 The New Conservatives

In elections every vote counts. However, elections are often characterised by the battles for decisive electoral groups or swing voters. These are sometimes personified as an archetypal median voter: in the 1990s these emerged as the Essex Man and the Mondeo Man. In 2019, the 'Workington Man' was described by the think tank Onward as the key to the Conservative's victory. A Guardian article before the election provided a sketch of the Workington Man: a northern male over the age of 45 without a university

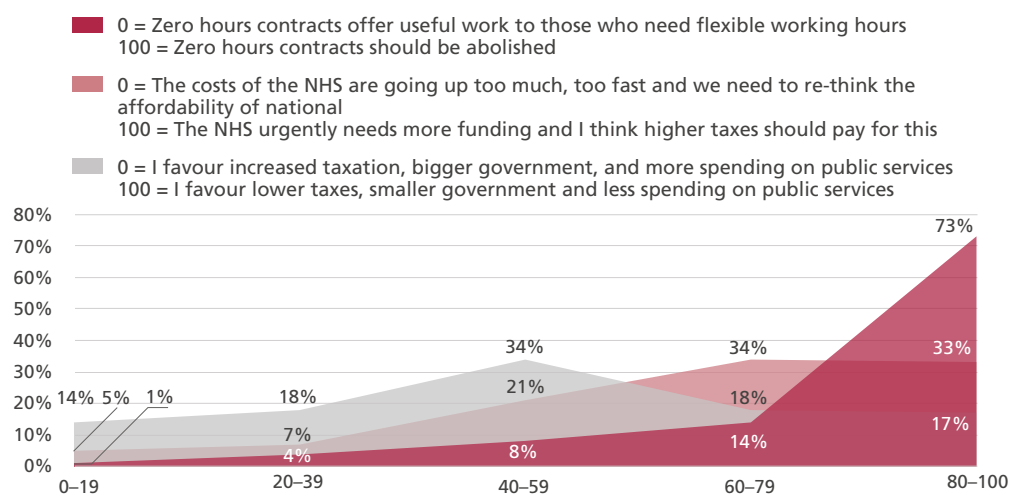
degree, who enjoys rugby league, and who had previously supported Labour but voted for Brexit in the 2016 referendum.<sup>85</sup> The 'Red Wall' seats which fell to the Conservatives and underpinned Boris Johnson's majority in 2019 were comprised of many such 'switching' voters – and are closely aligned in this segmentation with the New Conservative group. The battle to retain or indeed recover the votes of the New Conservatives is likely to shape the next election: and so we give particular focus to them, and their views on affordable housing policy, here.

The second oldest group in the survey, the New Conservatives voted in number for Brexit (76 per cent) and for the Conservatives in 2019 (49 per cent). This group is evenly split between full time work, part time work, and being retired. Although the majority of this group owns a home (64 per cent), the New Conservatives have the highest proportion of individuals who are currently socially renting (22 per cent) when compared to the other segments. They are the least likely to have a university education, have the lowest incomes of any of the groups in the survey, and are the least likely to have savings.

The socio-economic and political nature of this group makes them especially salient electorally. They are concentrated in key Red Wall constituencies (although well represented nationally) and are defined more by their support for Brexit than for their new affiliation with the Conservative Party, making them key battleground seats for both major parties. Many in this group will have moved from the Labour Party (and Brexit Party) to the Conservatives in 2019 due to their position on leaving the EU, yet they remain supportive of traditionally Labour policies like increased government spending and regulation.

Demographically, this group has a considerable amount in common with the Shire Tories. Attitudinally, what sets them apart is the New Conservatives' support for increased government spending and regulations to protect some of the worst-off in society, exemplified by their opposing views to the Shire Tories on social housing. The area chart below shows how those in the New Conservative group responded to a number of attitudinal 'spoke' questions, which were used to segment the groups.

