

February 2026

# Fieldwork:

Public attitudes toward the British countryside, housing and the future of the Green Belt



More in  
Common

100  
YEARS



Campaign  
to Protect  
Rural England



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## About More in Common

More in Common is a think tank and research agency working to bridge the gap between policy makers and the public by helping people in Westminster to understand those voters who feel ignored or overlooked by those in power. Our 'British Seven' segmentation provides a unique lens at understanding what the public thinks and why. We've published ground-breaking reports on a range of issues from climate and refugees to culture wars to crime.

We are a full-service research agency offering quantitative and qualitative research and are members of the British Polling Council.

This research was conducted between November 2025 and January 2026. Full methodological information can be found at the end of the report.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England funded the research presented in this report. More in Common has retained full editorial control over the report and its contents.

## The Seven Segments

This polling uses More in Common's new segmentation of the British public. Based on extended research into Britons' core beliefs, their values and behaviours, this segmentation allows us to look upstream not just at what different groups think, but why they think it. Going beyond a simple left-right spectrum, it reflects deeper differences in how people relate to authority, change, community and the future, which help explain why traditional party loyalties have weakened and political volatility has increased.

Segmentation is a particularly powerful way of detecting and understanding differences and commonality in people's values and in their broader orientation towards society and the big issues facing the country.

The analysis produces seven segments within the British population:

### **Progressive Activists – 12 per cent of the population**

A highly engaged and globally-minded group driven by concerns about social justice. Politically active but feeling increasingly alienated from mainstream party politics, they prioritise issues such as climate change and international affairs. Occasionally outliers on social issues, they maintain a strongly held and sometimes uncompromising approach to their beliefs.

### **Incrementalist Left – 21 per cent of the population**

A civic-minded, community-oriented group holding views which are generally left-of-centre but with an aversion to the extreme; they prefer gradual reform over revolutionary change. They trust experts and institutions yet are largely tuned out of day-to-day politics and can be conflict-averse, stepping away from issues they see as particularly fraught or complex.



### **Established Liberals – 9 per cent of the population**

A prosperous, confident segment who believe the system broadly works as it is and who trust experts to deliver continued progress. They have a strong belief in individual agency which can make them less empathetic to those who are struggling. Institutionally trusting, they maintain faith in democratic processes and have a strong information-centric way of engaging with issues.

### **Sceptical Scrollers – 10 per cent of the population**

A digitally-native group whose unhappiness with the social contract means they have lost faith in traditional institutions and seek alternative sources of truth online. Often shaped by their experience of the Covid pandemic, they prefer individual influencers over mainstream media and are increasingly drawn to conspiratorial thinking.

### **Rooted Patriots – 20 per cent of the population**

A patriotic but politically untethered group which feels abandoned and overlooked by political elites and yearns for leaders with common sense but does not want to overthrow the system as a whole. They are particularly concerned about community decline and the pressures of migration. Interventionist on economics but conservative on social issues, they have shaped much of Britain's politics over the past decade.

### **Traditional Conservatives – 8 per cent of the population**

Respectful of authority and tradition, Traditional Conservatives believe in individual responsibility and established norms that have served them well. Nostalgic for the past but optimistic about the future, they are deeply sceptical of many forces of change such as immigration or the path to net-zero.

### **Dissenting Disruptors – 20 per cent of the population**

Frustrated with their circumstances and with an appetite for radical solutions, Dissenting Disruptors crave dramatic change and strong leadership. Highly distrustful of institutions, opposed to multiculturalism and feeling disconnected from society, they are drawn to political movements that promise to overhaul the status quo and put people like them first.

## Foreword

As we mark The Campaign to Protect Rural England's centenary in 2026, this research confirms something we've known for 100 years: the British public treasures the countryside and wants to see it better protected for future generations.

From our founding campaigns for the first Green Belts and National Parks to today's work championing sustainable development and nature recovery, CPRE has always been guided by what communities value most. This report shows that those values remain remarkably consistent across age, geography, and political affiliation. Nearly nine in ten Britons say it's important to protect the countryside for future generations. The fact that three-quarters of young people want more land protected shows this isn't nostalgia – it's about securing a sustainable future for us all.

Yet despite this consensus, the countryside faces unprecedented pressures. An area of green field land equivalent to a small city is lost to development every year. Trust in political leaders to stand up for the countryside is worryingly low, with no party leader commanding broad public confidence on this issue. And while most people believe government can both build homes and protect nature, there's widespread scepticism about whether current plans will achieve either goal effectively.

The findings reveal a crucial insight for today's politicians: that the public has decisively rejected the false choice between building homes and protecting the countryside. People understand the housing crisis and want solutions, but they also see what politicians too often overlook: it's not one or the other, you can do both. With enough brownfield land in England alone for 1.4 million homes, we can meet the need for new homes while strengthening protections for the landscapes people value so highly.

As CPRE enters its second century, this report reinforces why our mission is more vital than ever. The countryside is not a luxury, it's fundamental to mental health, community wellbeing, climate resilience, and national identity. Too often, the loss of countryside is a choice and one that ignores solutions that don't require us to sacrifice our green spaces.

We urgently need political leadership that matches public ambition: leaders who will champion brownfield development, strengthen environmental protections, ensure genuine community consultation and safeguard our countryside for everyone. Our centenary year is a call to Love Your Countryside – to protect what matters, regenerate what's been lost and connecting to the places that sustain us all.

**Roger Mortlock**

Chief Executive, Campaign to Protect Rural England

# Executive Summary

## *Attitudes toward the British countryside and green spaces*

Visiting the countryside is a key part of British life. Half of Britons visit the countryside at least monthly, with many Britons from different generations, political persuasions and different parts of the country taking time to visit green spaces and the natural landscape once a month or more. For those who don't spend more time in the countryside, limited access, not limited appreciation, explains this- cost, distance and transport are the key barriers to visiting Britain's green spaces for many. Those who are financially comfortable or live in more rural areas are more likely to visit the countryside frequently as those who are more financially precarious or live in cities.

There is an emerging gender gap between young adults when it comes to their views on the countryside and nature. While young women are less likely to visit the countryside frequently than men of the same age, they tend to be less optimistic about how well the countryside will be protected in the future and are more likely to prioritise this as a political issue, than their male counterparts.

The countryside carries a strong emotional attachment, and is a source of national pride, for many. Britons overwhelmingly associate it with a sense of calm and tranquillity, with many seeing the countryside as carrying benefits for people's wellbeing and mental health. Nearly two thirds see the countryside as one of the things that makes Britain special. It is no surprise, then, that protecting the countryside is a rare consensus issue-nearly nine in ten Britons across all parties and demographics support protection for future generations, while 70 per cent of Britons, again from across the political spectrum, want more land to be protected for nature and wellbeing.

Even the youngest Britons value the countryside, despite it not yet being a key part of their lives. In focus groups, participants as young as sixteen felt little personal connection to the countryside and even described it as remote or boring. Yet, despite this, they still strongly support preserving it, and expect the countryside to matter more to them as they get older.

Yet there is little faith in Britain's political leaders to protect our countryside and natural habitats. No party leader commands broad trust on protecting the countryside, particularly the Prime Minister. Zack Polanski, the Green Party leader, records the highest net trust score, but even this is relatively low at -12.

## *How do we protect the countryside while providing affordable housing?*

While protecting nature matters to the public, they are clear that it is not the government's top priority. More people see protecting the countryside as important but a secondary issue. Those who are more affluent and concerned about the environment tend to rank this as a key priority for Labour to tackle.

Meanwhile, affordable housing is consistently ranked in the top five most important issues facing the country by the public. 16 per cent now rank affordable housing among the most important issues facing the country. Yet this is balanced with widespread support for protecting the countryside, with more than eight in ten saying that safeguarding the British countryside is also important, including three quarters of those who prioritise affordable housing as an issue.

Indeed, housing versus nature is not seen by Britons as a zero-sum trade-off. Half believe the government can both build new homes and protect nature, while fewer than one in five think it must choose one over the other. However, there is widespread scepticism about the government's housebuilding target, and the ability to protect nature while delivering on development of this scale.

There is a clear preference for brownfield development over building on the Green Belt when it comes to housebuilding. The public strongly favours reusing disused or previously developed land for new developments, while very few support building on undeveloped green space- including among those most concerned about housing. Support for this approach spans the ideological spectrum and is driven by a mix of concerns about sustainability, heritage, and countryside preservation.

Even young people, while concerned about housing and their ability to own a home in the future, also think the government should pursue alternative housing solutions other than building on the Green Belt. Younger groups, including sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, favour retrofitting and repurposing existing buildings to reduce pressure on green spaces and more rural areas.

But Britons do not feel that housing developers share the public's priorities for housing development. Many believe speed and profit outweigh environmental protection or constructing affordable homes in developer's priorities for new projects. Given few think large housing companies prioritise protecting the natural environment, there is scepticism of schemes which would allow developers to bypass environmental surveys.

### *Powering communities while protecting the countryside*

There is a strong appetite for greater government action on renewables. Many Britons feel the government could be doing more to support renewable energy and community-led energy initiatives, with more than seventy per cent supporting a law requiring solar panels on suitable public and commercial buildings. Support is strong even among those groups who tend to be more cautious on environmental issues.

Yet while the public supports the idea of investment in renewable energy infrastructure in theory, they retain some practical concerns. Scepticism around renewable and community energy infrastructure centres on feasibility, costs, and potential impacts on the natural environment. The public would prefer that any new infrastructure is built on previously developed land, rather than natural landscapes.



Similarly, while there is strong support among teens for renewables, as with adults, this is conditional. Young people are highly supportive of renewable energy and rooftop solar, but remain cautious of building cables, pylons or solar panels in places where this infrastructure could visibly disrupt natural landscapes.

Consultation on renewable energy infrastructure is key to winning the support of wavering groups. Poorly sited infrastructure, or pylons, solar panels or cables being placed without community consultation- especially in visible natural landscapes- risks eroding support for renewables among already cautious segments.

### *Looking forwards*

There is widespread pessimism about how well Britain's natural landscapes and habitats will be protected in the future. More than half of Britons believe Britain's countryside and natural habitats will be less well protected in ten years' time than they are now. Majorities across every age group, from Gen Z to the Silent Generation, believe the risks to the countryside are increasing.

However, the decline of the countryside is not seen as a future threat, but a present one. More than seven in ten believe the amount of wildlife and natural habitats in Britain has decreased in recent years, with a third saying the decline has been significant. Concern is highest among older people and those in rural areas.

The public most often cites housing development, urban expansion, and a lack of coherent government strategy on development. In discussions, it emerged that this fear is less about development being an intrinsically bad thing, but the government failing to take a long-term view on how to balance the need for housing and protect the countryside.

