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# Beyond consultation: The net zero engagement journey

Building understanding of public priorities for infrastructure in the South West

June 2026





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# Building for the future, with people at the heart

Infrastructure is not just about assets, networks, or investment decisions – it is about people. Whether infrastructure succeeds depends as much on people’s perceptions, experiences, and attitudes as it does on technical design or funding. And today, those decisions are being made in an increasingly complex environment: rising cost of living pressures, environmental urgency, evolving governance arrangements and heightened public scrutiny.

The South West is a diverse region, with strong local identities and a mix of rural, coastal and urban communities. Decisions may be taken at a regional or national level, but their impacts are always felt locally. That is why understanding what people value, what concerns them, and how they view infrastructure really matters.

Public expectations are changing. Communities want to understand not only what is being built, but why it is needed, who it is for, and whether the benefits and trade offs are fair. Trust cannot be assumed. Attitudes are closely linked to whether people feel listened to, understood, and genuinely involved, particularly where projects involve disruption or visible local change.

The transition to a lower carbon economy adds further challenge and opportunity. While net zero is a national ambition, its impacts are experienced locally.

Success depends on how well infrastructure investment aligns with people’s everyday priorities and how clearly its purpose and benefits are communicated.

This people-led ethos sits at the heart of the South West Vision developed by the South West Infrastructure Partnership (SWIP) and ICE South West. The Vision advocates a more user-focused approach to infrastructure, where the needs of people and the environment guide decision making. Identifying user needs, and understanding public attitudes, is fundamental to achieving this ambition.

This report captures how people in the South West, from all walks of life, view infrastructure, and the journey to net zero. By listening to their voices and understanding what matters most to them, it provides vital evidence to inform future decisions and helps ensure that communities remain at the heart of change.



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# Introduction

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Infrastructure underpins daily life, from transport and housing to energy, water and digital networks. Decisions about how this infrastructure is planned, funded and delivered will shape the South West's economic resilience, environmental outcomes and quality of life.

However, the context for infrastructure delivery is shifting. Economic pressures, environmental concerns and political change are influencing how people judge investment decisions and how willing they are to engage with them. Traditional assumptions about public understanding, trust and participation are increasingly being tested.

This report, produced by SWIP and ICE South West in partnership with Copper Consultancy and BMG Research, explores public attitudes to infrastructure and the net zero agenda in South West of England. Its purpose is to support the infrastructure sector in understanding public priorities, beliefs and behaviours, and to examine what these mean for engagement practice.

The findings are based on a demographically representative survey of 1,000 South West residents, alongside qualitative insight from infrastructure engagement experience. The research explores levels of understanding and support, how attitudes differ across population groups, and the factors that influence whether people engage with local infrastructure decisions.

Although the research identifies broad support for infrastructure investment and decarbonisation in principle, it also reveals a disconnect between that support and participation in formal consultation and engagement. In particular, it shows that current engagement approaches often fail to reflect how different audiences receive information, form views and take part.

The evidence points to a need to move beyond consultation as a procedural requirement, towards engagement that is more inclusive, transparent and rooted in everyday experience. Doing so is essential if infrastructure decisions are to reflect the full breadth of public views and secure long term confidence.

An ICE policy paper<sup>1</sup> discussing people's experiences of infrastructure from a diversity and inclusion perspective, based on a UK-wide public survey wide public survey in April 2026, reinforces these survey findings and the central importance of designing infrastructure to enable people to live the lives they want.

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<sup>1</sup> Built for purpose? Understanding people's Experiences of infrastructure assets and Services (May 2026) <https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/policy-and-advocacy/policy-insights/understanding-peoples-experience-of-infrastructure>





## Executive summary

This research examines how people in the South West understand, perceive and engage with infrastructure and the net zero agenda. It reveals significant differences between population groups and highlights structural weaknesses in how engagement is currently carried out.

### Generational differences shape attitudes and participation

Age is the strongest differentiator in attitudes to infrastructure and net zero, outweighing geography or socio-economic background.

Younger people tend to show strong support for local infrastructure and broad alignment with net zero objectives, particularly where projects deliver visible local benefits. For example, **95% of those aged 25-34 said they would support a local infrastructure project** – with 63% offering strong support.

However, younger audiences are largely absent from formal consultation processes. Traditional engagement channels do not align with how younger audiences access information or choose to participate, meaning their views are frequently under represented.

Older audiences are far more visible in engagement activity. Their support, however, is more conditional and shaped by concerns around disruption, environmental impact, fairness and personal cost.

As a result, consultation feedback often reflects a narrow subset of public opinion rather than the full distribution of views.

### Understanding and visibility are central to support

Support for infrastructure is closely linked to understanding. People who feel clear about what infrastructure is, why it is needed and how it benefits their lives, are more likely to support new investment.

Projects that feel tangible and relevant to everyday experience are prioritised by the public over those whose benefits feel abstract or distant. The research shows that respondents overwhelmingly chose the delivery of infrastructure they interact with daily, or regularly see in the media. Where purpose and value are unclear, confidence is weaker and engagement declines.

Building understanding and trust is therefore a critical foundation for meaningful participation.





### **Net zero ambitions are recognised but weakly anchored in everyday life**

Although awareness of the term 'net zero' is high, understanding is inconsistent. Views are often shaped by values rather than shared knowledge, making the concept polarising.

Support diminishes when the net zero agenda is presented primarily as a long-term national objective associated with cost or sacrifice. Attitudes become more positive when it is connected to tangible local outcomes. The report shows that support depends on connecting the net zero agenda to immediate, tangible benefits such as lower bills, healthier lifestyles, convenient travel and a stronger sense of place, rather than relying solely on distant environmental goals.