Figure 53. New Conservative attitudes to economic 'spoke' questions



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

85 Guardian, So farwell then, Workington man... we hardly knew you, Nov 2019

While the Shire Tories were against the abolition of zero hours contracts, and reticent to raise taxes to increase NHS funding, the New Conservatives support both of these policies. Perhaps even more telling about the character of this group is their split on whether we should live in a high-tax, big government world or a low-tax, small government world. Only the Metropolitan Elite group (the farthest left of all segments) were more supportive of high-tax and big government than the New Conservatives. Their relative appetite for increased spending and big government suggests they are well placed to support an affordable housing campaign. We look at New Conservatives' views on social housing in more detail below.

The New Conservatives are strongly supportive of social housing conceptually and in practice as a policy. They believe it should be made a priority of the current government (67 per cent) and that the government needs to be putting additional funds and policies to tackle the current housing crisis (66 per cent).

Their support for action on social housing could be partially explained by their socio-economic status. Alongside having the highest proportion of tenants in social housing among the segments, 33 per cent agree or strongly agree that they would benefit from a social home themselves – the highest of all segments.

When given a list of more than 20 words, they most closely associate social housing with affordability (58 per cent) and community (36 per cent). For the New Conservatives, social housing is an essential resource to help provide a safety net for those who are both financially and non-financially vulnerable (84 per cent). At the same time, they identify it as being a springboard into work and self-sufficiency.

Getting social housing [right] creates a feeling of... having a good childhood where people can generally get on with their lives without fear... when young people get a foothold in their life and their friends and their community they feel good about themselves. It will help them do better in life...

**Miles, South West**

New Conservatives see the people who live in social housing as victims of circumstance: 'unable to afford private rents' (58 per cent), 'normal people like the rest of us' (58 per cent), and who are 'financially disadvantaged' (48 per cent). They believe that the purpose of social housing is to support those who are both financially vulnerable (84 per cent) and those with non-financial vulnerabilities (like old age or disability) (86 per cent).

Community is a particularly important aspect of social housing] along with affordability... a decent quality house that... whoever lives there should take pride in and enjoy and not feel threatened in any way.

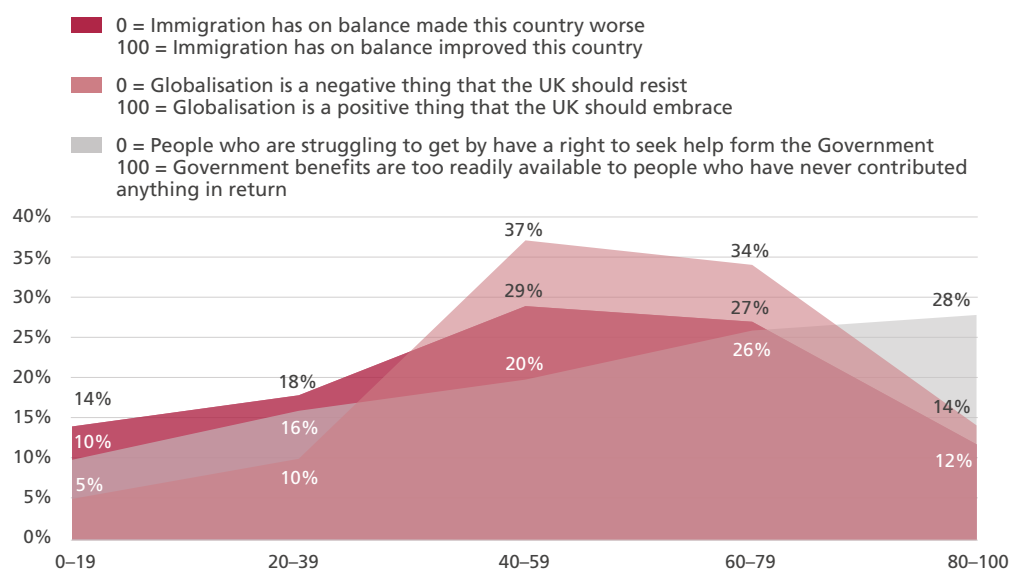
**Graham, South East**

### 9.3.2 The Liberal Centrists

This segment consists of middle-aged, middle-income, well-educated individuals who voted to Remain in the 2016 EU vote and split their vote between Labour (25 per cent), Conservative (26 per cent), and Liberal Democrats (15 per cent).