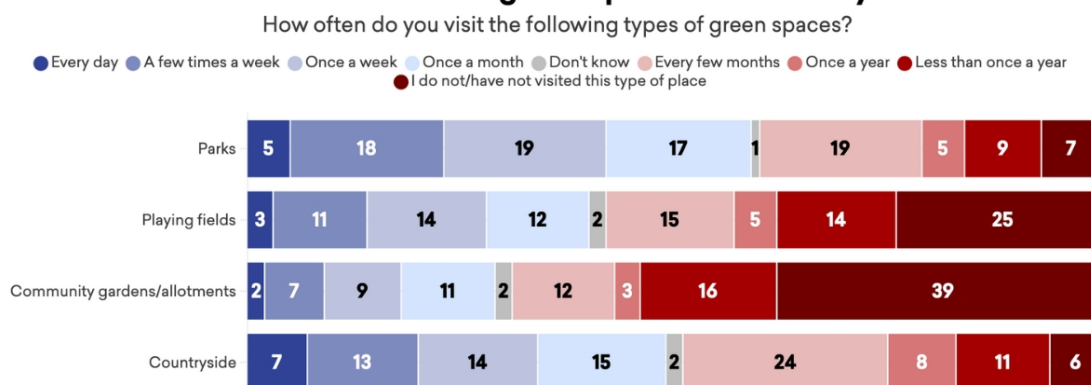
Younger people tend to have a more optimistic outlook than those who are older, and do not expect total loss of the countryside, instead anticipating a more built-up but still recognisable landscape in the future. However, they do share concern about the risks that climate change, pollution, flooding and development pose to the country's natural landscapes.

# Chapter 1 | How do Britons feel about their countryside and green spaces?

## Engagement with the British countryside

Visiting the countryside and green spaces is a key part of many Britons' lives. Half of Britons say they visit the countryside at least once a month, with a third doing so once a week or more. Parks are similarly well visited, with six in ten saying they go to a park at least once a month.

### Most Britons visit some kind of green space on a monthly basis or more



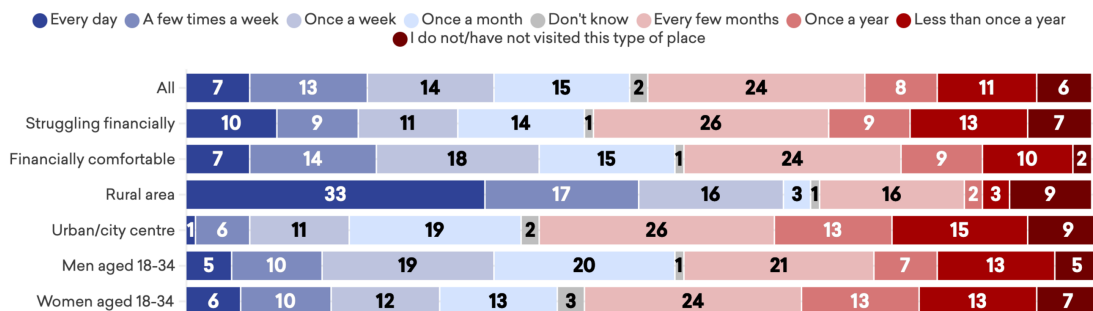
Visiting the local countryside is an experience that is shared across generations. At least four in ten people in every age group, from Gen Z through to the Silent Generation, say they visit the countryside at least once a month. It is also an activity that cuts across political beliefs and differences in values, with at least 45 per cent of each of the seven segments visiting the countryside monthly or more. Traditional Conservatives and the Incrementalist Left- two groups from opposite ends of the ideological spectrum- are among the most likely to do so.

Where clear dividing lines do emerge is around finances and geography. Those who describe themselves as financially comfortable are ten points more likely to say to visit the countryside frequently as those who are struggling.

Meanwhile, those living in rural areas, villages, or small towns are almost twice as likely to frequently spend time in the countryside as those living in cities or urban areas. Among those who say they are struggling financially, 20 per cent say their main reason for not visiting the countryside more often is that it is too expensive to get there, while 25 per cent say it is simply too far away. Those living in cities cite similar barriers, with distance, lack of public transport, and cost all playing a major role in how often they visit green space.

## Those who feel more financially insecure, live in urban areas, and young women are all less likely than average to frequently visit the countryside

How often do you visit the following types of green spaces? [The Countryside]



Source: More in Common, December 2025 • Bars may add up to more than 100% due to rounding

In addition, among the youngest generation of Britons, there is also evidence of a gender split- among those aged 34 and below, women are less likely than men to say they frequently visit the countryside. 27 per cent of women aged 18-34 say the main reason they do not spend more time in the British countryside is because it is too far away (compared with 20 per cent overall), while 20 per cent say there is not enough to do (versus 10 per cent overall).

Across the public as a whole, the reasons given for not frequently visiting the countryside or other green spaces are similar - the most common barriers to spending more time here are bad weather (38 per cent), distance from home (20 per cent), and a lack of available public transport (14 per cent).

"I think sometimes, if people have certain disabilities or maybe they want there to be facilities nearby, if you go somewhere very unspoilt, it might not be near toilets or facilities or that sort of thing"

Sara, customer service manager, Leeds, Traditional Conservative

"I think as well, those that don't drive - so I know people that live in London and they don't have a car so they're not able to access things like that [the countryside]. Young people as well, that haven't yet passed their driving test."

Aaliyah, AI consultant, Telford, Established Liberal

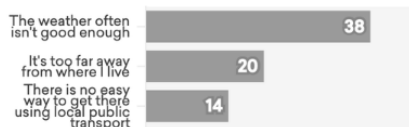
However, these obstacles are not felt equally. Progressive Activists - a segment that is typically younger, urban, socially liberal, and more financially precarious - are more likely than average to cite poor public transport, expense, lack of accessibility for those with disabilities or mobility issues, or there simply not being enough to do as their reasons for not spending time in green space. By contrast, Sceptical Scrollers, who are highly engaged online and more likely to live in urban centres such as Liverpool, Leeds, or Manchester, tend to point primarily to distance or say that they are simply not 'outdoorsy' people.

## Weather, cost, distance and a lack of public transport are all common barriers to accessing the countryside

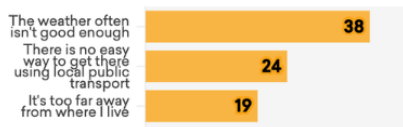
What are the biggest barriers to you visiting countryside or green spaces more often? Please choose up to three from the list below.

(Top three choices per segment)

### All



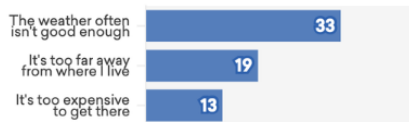
### Progressive Activists



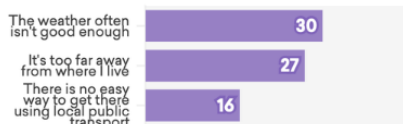
### Incrementalist Left



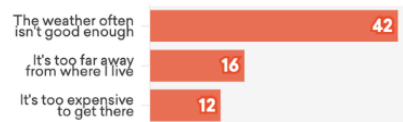
### Established Liberals



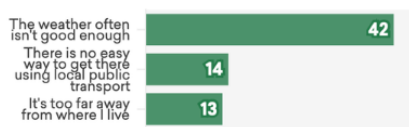
### Sceptical Scrollers



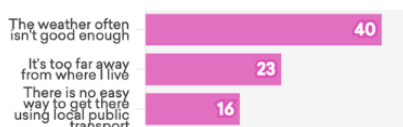
### Rooted Patriots



### Traditional Conservatives



### Dissenting Disruptors





## The countryside as a source of calm and pride

For many Britons, the countryside and green spaces are closely associated with calm, tranquillity, and personal wellbeing. They are widely seen as delivering significant benefits for physical health, mental health, and overall quality of life. When people are asked how they feel when they think about the countryside, the language they use is overwhelmingly positive: words such as *relaxing*, *refreshed*, *serene*, and *peaceful* are used commonly by respondents. This emotional connection also feeds into a sense of national pride – nearly two thirds (64 per cent) say the countryside is one of the things that makes Britain special, with more than a quarter saying it is the single main thing.

**In a word or two, when you think of the countryside, how do you feel?**



The benefits most commonly associated with the countryside by the public centre on peace and quiet and its positive impact on mental health and wellbeing. These perceptions are particularly strong among older generations. Half of the public also say that access to nature and wildlife is a key benefit of the British countryside, with this view held especially strongly by those living in suburban areas or urban city centres – for many, the countryside represents a way to engage with nature that is not readily available close to home.

Younger people, meanwhile, are more likely than older generations to see green spaces and the countryside as playing an important role in helping to tackle the impacts of climate change.

“I quite like the escapism of being able to go out and not being surrounded by people. So, if I take the dog for a walk and we drive somewhere rural, then I know we're not going to bump into anyone all day and it's just me.”

Aaliyah, AI consultant, Telford, Established Liberal

“I think there's health benefits as well. You're doing walks, maybe up North the air would be a lot fresher, less polluted, so it's probably better for everyone's health as well.”

Wayne, train driver, High Wycombe, Progressive Activist

“I think the countryside plays a massive part in health in general. Mental health, massively. It's serene, it is calming. For physical health, it can get you active, but also the environment- if we take away the green fields and the trees, the environment's affected, isn't it? We need that.”

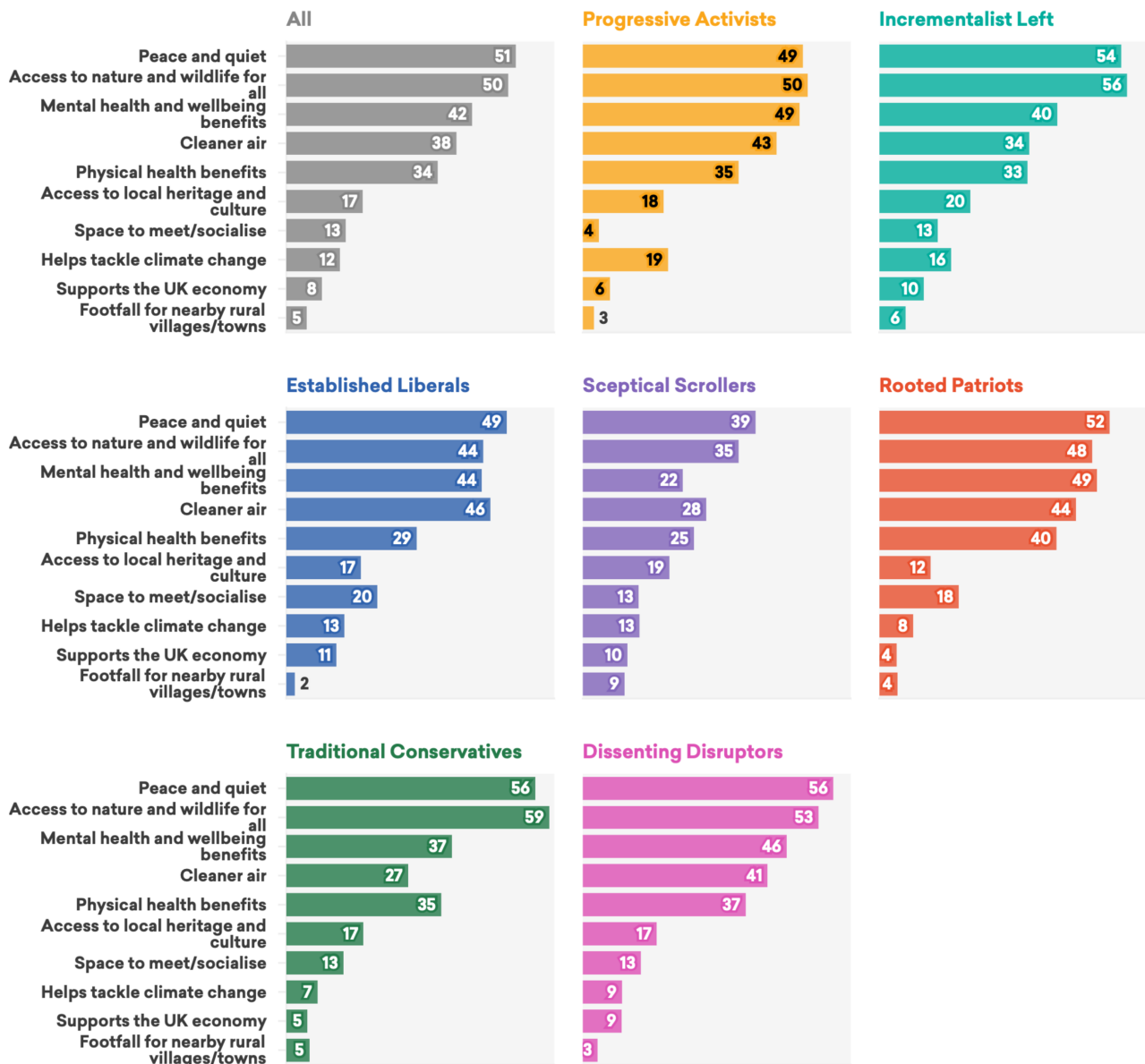
Scott, engineer, Leeds, Rooted Patriot

While views on the physical and mental health benefits of the countryside are broadly shared between groups, there are differences between segments of the population in how other implications are viewed. For example, more socially liberal and globally minded groups, who tend to be especially concerned about climate and environmental issues, are more likely than average to emphasise its role in tackling climate impacts and providing clean air.

For Rooted Patriots, who are typically closely tied to their local communities, the countryside's value as a space for people to meet and socialise is particularly important. And, among Dissenting Disruptors, the mental health benefits stand out as especially valuable.

# Peace and quiet, access to nature and its positive impact on mental health and wellbeing are seen as the biggest benefits of Britain's countryside

What do you think the biggest benefits of Britain's countryside for the public are? Please choose up to three from the list below.



Given the above, it is unsurprising that proximity to green space and the countryside plays a major role in where people would ideally like to live.

More than eight in ten Britons say that being close to green space is very or quite important when choosing where to live, while nearly three quarters say the same specifically about proximity to the countryside. These considerations are ranked as a higher priority than low council tax or access to good schools.

“[On what’s important when it comes to choosing where to live] Open spaces. I’ve always lived in places where there’s really nice nature nearby, nice forests, hills, rivers, so having good access to that and not just being stuck in a crowded place.”

Aaliyah, AI consultant, Telford, Rooted Patriot

Against this backdrop, there is near universal support for protecting Britain’s countryside for future generations. This is not a divisive issue across age, party support, or whether people have children or not - just under nine in ten say this is very or quite important to them. When asked why protecting the countryside for future generations matters, the most common reasons relate to the mental health benefits for future generations (42 per cent), wanting children to be able to enjoy Britain’s natural landscapes (37 per cent), and preserving future access to nature and biodiversity (35 per cent). Fewer people cite protecting future generations from climate change (16 per cent) or from noise and light pollution (11 per cent).

While more than nine in ten supporters of every major political party agree that protecting the countryside for future generations is important, the motivations of each group differ. Among those intending to vote Conservative, the dominant justification is ensuring that future generations can enjoy natural landscapes and scenery. Reform UK voters are more likely to emphasise the importance of protecting heritage and national character.

“The landscape and the green land, it’s part of the identity of the UK and it’s part of the reason a lot of the world wants to live here. Certainly, it’s why I want to live here. I don’t want to live anywhere else, but if you just keep building and building then how is it any different to a lot of other countries? It is part of the UK’s identity and it’s slowly - or quickly at the moment - it’s quickly moving away and it’s disappearing. Once it’s gone, you can’t bring it back.”

Scott, engineer, Leeds, Rooted Patriot

Meanwhile, for Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters, the mental health and wellbeing benefits are the primary rationale, while among green supporters the strongest emphasis is on ensuring that future generations grow up with access to wildlife and biodiversity.

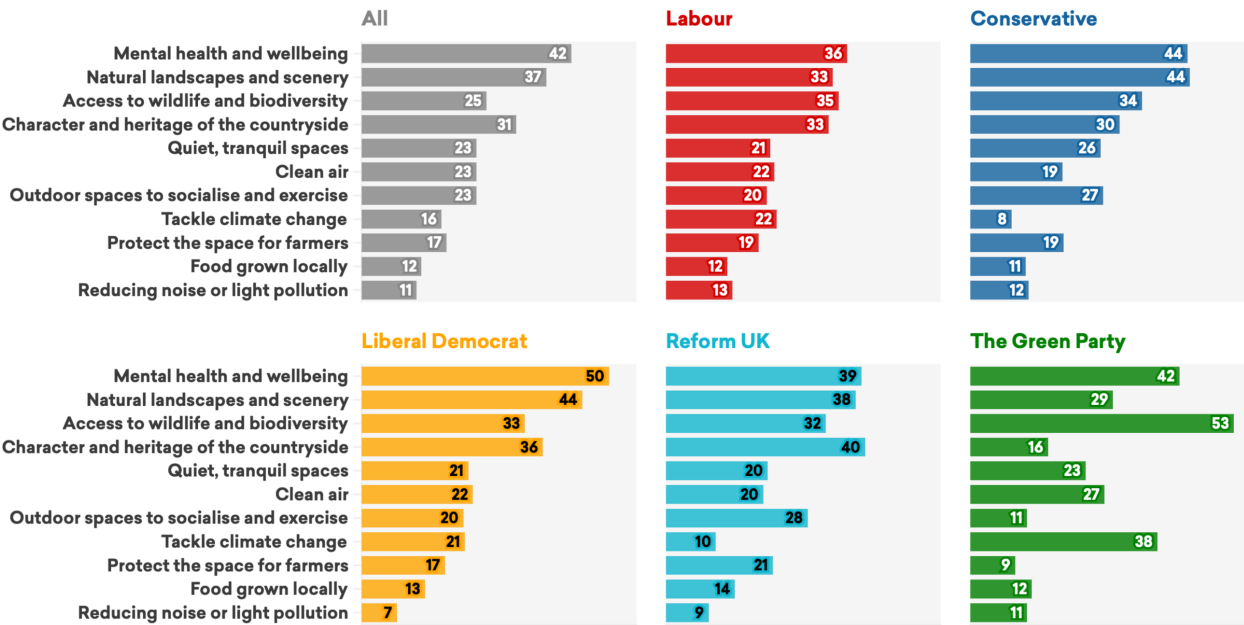


To the socially conservative segments, the British countryside offers a continuity with British values and history, while more socially liberal segments see it as offering a means to improve the wellbeing for either themselves, their community or nature and wildlife more broadly.

**Conservative voters stress ensuring that future generations have access to nature, while Labour voters focus on the countryside's health benefits**

You said that it is important to you that the countryside is protected for future generations. Why is that? Please choose up to three options from the list below.

By current voting intention



## Chapter 2 | Protecting green spaces while growing places

### A government that can do both

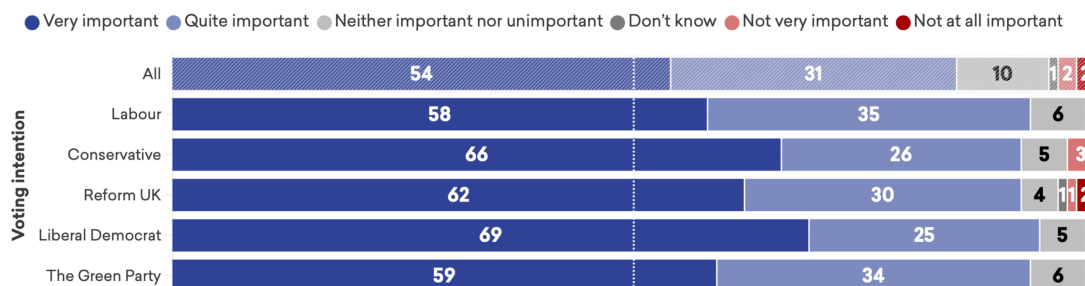
Around 16 per cent say that affordable housing is one of the most important issues facing the country, making it the fifth most salient issue facing the country behind the cost of living, the NHS, and immigration and asylum. At the same time, there is very strong support for protecting the Green Belt: 86 per cent say that safeguarding some areas of the countryside from development is important to them, including nine in ten supporters of each major political party.

Even among those who prioritise affordable housing as a key national issue, support for protecting the Green Belt remains high, with more than three quarters saying preserving land from development is very or quite important.

#### Supporters of every party say preserving the Green Belt is important to them

The 'Green Belt' refers to areas of open land in Great Britain, around towns and cities, where building and development is restricted. Designating areas of land as 'green belt' is designed to stop urban settlements (i.e. towns and cities) from becoming too big, preserving the countryside and protecting wildlife habitats.

How important is preserving the green belt to you?



Crucially, most people do not see concern for housing and development as being in direct opposition to the preservation of green space or the prevention of urban sprawl. Half of Britons believe the government can both build new homes and protect nature and the countryside, while only 16 per cent think it must choose between the two. Majorities of supporters of every major party share the view that both goals are compatible, as do 53 per cent of those who say affordable housing is one of the most important issues facing the country.

In conversation, Britons express concern in housing and nature being presented as a direct trade-off, with the worry that a short-term rush to build more housing, without proper regulation, will turn the current housing crisis into a future 'poor-quality' housing crisis, or exacerbate current declines in nature and wildlife in the UK.