Looking at their attitudes and beliefs, the Liberal Centrists sit near the centre socially, while their pro-EU beliefs (75 per cent voted remain) are reflected in their broadly positive views about the impact of both immigration and globalisation on the United Kingdom. At the same time, this group is also softly in favour of the view that ‘government benefits are too readily available’ (54 per cent). They reflect economically liberal values that would have made them feel at home with both the Blair Labour government and the Cameron Conservative/Coalition governments, and their voting records in 2019 point towards a group that are currently without a political party to call home.

Figure 54. Liberal Centrists attitudes to social ‘spoke’ questions



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

The Liberal Centrists are not a secure Conservative or Labour group – their position as swing voters makes them an eminently ‘persuadable’ segment of the population that all major parties will find important to pay attention to having made up 20 per cent of the total Labour vote, 15 per cent of the total Conservative vote and 35 per cent of the total Liberal Democrat vote in the last election.

While this group would not benefit from a social home themselves, they are in favour of the government prioritising social housing (56 per cent) and believe that it is a key element in ending the housing crisis (63 per cent). This group prioritises housing being affordable (55 per cent) over all else, in stark comparison to home ownership which only received 14 per cent of their vote.

[With social housing] I think we are, whether it is always fair, protecting our vulnerable – so we’re doing the right thing. You wouldn’t want to take it away.

Susan, South West

They are not convinced that tenancies should last a lifetime with 50 per cent disagreeing that they should be granted for a tenant’s lifetime. Many also say they would be nervous or feel unsafe living next to social housing (46 per cent versus 31 per cent who would feel safe and comfortable) – second only to Shire Tories, indicating that that negative perceptions

around social housing and its tenants remain even among those who are broadly supportive of building more. Indeed, they are warm to social housing developing community and see it as a tool to create community with their top associations with social housing being affordability (47 per cent) and community (29 per cent).

This group cares in equal measure about the appearance of new homes and that they fit in with the local community (31 per cent) and the affordability (31 per cent) of new general needs homes built in their local community. In terms of new social housing being built in their local area, they are concerned about how local infrastructure will cope with new development with that being their highest concern (31 per cent).

Do you know this is a bug bear of my husband's who moans all the time about the kennel type of flats that are going up and that there's no harmony with what exists on the roads and things. They just plonk these disgusting slabs in and I think there's a lot to say about being a bit more thoughtful about the area that it's going in, just putting a little bit of individuality onto different blocks so they don't look just mass produced.

**Mary, South East**

Housing policy that emphasises affordability and community strengthening is likely to play well with this group. This group sees social housing as a springboard into work and self-sufficiency, but also as an important social safety net for those who are financially and non-financially vulnerable. An emphasis on 'low cost' and 'affordable' housing for working people, as well as 'social housing' for those who need it, may play well with this group that has a social conscious, but also believes in the merit of work.

I have read about these communities where people build their own properties and they're given a bit of land and families are given a little bit of budget to help start them off, you know they've put their blood sweat and tears into these things, it gives a bit of purpose behind those properties. Whereas if you just give someone a council place to live in they might not treat it as respectfully, so I think you know, that education around you know, earnt responsibility, that would help.