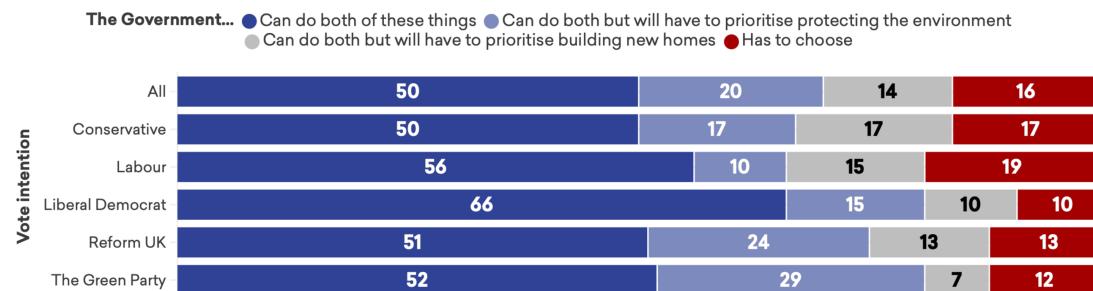
“I understand the need for houses, but I just hope it just doesn't take away too much of that beautiful green space and that kind of space that we all feel as a family that we've got, that drew us to love this place so much. But everywhere is changing, I get that and people obviously, the way the country is at the moment, people need houses. Everyone needs a roof over their head, and they deserve a roof over their head, but you kind of don't want it in your backyard. But I think that a lot of people feel like that anyway, just as long as it sort of keeps that special charm that it's always had”

Paula, HGV driver, Lowestoft, Dissenting Disruptor

That said, there is an acknowledgement by some that while the government may be able to pursue both objectives, it may eventually need to prioritise one over the other. 14 per cent say the government can do both but will ultimately have to prioritise building new homes, while 20 per cent say it can do both but will need to prioritise protecting the environment and countryside. These views vary by party: Conservative and Labour supporters are more likely to say housing would need to be prioritised, while Reform and Green supporters are more likely to say the environment would take precedence, despite broader differences in their political outlooks.

### Voters across all the major parties believe the government can both build new homes and protect the environment

Some people say that the government has to choose either between protecting the environment or building new homes. Do you think you can do both, or does the government have to make a choice?



However, focus groups revealed some scepticism across party lines about the government's housebuilding target. Despite a recognition across the group of a need for more affordable housing, there was a feeling that the government's target of 1.5 million homes by 2029 was unrealistic and could lead to developers cutting corners when it comes to following planning and environmental restrictions or could be of negative consequence for the local environment.

“Obviously it’s unrealistic to be able to do that many, in that space and time. It’s just another pledge, isn’t it? That’s promises which can be broken. By 2029 as well. When did they get into power? 2024?”

Wayne, train driver, High Wycombe, Progressive Activist

“It’s unrealistic to build that many houses, and how many corners are going to have to be cut to even get anywhere near that? That’s been mentioned quite a few times. They’re not supposed to give planning permission until there’s the correct level of infrastructure to take all these new houses. But yet if they’re demanding that they’re building houses, they’ve got to cut corners, they’ve got to change the planning laws to speed it up before the infrastructure’s done.”

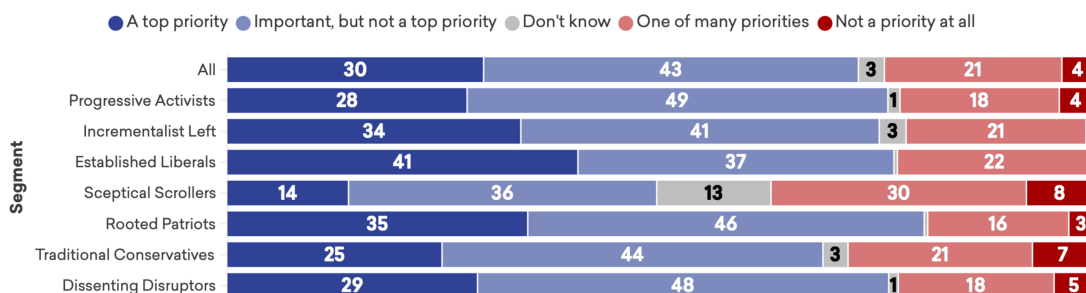
Scott, engineer, Leeds, Rooted Patriot

Overall, though protection of the countryside and environment is important to a large portion of voters, many concede the government will have to prioritise other issues over doing so. More people view regenerating and protecting nature and the countryside as important but not a top government priority (43 per cent) than see it as a top priority in its own right (30 per cent).

Those who do place it at the top of the agenda tend to be more affluent, less focused on immediate pressures such as the cost of living, and more concerned with climate and nature issues overall. For example, Established Liberals - the most affluent of the seven segments - are the most likely to say that protecting nature and the countryside should be a top priority for the government (41 per cent, compared with an average of 30 per cent). Rooted Patriots, who can be seen as the typical ‘Red Wall’ voter, are the second most likely to say that the government should put protection of countryside and nature as a top priority.

## Most Britons see protecting nature as a priority for government, but not the most important one

Compared to other priorities, how much of a priority should regenerating and protecting nature and the countryside be for the government?

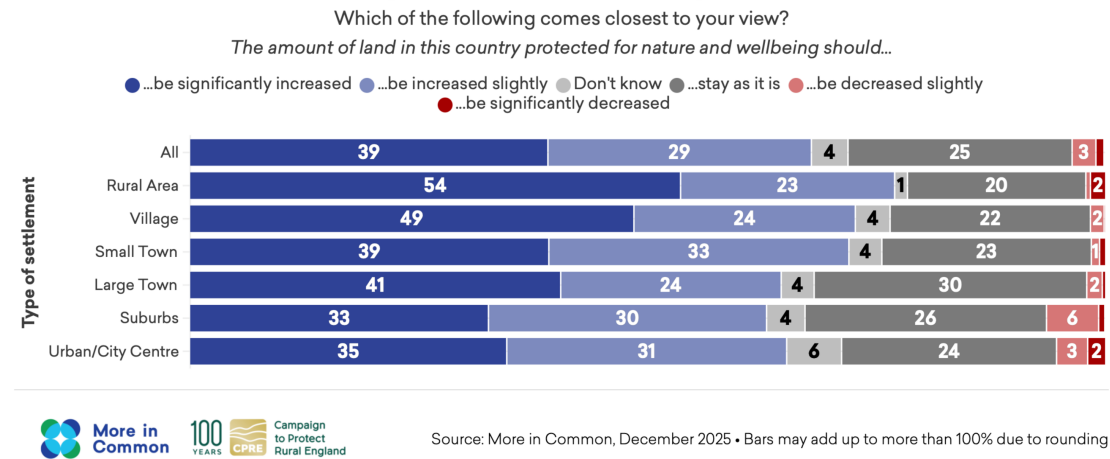




# Building new homes without sacrificing green space

Just under seven in ten people say that the amount of land protected for nature and wellbeing in the UK should be increased. While many recognise the need for new housing and value the provision of affordable homes, there is a clear expectation that development should not come at the expense of the natural environment. This view is widely shared, including among those who already live in built-up urban or city centres and in large towns (65 per cent each).

## From cities and towns to those in villages and rural areas, Britons think the amount of land protected for nature and wellbeing should be increased regardless of where they live

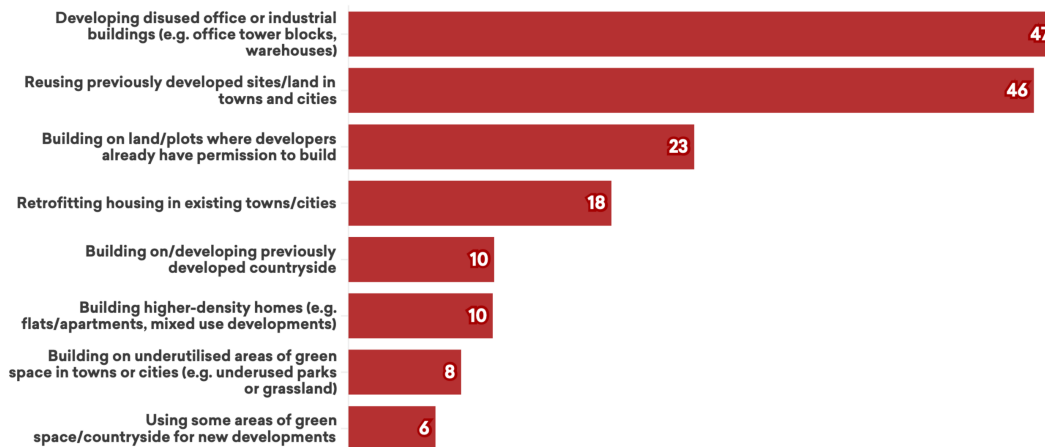


This preference is reflected clearly in views about where new housing should be built. When asked which sites the government should prioritise for future housing developments, the public by far favour previously developed land: 47 per cent say disused office or industrial buildings should be developed, 46 per cent support reusing previously developed sites in towns and cities, and 23 per cent favour building on plots where developers already have permission to do so.

By contrast, only 6 per cent think the government should focus on using green space or countryside for new housing, and just 7 per cent support building on under-utilised green space within towns or cities, such as parks or grassland. Even among those who identify affordable housing as one of the most important issues facing the country, only 9 per cent say the government should prioritise building on unused green spaces.

## The public would rather new housing developments were built on previously developed land or incorporated retrofitting than use unspoiled countryside

When it comes to choosing locations for new housing developments, what should the government prioritise most? Please choose up to two options from the list below.



Progressive Activists, Rooted Patriots, and Traditional Conservatives- despite holding quite different social and political worldviews- are all more likely than average to support reusing previously developed land in towns and cities, suggesting this approach has the potential to unite across political lines.

Retrofitting or repurposing existing properties is particularly popular among Progressive Activists and the Incrementalist Left, while also finding strong support among Traditional Conservatives. Focus groups suggested that for some, this preference was driven out of concern for being environmentally friendly and promoting sustainability, while for others - particularly Traditional Conservatives - it was out of preserving the natural beauty and heritage of the countryside.

“I personally find it frustrating, because I feel there could be a lot of work to be done in retrofitting. You see a lot of abandoned council estates. And military camps as well. I used to be in the army and we used to have a whole patch full of empty houses that we then started renting out to the public, but they could be used for more council accommodation.”

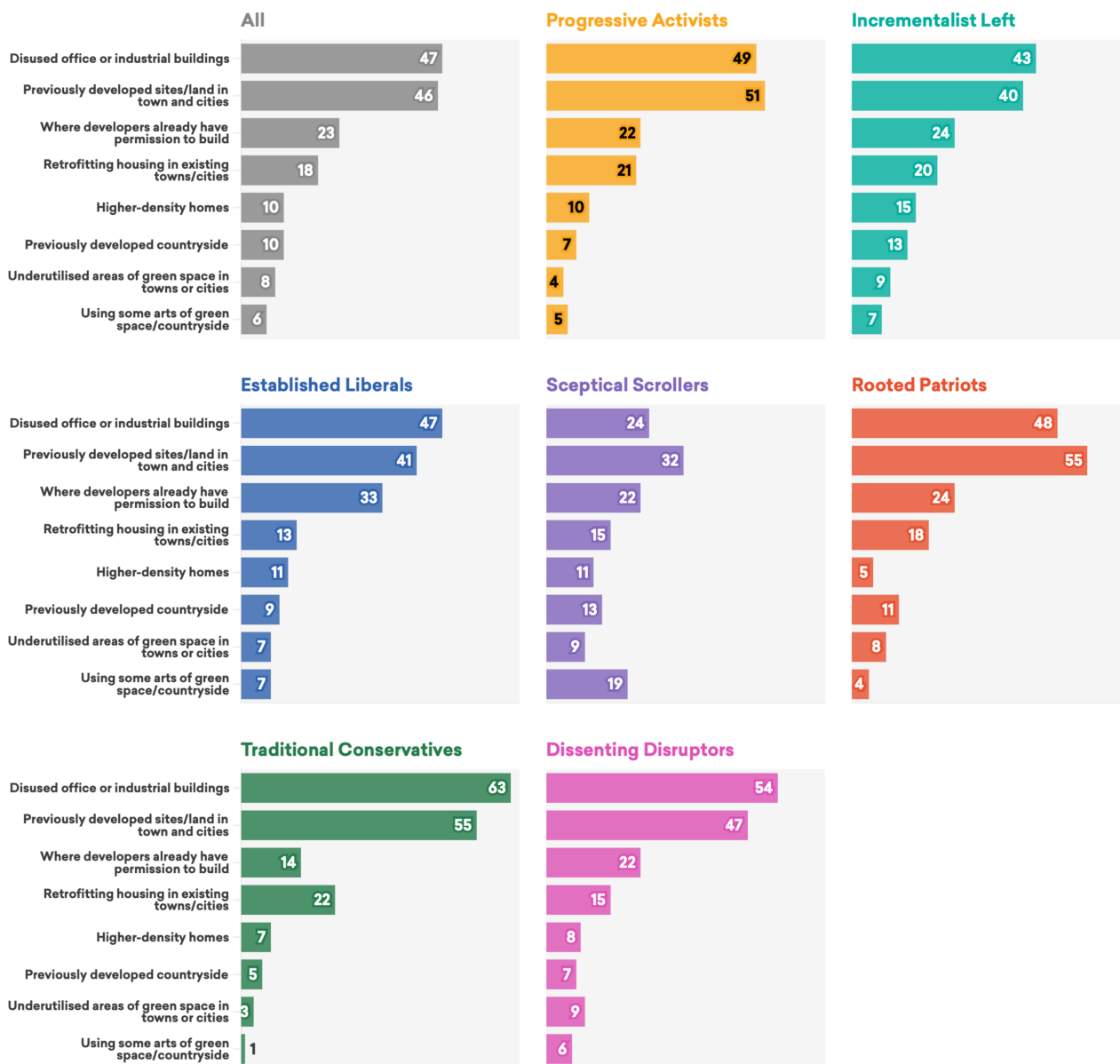
Aaliyah, AI consultant, Telford, Established Liberal

“There is a housing crisis, people have not got houses. The biggest thing with my charity at the minute is housing. People are in inappropriate housing or the landlord is selling the property. And what happened is the councils got rid of the housing stock, they sold it on right to buy and then that never gets put back, so they never replenished. But we have got so many empty houses (...) I think the last statistic in Calderdale was about 15,000 houses that were empty. But if they reused housing and looked at an infrastructure to put in, we wouldn't need any more houses being built in my area. They would've put 15,000 houses in North Halifax and a lot of that is on Green Belt land. Some I agree with, some of them I don't.”

Lisa, trust manager, Halifax, Dissenting Disruptor

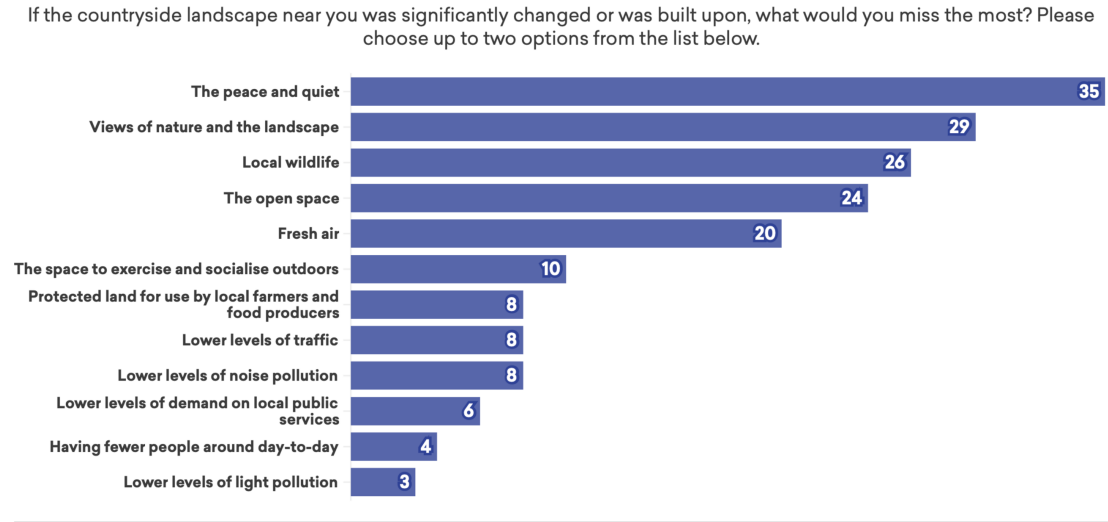
## Building on previously developed land and regenerating disused buildings are approaches to development with broad appeal

When it comes to choosing new locations for housing developments, what should the government prioritise most? Please choose up to two options from the list below.



For many, opposition to building on local countryside is rooted in what could be lost as a result. More than a third say that if countryside near them were built on, they would miss the peace and quiet it provides, while over a quarter say they would regret losing views of nature and landscape, or access to wildlife. The public is more likely to say they would miss these than lower traffic levels, reduced noise pollution, or pressure on public services, suggesting resistance to building on green space is not simply about avoiding disruption or population growth, but about the value of the countryside itself as an asset to these communities.

**The public say they would miss the peace and quiet, views of nature and access to local wildlife their local countryside provides if it were to be developed**



When asked what they think other Britons prioritise when it comes to new housing developments, most people believe they put affordability and proximity to amenities such as transport links and schools come first.

However, 22 per cent also think the public prioritises protecting nature and the environment, suggesting that some believe this to be a shared national concern. Views on this vary by segment: groups that tend to emphasise heritage, character, and wildlife - such as Traditional Conservatives, Rooted Patriots, and Dissenting Disruptors - are more likely to think that protecting nature is a shared public priority.

By contrast, segments that focus more on clean air or tackling climate change as benefits of the countryside are less likely to see this as a dominant public concern, instead thinking other Britons emphasise environmental sustainability or the affordability of construction when it comes to building new housing.

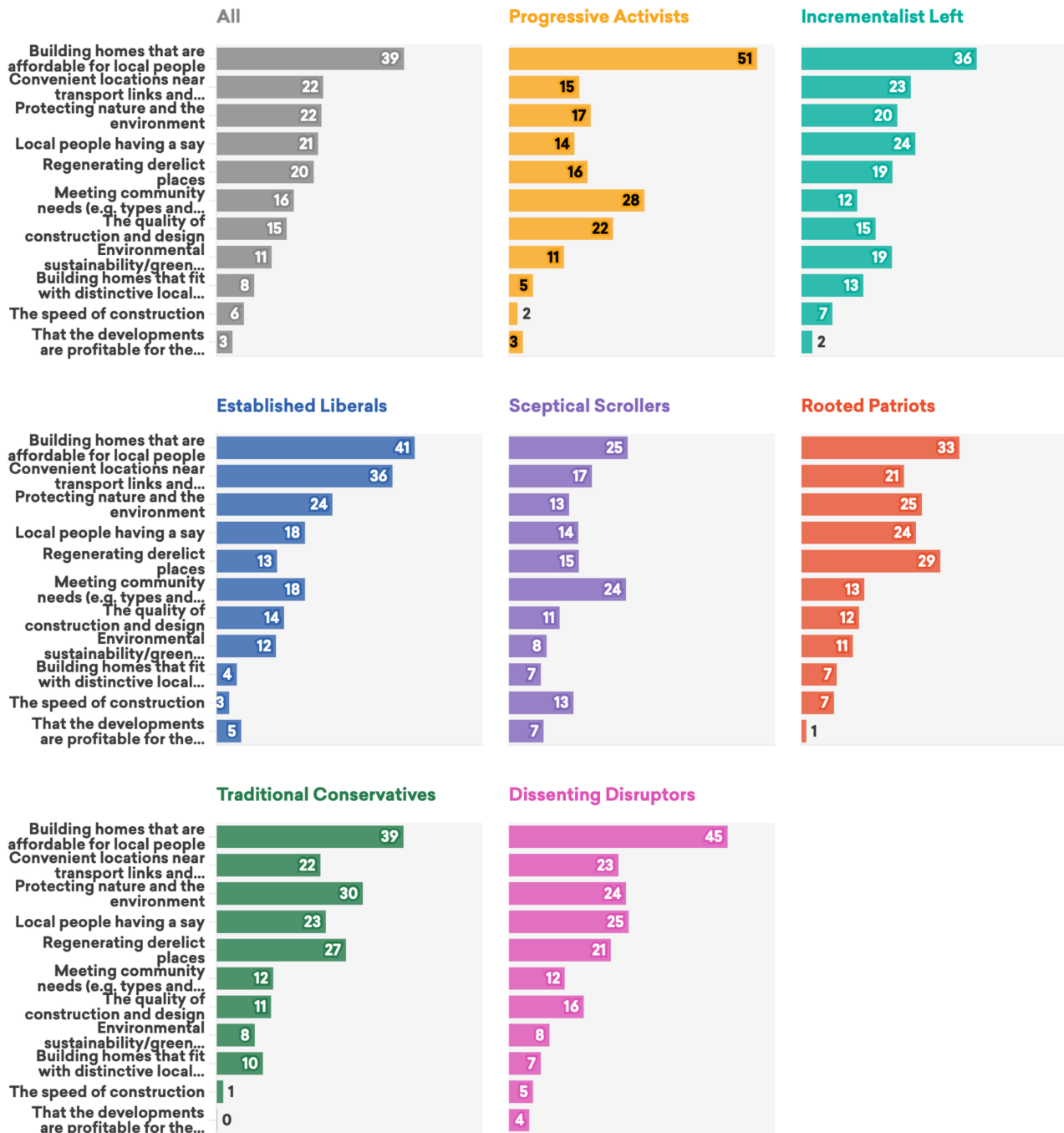
Rooted Patriots, a group more commonly found in former industrial and 'red wall' areas that now face higher levels of deprivation and insecure work, are more likely than average to think the public prioritises developments that regenerate the local area (29 per cent, compared with a 20 per cent average).