**Rose, South East**

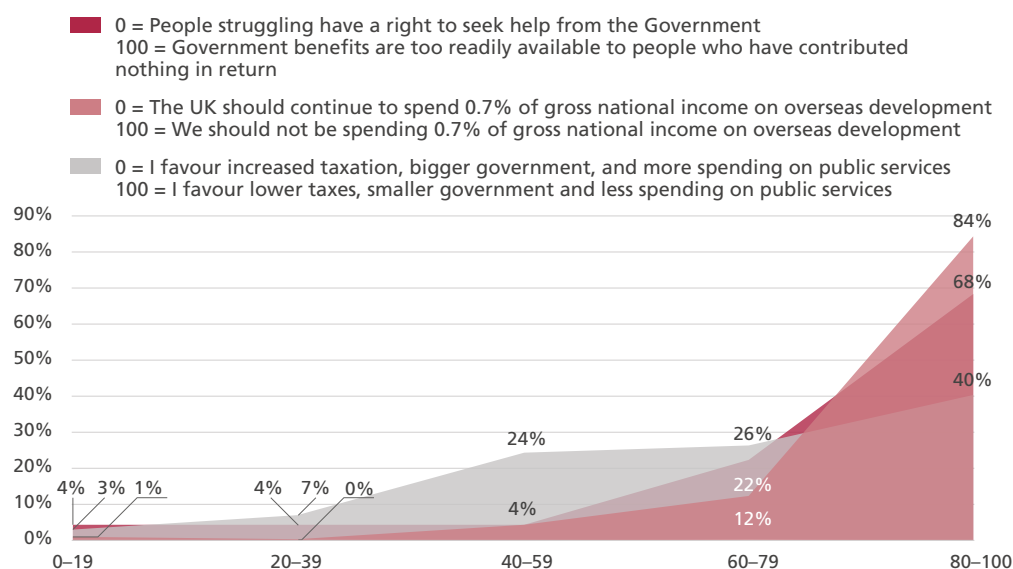
### 9.3.3 The Shire Tories

This segment of older, predominantly white, Brexit supporters are the traditional backbone of the Conservative party's support base, having made up 25 per cent of the Conservative vote in 2019, but are shrinking in electoral significance in the wake of the growth of the 'New Conservatives' who made up 27 per cent of the 2019 Conservative vote.

Demographically, this group has a lot in common with the New Conservatives: they are the two oldest groups, the two whitest groups and the two groups who voted in highest numbers to Leave the EU and for the Conservative Party in 2019. Where they differ is in their attitudes, both towards social housing and more broadly across social and cultural attitudinal questions.

The Shire Tories are strongly driven by a sense of personal responsibility – that people are not owed anything unless they contribute in-kind. The Shire Tories were the only group with a large proportion of members who think the responsibility of ensuring families have an affordable place to live falls on the individuals and families themselves (40 per cent). They strongly believe that government benefits are too readily available (90 per cent), that the government should cut overseas development spending (96 per cent), and support a smaller state with low taxes and scaled back public services (66 per cent).

Figure 55. Shire Tories attitudes to economic ‘spoke’ questions



Source: CSJ/Stack Data Strategy

There is a stigma attached to social housing, it can tend to be because there are poorer people living on top of each other... you end up with a lot of gang warfare and a lot of crime and drugs...

Matthew, South East

The majority of Shire Tories say they would ‘feel unsafe living next to social housing’ (62 per cent). They were, however, less conclusive when asked about the overall impact of social housing on society, possibly inferring that their concern is around the current form of social housing, not the social purpose of the tenure. When asked if social housing plays a positive social and economic role in society, 36 per cent disagreed, 31 per cent neither agreed or disagreed, and 33 per cent agreed. Though largely Shire Tories do not believe that social housing should be a priority of the government (48 per cent), a meaningful portion of them do (28 per cent) suggesting room for policymakers to reach this group through strategically framed housing policy.

My only sort of bugbear with social housing is that some people aren't deserving of it... people don't accept what is given to them and cause councils or local authorities some headaches.

**Matthew, South East**

The Shire Tories were more open to forms of social housing when framed through the lens of affordability and fairness. When asked in focus groups about what kind of housing the government should prioritise, 'affordable housing', 'low-cost housing', and 'housing with rents linked to local incomes' all won more support from Shire Tories than 'social housing', further inferring that the Shire Tories take issue with social housing in its current format, but may welcome a new deal for social housing with affordability and fairness given greater emphasis.