Dissenting Disruptors, who place strong emphasis on free speech, representation, and local voice, are more likely than other segments to believe that local people having a say in developments matters to the wider public. Overall, people's own values and political experiences shape how they interpret the priorities of those around them.



## Every segment places affordability of homes as the number one public priority, with protecting nature and the environment in joint second

When it comes to housing development projects, what do you think are the main priorities for the public?  
Please choose up to two options from the list below

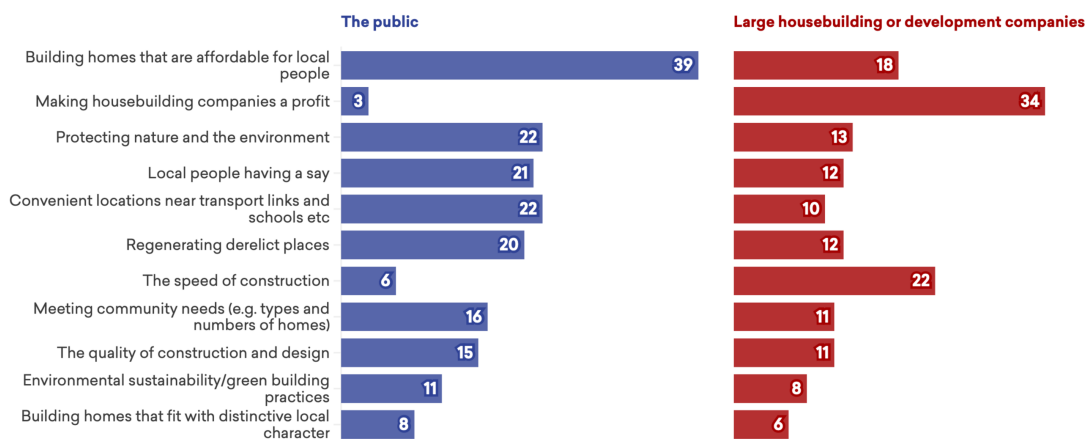


The gap in what the public perceive between Britons' priorities and those of housing developers to be when it comes to building new developments is stark. Only 18 per cent think developers prioritise building affordable homes, despite many viewing this as a public priority.

Additionally, a large number believe that development companies prioritise the speed of construction, over key public priorities such as protecting nature and the environment—just 13 per cent believe housebuilding companies prioritise this, nine points lower than the proportion who think the public does so.

### While the public believes their fellow Britons prioritise building homes that affordable while protecting nature and the environment, they think developers prioritise making a profit

When it comes to housing development projects, what do you think are the main priorities for large housebuilding or development companies? Please choose up to two options from the list below.



Scepticism is particularly pronounced among Green voters: almost half of those intending to vote Green believe developers primarily prioritise profit. This group is also the least likely to think that housebuilding companies focus on protecting nature or complying with environmental regulations. Reform UK supporters are the most likely to believe developers do prioritise environmental protection, though even here only 17 per cent say this is the case.

In focus groups, people also tended to be cynical of any schemes that would allow developers to skirt or postpone local environmental surveys and allow them instead to pay into a local wildlife protection or nature recovery fund.

Opposition stemmed from people being uncertain about where that funding would go, whether developers would actually be forced to pay into it, and concern that this could in the long run lead to irreparable damage to the local countryside or natural habitat, which could have been stopped by an earlier survey.

“[On the idea of a nature recovery fund] Rubbish. I think it won't happen. That's what I think. Where's it going to go? That money is not going to go where it needs to go. I like what they do already.”

Sara, customer services, Leeds, Traditional Conservative

## Chapter 3 | Powering communities, protecting landscapes

### Support for community and renewable energies

Many Britons believe the government could be doing more to support renewable energy and community-led energy initiatives. For example, when presented with the idea of a law requiring all suitable commercial or public buildings to have rooftop solar panels, over seven in ten say they would support it, while just 5 per cent oppose it. Support spans every segment, though it is slightly lower among Rooted Patriots (68 per cent) and Traditional Conservatives (67 per cent), two groups that tend to be more cautious about the pace and cost of the energy transition.

That more than six in ten in these groups still support the policy underscores its broad popularity. However, these groups do tend to be more sceptical of how mandatory installation would work in practice, pointing to constraints with the location of solar panels and the potential impact they might have on local beauty or the natural environment.

“I quite like the idea actually [of installing solar panels]. I work at RICS, the Royal Institution Chartered Surveyors, and I do a lot of work on sustainability, and I just think it's a good idea to help get buildings more efficient. If they have solar panels on the buildings, they'd be purchased at a higher price. But then you've got a building that's an CG, an EPC rating in a, so it's more efficient. You'll save more money in energy. I like the idea. I think it's good.”

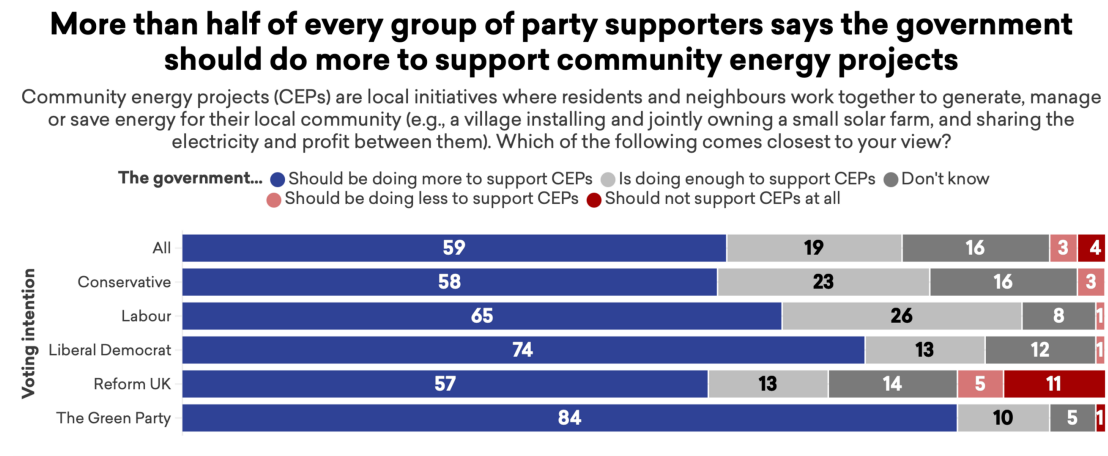
Aaliyah, AI consultant, Telford, Established Liberal

“Quite a few years ago when they were doing the government grant for the solar panels, we were refused it, because our house points in the wrong direction. So what are they going to do with all these new houses? They're going to all build them all in straight lines? If they don't work when the house is the other way around, then how's that going to work?”

Scott, engineer, Leeds, Rooted Patriot

Respondents were also asked about community energy projects - local initiatives where neighbours collaborate to generate, manage, or save energy for their area (for example, a village jointly owning a small solar farm and sharing electricity and profits). A majority say the government should be doing more to support these projects, compared with 19 per cent who feel the government is already doing enough. Support is strongest among

Liberal Democrat, Labour, and Green supporters, though over half of each major party's supporters agree that more government action is needed.



Source: More in Common, December 2025 • Bars may add up to more than 100% due to rounding

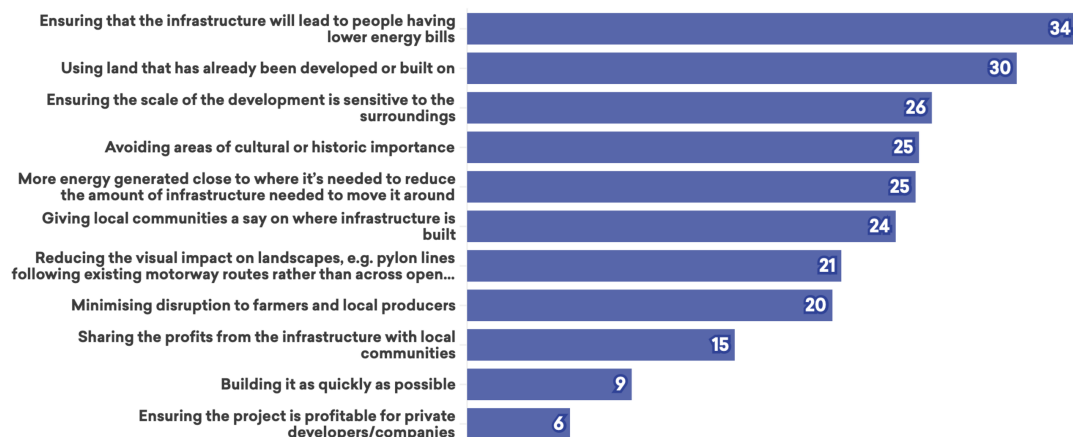
When asked why the government should do more, the primary reason cited is reducing energy bills for local residents- 45 per cent see this as a key rationale. This support is not limited to those who are struggling financially, with people who feel relatively stable or who can cover essentials also supportive, indicating broad appeal.

The benefits for climate and the environment are another popular motivation, cited by 35 per cent, with Progressive Activists and the Incrementalist Left most likely to see community energy projects as a tool for climate action. Dissenting Disruptors, meanwhile, focus on local control over energy supply, while Traditional Conservatives are more likely to highlight how CEPs can help preserve the countryside and limit further development.

Looking more broadly at renewable energy infrastructure, the public has two clear priorities: ensuring any infrastructure actually reduces household energy bills, and that it sits on previously developed land rather than greenfield sites, in order to minimise any disruption to the natural environment. While there is recognition of the need for new energy infrastructure, people clearly want development to be careful and considerate - only 9 per cent say renewable energy projects should prioritise speed of construction above anything else, whereas more than twice as many prioritise minimising disruption to local producers, reducing visual impacts on landscapes, and avoiding culturally or historically important areas.

## When it comes to new renewable energy infrastructure, the public's priority is that it reduces the price of energy bills

When considering where and how to build the new infrastructure the country needs to transition to using renewable sources of energy (e.g. more pylons, solar panels, wind turbines), what should the government prioritise most? Please choose up to three options.



Respondents' segments shape their priorities when it comes to renewable energy infrastructure. Progressive Activists and the Incrementalist Left place more emphasis than average on ensuring profits from local renewable infrastructure are shared with the community and that energy is generated close to where it is needed, reflecting a strong community focus. Established Liberals, by contrast, are more likely than other groups to prioritise the speed of construction.

Groups who tend to be more cautious about renewables, such as Rooted Patriots and Traditional Conservatives, emphasise using land that has already been developed, with Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disruptors also particularly concerned about local consultation and community input in where infrastructure is built. Traditional Conservatives are especially motivated by preserving natural landscapes, ensuring any new infrastructure blends with its surroundings. For these groups, constructing new pylons, solar farms or wind farms without strong community consultation and input, and in plain sight of natural landscapes or habitats, could diminish support for renewable energy among a group that is already wavering.

“It's fair enough having pylons looking across a field, and seeing a pylon is one thing, but it's the total carnage that it'll cause. How many years is it going to take that landscape to recover from that? Ten men can't just pick up a pylon and walk into the middle of a field. They've got to have big trucks and cranes and everything on there. So they've got to make roadways into the middle of that field to be able to get it up”

Scott, engineer, Leeds, Rooted Patriot

## Renewable energy infrastructure priorities differ by segment, from community benefits to the speed of delivery

When considering where and how to build the new infrastructure the country needs to transition to using renewable sources of energy (e.g. more pylons, solar panels, wind turbines), what should the government prioritise most? Please choose up to three options.





“I think when we talk about infrastructure, they need to see what's already in place and to see whether or not it's working first before they come up with all these great ideas that we are paying for with our energy costs, an extraordinary amount of money. And they need to look at that first before they go, ‘oh, well, let's just put some up here, or let's flatten that farmland because they're now paying our farmers money to put wind farms and solar panels on their fields that should be producing food for us, because they're paying them to do it and not to farm the land’”

Lisa, trust manager, Halifax, Dissenting Disruptor

In short, while Britons broadly support renewable energy and community-led energy projects, they also want government action to be thoughtful when it comes to their construction, balancing climate and protection of the environment with careful planning and sensitivity to local communities' needs.

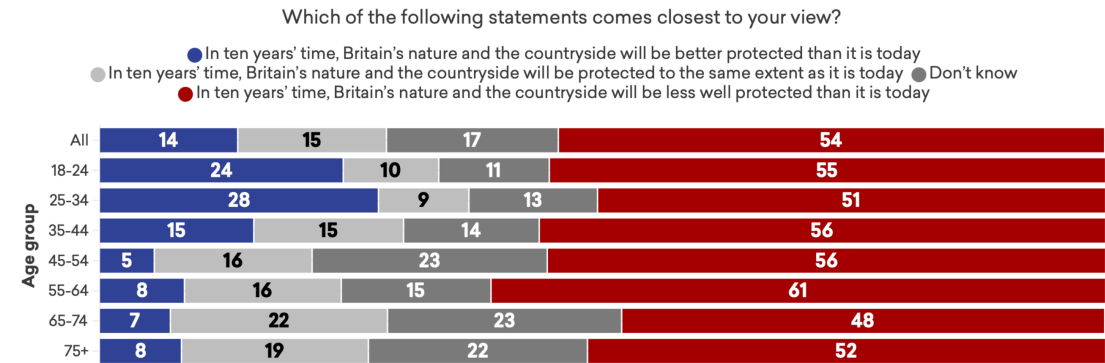
# Chapter 4 | Looking forward

## The future of Britain’s countryside and green spaces

While Britons highly value their countryside and green spaces, there is widespread concern about just how well they will be protected in the years ahead. More than half believe that in a decade, Britain’s natural habitats and countryside will be less well protected than they are now, with just 29 per cent thinking protections will be the same or better. Younger people tend to be slightly more optimistic than older generations, but majorities in every age group, from Gen Z to the Silent Generation, believe the countryside faces greater risks.

Among the youngest adults, there is a striking gender gap. Young women aged 18–34 are particularly pessimistic, with 61 per cent believing the protection of Britain’s natural habitats will be weaker in ten years, and only 16 per cent believing they will be better protected. By contrast, 44 per cent of men the same age feels this way, while 36 per cent expect protections to improve, despite this group being more likely to visit and engage with the countryside than young women.

### While all generations share concern about the future of the British countryside, young Britons tend to be more optimistic than those who are older



Source: More in Common, December 2025 • Bars may add up to more than 100% due to rounding

When asked what poses the greatest risks to Britain’s countryside, the public highlights housing developments (51 per cent), urban and town expansion (46 per cent), and a lack of coherent government strategy. While many believe the government can both expand housing and protect nature, these responses suggest that people see a gap in joined-up planning.

“I think it depends on how much green space you're used to, but I can see how ours is being decimated, I can see us just being turned into a city where you've got to go a lot further to get to any of our green space. The only thing with that is we have a lot of hills and it'd be harder for them to cut into that hillside. So that is probably one saving grace with it. But I do think our green space will be decimated.”

Lisa, trust manager, Halifax, Dissenting Disruptor

“To be honest, it really depends. I mean a lot of the time when the legislation comes through from the government to build the houses, or maybe changes or disturbance in the infrastructure of the UK, it really depends how much of the public is opposed towards that legislation. But possibly [a risk is] building the houses around the Green Belt as the population increases in the UK”

Ashan, survey engineer, Birmingham, Sceptical Scroller

“It might not be as bad, but I think it's going to be, it definitely won't be as it is now. They have to find somewhere to build on. If they're going to stick to their plans, they're going to have to build it somewhere.”

Wayne, train driver, High Wycombe, Progressive Activist

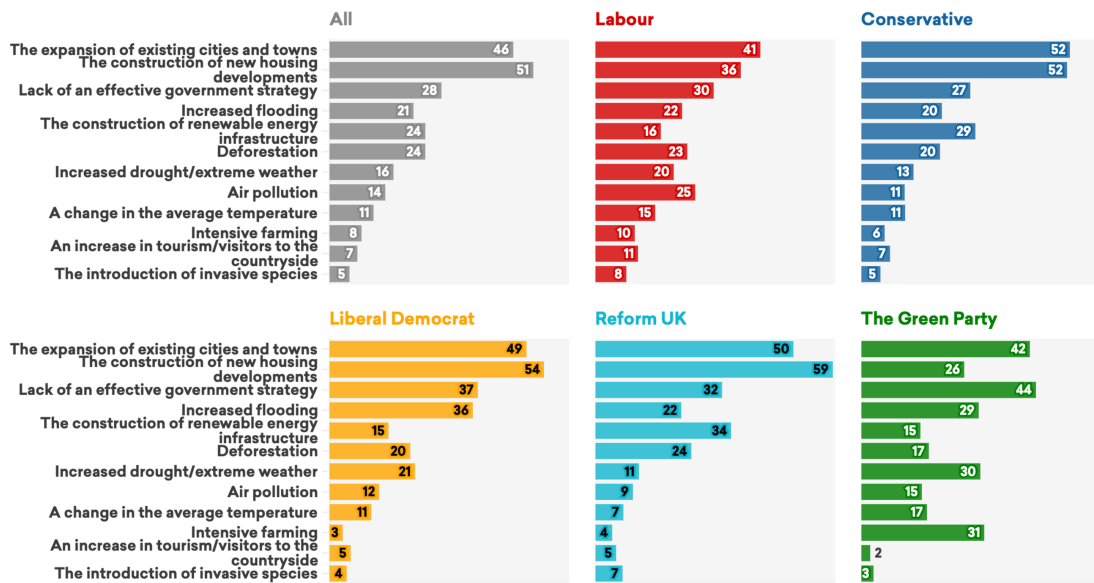
Views do differ by party support. Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters are more concerned than average about ecological threats to the countryside, with Labour voters focusing on air pollution, while Liberal Democrat supporters emphasise flooding risks. Green supporters are especially worried about extreme weather and are three times more likely than average to cite intensive farming as a threat to the British countryside.

Meanwhile, Reform UK supporters are more likely to see government decisions on infrastructure, including renewable energy, as a potential threat to green spaces, and are deeply concerned that progress on energy should not come at the expense of natural habitats.

## Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green supporters are more likely to see climate change as a risk to the countryside and anyone, while Reform UK voters focus on new developments

You said that in ten years' time, Britain's nature and countryside will be less well protected than it is today. What do you think the biggest threats to the countryside and nature are? Please choose up to three options from the list below.

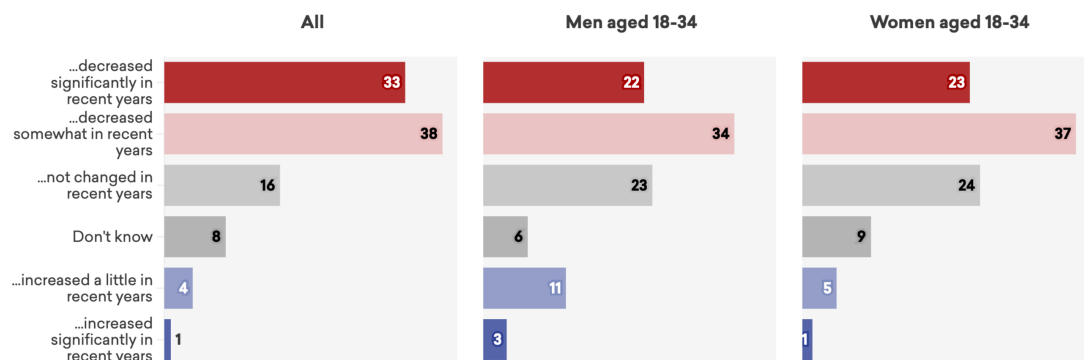
By current voting intention



However, these threats are not something Britons think could put the countryside or natural habitat at risk in the future - they are very much present. 71 per cent believe that the UK's natural habitat and wildlife have decreased in recent years, with a third saying the decline in the amount of natural habitat has been significant. Older adults and those in rural areas are particularly likely to think this is the case, with young men once again being some of the most optimistic about the state of the countryside, being almost three times more likely than average to say wildlife and habitat have increased in recent years.

## Young people, particularly young men, tend to be slightly more optimistic about the state of wildlife and natural habitat in the UK

Which of the following comes closest to your view? 'The amount of wildlife and natural habitat in the UK has...'



In response, three quarters of Britons feel that local landscapes and the countryside need stronger protections, with 46 per cent saying protections should be much stronger. Fewer than 2 per cent think protections should be reduced.