People have been given places but they're not very deserving of them... if you just give someone a council place to live in they might not treat it respectfully...

**Shauna, South East**

Shire Tories carry the strongest stigmatised views of social housing, yet take the minority viewpoint on new social housing in broad terms.

## 9.4 Conclusion

The segmentation shows that the nature of the traditional 'left-right' divide is shifting as old certainties give way, requiring new methodologies to understand this evolving electorate. A closer look at the segment's views across social, cultural and economic issues, as well as a granular look at their perspectives on housing show us that the left no longer has a monopoly on voters who are pro-interventionist or support social housing.

This research offers a new understanding of the public's views on social housing, which a government could use to underpin a housing strategy where building low-cost rented homes are made a policy priority. Indeed, out of this research emerges an electorate that is largely united by its approval of low-cost rented housing that is underpinned by affordability, community, and is a springboard into stability.

Finally, this research uncovers affordable housing as a politically salient issue and offers an opportunity for the government to develop new policies that reflect public opinion. Using these insights, the Centre for Social Justice will continue to advance a new vision for truly affordable housing in forthcoming research.



# Appendix 1: Segment demographics table

Demographics		Segments		
		Aspirational Individualists	Metropolitan Elite	Disengaged Middle
Gender	Male	52%	52%	48%
	Female	48%	48%	52%
Age	18–24	19%	12%	19%
	25–34	35%	15%	24%
	35–44	23%	15%	19%
	45–54	12%	20%	13%
	55–64	6%	16%	12%
	65+	5%	22%	13%
Region	North East	5%	4%	5%
	North West	12%	13%	12%
	Yorkshire and the Humber	11%	8%	10%
	West Midlands	11%	8%	13%
	East Midlands	9%	8%	10%
	East of England	7%	9%	8%
	London	25%	21%	18%
	South East	13%	17%	14%
	South West	7%	12%	9%
Ethnicity	White	75%	85%	79%
	Non-White	25%	15%	21%
Education	No Degree	63%	44%	67%
	Degree	37%	56%	33%

Demographics		Segments		
		Aspirational Individualists	Metropolitan Elite	Disengaged Middle
Urbanity	Completely urban	35%	26%	20%
	Mostly urban	32%	34%	35%
	A mix	19%	21%	27%
	Mostly rural	10%	15%	15%
	Completely rural	3%	3%	3%
EU Vote	Leave	29%	5%	31%
	Remain	45%	76%	27%
	I did not vote	20%	17%	34%
	Prefer not to say	6%	1%	8%
2019 Vote	Labour	33%	54%	18%
	Conservative	24%	5%	26%
	Liberal Democrat	9%	17%	7%
	Other	6%	5%	4%
	Did not Vote	28%	19%	46%
Household Income	Less than £21,000	29%	22%	30%
	£21,000 to £41,000	31%	33%	30%
	£41,000 to £62,000	15%	21%	14%
	Greater than £62,000	17%	16%	13%
	Prefer not to say	7%	7%	12%
Employment Status	Full time work	57%	38%	40%
	Part time work	17%	16%	16%
	Retired	6%	25%	18%
	Unemployed	13%	11%	16%
	Full time education	4%	4%	5%
	Other	3%	5%	4%

Demographics		Segments		
		Aspirational Individualists	Metropolitan Elite	Disengaged Middle
Savings	No savings	16%	10%	18%
	Less than £250	8%	5%	6%
	£250–£1,000	9%	8%	9%
	£1,000–£3,000	11%	6%	8%
	£3,000–£6,000	8%	6%	7%
	£6,000–£10,000	5%	6%	6%
	£10,000–£15,000	9%	6%	5%
	£15,000–£20,000	6%	5%	3%
	£20,000–£40,000	6%	7%	6%
	Over £40,000	12%	30%	16%
	Don't know	9%	11%	16%
Monthly Housing Costs	Nothing	11%	40%	28%
	Less than £200	18%	6%	10%
	£201–£400	15%	12%	15%
	£401–£600	24%	15%	18%
	£601–£800	12%	13%	11%
	£801–£1,000	5%	5%	6%
	£1,001–£1,500	6%	5%	5%
	£1,501–£2,000	2%	2%	3%
	More than £2,000	7%	2%	4%
Tenure	Owned outright	29%	41%	32%
	Owned with mortgage	33%	26%	31%
	Social renting	19%	11%	18%
	Private renting	18%	22%	19%
Social Housing Tenure	Local council	44%	46%	41%
	Housing association	47%	52%	50%
	Other	5%	2%	5%
	Don't know	4%	0%	4%