When it comes to political leadership, public trust in any of the main party leaders to protect the countryside is limited. Nigel Farage is the most trusted to do so at 23 per cent, narrowly ahead of Ed Davey, Kemi Badenoch, and Zack Polanski, but a majority still distrusts him.

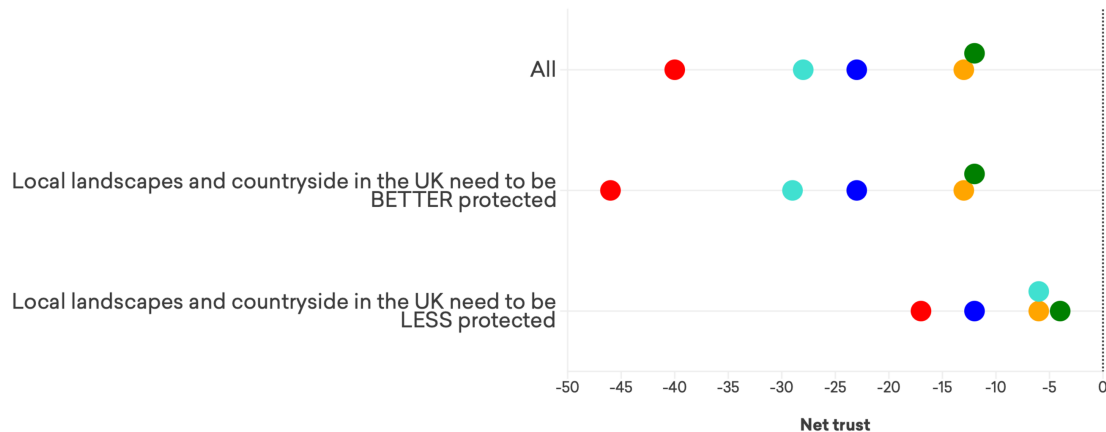
Nigel Farage tends to be particularly distrusted by supporters of parties other than Reform UK, even though Kemi Badenoch receives notable support from Reform supporters (31 per cent). The Prime Minister ranks lowest in trust at 18 per cent and is the most widely distrusted to protect the countryside (59 per cent). Overall, the Green Party leader scores highest when accounting for net trust to protect the countryside (trust minus distrust), even among those who believe protections will worsen in the next decade.

However, in sum, this data indicates that few Britons have strong confidence that political leaders can safeguard Britain's natural environment, with even the most trusted figures remaining deeply divisive.

## Those who favour better countryside protections most trust Zack Polanski and Ed Davey to deliver them

To what extent would you trust the following party leaders to protect Britain's nature and countryside?

Party leader: ● Kemi Badenoch ● Keir Starmer ● Ed Davey ● Nigel Farage ● Zack Polanski



## The next generation

When thinking about how the next generation views the countryside and how future changes to it might affect them, young people expressed concerns that closely mirrored those of older generations. In particular, they wanted stronger protections for the countryside and expressed some anxiety about its future. This was striking given that relatively few participants in this focus group described having a strong personal attachment or emotional connection to the countryside or natural landscape.

Instead, many young people said they did not feel connected to the countryside at all. They often described it as boring, with little to do when they visited, especially compared with the spaces they usually socialise in, such as football pitches, cafés, or local shops. The countryside was commonly seen as remote and distant from their everyday lives, even by those living in relatively rural areas. For some, the cost of travelling to rural areas also made it impractical as a place to meet and spend time with friends.

“For me, I think it's a bit different because a lot of my friends live out in the countryside. And to me, it feels quite boring because there's a lot of it around me and there's nothing to do, ever.”

Henry, Cornwall, 17

“Well, because obviously I'm near the Lake District, so I think of the scenery, just far away, reserved from everywhere else. It doesn't really interest me. Well, it does, but again, there's not a lot to do there.”

Hannah, Manchester, 16

“I guess it's more attractions and everything because, again, it sort of just feels there's nothing to do and there's a few shops, but that's it. But in the city there's more shops and there's more food places and more places to go”

Farhana, Leicester, 17

However, several participants described the countryside as a place where their families spend time together and socialise, and many recognised its inherent value- it was seen as offering peace and quiet, a contrast to city life, and a space that supports people's wellbeing by giving them access to fresh air and open surroundings.

As a result, there was a clear desire to preserve and protect the countryside. A number of young people suggested that, while it may not play a large role in their lives at present, it could become more valuable to them as they grow older and more independent.

“Yeah, I think it is [important] to see different kind of cultures. Instead of living in the city, they're probably living in a quiet place, a lot of fresh air.”

Zayain, Birmingham, 16

“I think as much as I do find it boring sometimes, I think if it wasn't there, say surrounding the coast especially, I think it would be really depressing. If we couldn't keep what's quite beautiful about the natural bits of England, if we lost that by losing the countryside, it would be a really depressing place, I think.”

Henry, Cornwall, 17

Most young people wanted environmental protection to be treated as a priority alongside housing development, as opposed to over it. However, this did not mean they had no concerns about the impact developments could have on the British countryside- these often focused on its impact on wildlife and natural habitats, more specifically than those of the adults in the other focus group.



At the same time, the young people in the group recognised real pressures around housing, with house prices and affordability seen as particularly acute issues for their generation. Many felt that, in some cases, building on green spaces might be unavoidable, even if it conflicted with their desire to protect the environment.

“I feel like we should protect [the countryside] because like someone said earlier, habitats live on it. Do you know what I mean? Does that make sense? There's a lot of cows in the countryside and stuff like that.”

Nicole, Crawley, 17

“I think they should build houses. Because if there's a house in general or anything to help society, it's not a waste of space. Some places, they don't need to be left empty.”

Hannah, Manchester, 17

However, the group also wanted the government to try to use more novel routes to house building, like conversion of other buildings or retrofitting, which they felt could slow or lessen the impact on Britain's countryside.

“I think that's a really good idea because while I do think it's important to have more houses, if we can avoid disrupting land, and especially because I feel like the more that it's built, it'll just keep happening. It'll keep spiralling and you could lose precious countryside slowly and people wouldn't even notice. So I think it is important to use the space we already have that isn't set out as countryside.”

Henry, Cornwall, 17

“I think the idea of them renovating the offices or the unused houses is definitely a good idea because I feel like definitely around where I live, a lot of the fields are just getting built on for new housing estates”

Darcy, County Durham, 17

There was strong support for renewable energy, even more so than the older discussion group. The young people here expressed greater concern about the future impacts of fossil fuels and the oil and gas industry, issues they were actively learning about at school, which appeared to shape their views.

On solar panels specifically, while few had strong opinions either way on them, some did mention having family members who were considering installing them in response to rising energy costs. Solar panels were generally seen by the group as relatively

commonplace: participants from rural areas were more likely to report seeing solar farms in fields, while those in city centres or suburbs tended to notice panels on roofs.

The group felt that solar farms were a good use of land where fields had no other purpose (e.g. farming) and they were also open to the presence of pylons if this enabled wider access to cleaner, renewable energy in the local area. Many supported the idea of requiring all new homes and buildings to include rooftop solar panels. However, this support was conditional, with resistance emerging where solar farms or renewable infrastructure could be seen to disrupt the natural environment.

“[On where to put solar panels] Yeah, I'd say in fields and houses, I think fields are probably quite popular. Just big fields with just rows and rows of them with fences or bushes around them. And then I'd say they're quite common on people's houses as well.”

Morgan, Swansea, 17

“I don't think they have a major effect on nature, but maybe just how the countryside looks. But I think I would be quite annoyed if I saw them near the beach and stuff, I think because it would ruin the view.”

Henry, Cornwall, 17

Looking ahead, it was clear that this group of young people had a strong concern for environmental sustainability and the future of the countryside. Even if they did not engage with green spaces or the countryside as frequently as older participants said they did, they still recognised and valued its importance.

When asked about the biggest threats to the countryside in the near future, their responses closely mirrored those of the adult groups. Housing development was most frequently cited- while participants acknowledged the need for new housing, they felt it also posed risks to the natural environment, as did accompanying infrastructure such as new railway lines and motorways. In addition, pollution, particularly water pollution and sewage, was raised as significant concerns, especially by participants living in coastal areas.

“Because obviously the population's growing quicker than ever, and obviously more houses are going to need to be built, the more you do that, then the more countryside that's being taken away and habitats and crops and food”

Morgan, Swansea, 17

“I think I've seen a lot of pollution of waters. I've noticed quite a few times, especially recently, where if I go for a surf or if I go for a swim, that I'll get sick after. It's not like

it's happening all the time, but there's been, I think, two occasions and then you check the news and you see that these companies are dumping sewage into the sea and it's really dangerous for people and for wildlife.”

Henry, Cornwall, 17

As with the young adults in the poll, this group tended to be relatively optimistic about the future compared to those who are older. They did not believe the countryside would become completely degraded or that there would be nothing left to visit. Instead, they anticipated a landscape that would be more built up, but not entirely lost, despite their concerns.

“I don't really think about it, but now you've said it. I feel like there still will be countryside, just not as we had it when we were younger and we got taken there and stuff like that. But I still feel like there will be, but it'll be definitely more polluted and definitely a lot more houses rather than countryside”

Nicole, Crawley, 17

## Methodology

The findings presented in this report are based on a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact [sophie@moreincommon.com](mailto:sophie@moreincommon.com)

### Quantitative research

More in Common conducted a survey of 2,067 adults in Great Britain between the 15 and 19 December 2025 for CPRE. Respondents have been weighted according to age/sex interlocked, region, ethnicity, 2024 General Election vote, and education level.

More in Common is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. The data tables for this work can be found on [More in Common's website](#).

### Qualitative research

More in Common conducted two online focus groups as part of this project:

- Focus group 1: Held in November 2025 with eight participants from across England. These participants were from a mixed in their gender, ethnicities, employment status, voting histories and segments.
- 
- Focus group 2: Held in January 2026 with eight participants from across England, aged 16 and 17. These participants were mixed in their gender and ethnicities.

## Appendix

Full response list options for the chart titled *'Conservative voters stress ensuring that future generations have access to nature, while Labour voters focus on the countryside's health benefits'*

You said that it is important to you that the countryside is protected for future generations. Why is that? Please choose up to three options from the list below.

- So that they can enjoy our country's natural landscapes and scenery
- So that they have access to quiet, tranquil spaces
- So that they grow up with access to wildlife and biodiversity
- So that they have access to clean air
- So that they have access to outdoor spaces to socialise and exercise
- Because green spaces are beneficial to people's mental health and wellbeing
- To ensure they have access to food grown locally
- To preserve the character and heritage of the countryside for future generations
- To help them tackle climate change
- To protect future generations from noise or light pollution
- To protect space for future generations of farmers



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YEARS



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