Demographics		Segments		
		New Conservatives	Liberal Centrists	Shire Tories
Gender	Male	45%	45%	57%
	Female	55%	55%	43%
Age	18–24	4%	4%	2%
	25–34	8%	14%	9%
	35–44	13%	17%	9%
	45–54	22%	21%	19%
	55–64	21%	16%	20%
	65+	32%	28%	41%
Region	North East	7%	7%	4%
	North West	12%	12%	10%
	Yorkshire and the Humber	12%	11%	10%
	West Midlands	11%	10%	10%
	East Midlands	11%	9%	10%
	East of England	12%	8%	11%
	London	8%	14%	13%
	South East	17%	20%	20%
	South West	10%	10%	13%
Ethnicity	White	97%	90%	96%
	Non-White	3%	10%	4%
Education	No Degree	81%	61%	69%
	Degree	19%	39%	31%
Urbanity	Completely urban	15%	17%	15%
	Mostly urban	38%	36%	36%
	A mix	22%	24%	21%
	Mostly rural	21%	20%	23%
	Completely rural	4%	4%	5%
EU Vote	Leave	76%	6%	76%
	Remain	5%	75%	7%
	I did not vote	15%	16%	14%
	Prefer not to say	3%	3%	3%

Demographics		Segments		
		New Conservatives	Liberal Centrists	Shire Tories
2019 Vote	Labour	13%	25%	4%
	Conservative	49%	26%	66%
	Liberal Democrat	2%	15%	1%
	Other	4%	3%	4%
	Did not Vote	31%	31%	25%
Household Income	Less than £21,000	36%	22%	23%
	£21,000 to £41,000	35%	34%	34%
	£41,000 to £62,000	13%	18%	21%
	Greater than £62,000	7%	15%	12%
	Prefer not to say	8%	12%	9%
Employment Status	Full time work	31%	41%	37%
	Part time work	13%	14%	13%
	Retired	35%	29%	39%
	Unemployed	15%	10%	7%
	Full time education	0%	2%	1%
	Other	7%	6%	3%
Savings	No savings	21%	12%	8%
	Less than £250	6%	4%	3%
	£250–£1,000	7%	6%	5%
	£1,000–£3,000	7%	8%	5%
	£3,000–£6,000	7%	7%	5%
	£6,000–£10,000	7%	6%	4%
	£10,000–£15,000	5%	5%	6%
	£15,000–£20,000	3%	3%	4%
	£20,000–£40,000	7%	7%	9%
	Over £40,000	22%	27%	36%
	Don't know	11%	15%	14%

Demographics		Segments		
		New Conservatives	Liberal Centrists	Shire Tories
Monthly Housing Costs	Nothing	45%	41%	55%
	Less than £200	8%	7%	5%
	£201–£400	15%	12%	10%
	£401–£600	18%	15%	13%
	£601–£800	8%	11%	8%
	£801–£1,000	3%	7%	4%
	£1,001–£1,500	3%	4%	4%
	£1,501–£2,000	0%	2%	1%
	More than £2,000	0%	2%	1%
Tenure	Owned outright	44%	45%	60%
	Owned with mortgage	20%	29%	24%
	Social renting	22%	10%	7%
	Private renting	13%	15%	9%
Social Housing Tenure	Local council	46%	42%	29%
	Housing association	54%	58%	71%
	Other	0%	0%	0%
	Don't know	0%	0%	0%



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