### **Trade-offs: Disruption is rarely the enemy**

Disruption alone is rarely the main cause of opposition. Many people are willing to accept disruption if they understand why a project is needed and what it will deliver.

Resistance increases where environmental impacts or financial costs are perceived as unclear or unfair.

Willingness to support infrastructure depends on transparency about trade offs, credible reassurance on mitigation, and clarity about local benefit.

### **The risk of the status quo**

Current approaches to engagement risk producing an incomplete and distorted picture of public opinion. Supportive audiences remain under represented, while undecided groups lack the information they need to form confident views.

This increases the risk of resistance, delay and erosion of trust at a time when infrastructure decisions are increasingly made locally.

# Understanding the audience behind the attitudes

People do not approach infrastructure or the net zero agenda from a uniform starting point. Socio-economic context, values, political identity and information habits all influence how views are formed and whether engagement feels relevant.

The research tested multiple potential differentiators, including geography, locality and socio-economic background. Although these factors all shape attitudes to an extent, age emerged as the strongest and most consistent indicator of differences in values, beliefs and behaviours. For this reason, the analysis in this report primarily uses age as the lens through which public attitudes are explored.

## Socio-economic context and lived experience

Figure 1 shows a socio-economic snapshot of each age category.<sup>2</sup> Socio-economic experience varies sharply across age groups, shaping appetite for change, tolerance for disruption, sensitivity to cost and perceived risk.



Figure 1. Audience snapshot - socio-economic background

## The “squeezed middle”

Although respondents to this survey are generally “doing well”, it is worth noting those “at risk” and “at high risk” amongst respondents are aged 35-54. People in this group are most likely to be at the peak of their career, but with childcare, mortgage payments, taxes and other financial responsibilities, this data suggests that the cost of living is having greatest impact here.

As this age group represents the ‘mainstream’ more than any other, this is a good indicator of the public narrative – which predominantly is likely to be more about ‘making ends meet’ than wider societal or environmental considerations.

These pressures help explain why support for infrastructure and the net zero agenda weakens when impacts feel immediate and personal, particularly where benefits are unclear.

<sup>2</sup> The ‘cost of living’ metrics in Figure 1 have been developed by BMG Research and use a range of factors (including debt levels, ability to save in the next 12 months, and ability to afford an unexpected large expense) to determine financial stability, outlook and wellbeing.

## Sharp generational differences in values and information habits

Beyond economic circumstance, age groups differ in values, voting behaviours and information consumption.

Younger audiences are more likely to hold socially progressive views and rely on digital, social and peer-led sources for information.

Older audiences are more likely to consume news through traditional media such as television, radio and print.

These distinct information ecosystems shape which messages are encountered, trusted and acted upon. They also help explain why traditional consultation approaches disproportionately reach older audiences.

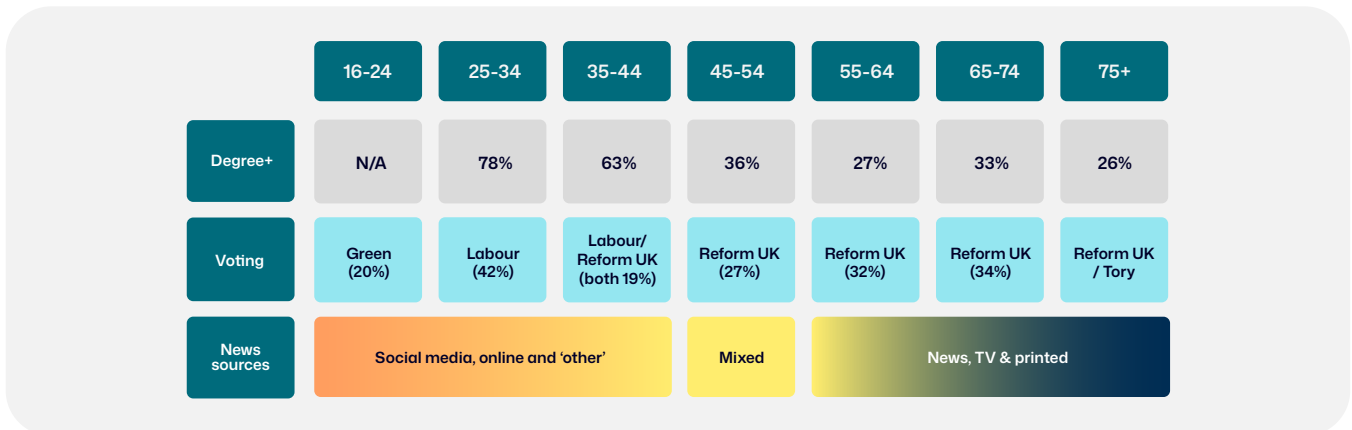


Figure 2. Values and attainment – showing statistics for a) % of respondents who have attained a degree level qualification or higher; b) voting behaviours, showing highest percentage(s) of chosen party “should an election take place tomorrow (September 2025)<sup>3</sup>”; c) news sources, dark green showing highest use of social media and alternative sources, yellow showing mixed sources, and dark red showing highest use of traditional news sources (radio, TV and printed press)

### News consumption by age – a missed opportunity?

We found that there is almost no crossover between the under-35s and those aged 55 or more, in terms of how people consume their information. Those aged 35 and under almost exclusively engage with news through digital, social and peer-led spaces, whereas mainstream media such as newspapers, radio and broadcasting is typically used by older audiences.

Historically, the infrastructure community has engaged through traditional channels, which begs the question: Is it that younger people aren't interested in local infrastructure – or is it **simply harder for them to discover consultations in the first place?**

<sup>3</sup> This data shows the voting intentions of the 1,000 respondents included in this survey September 2025 and is intended to demonstrate the differing values and beliefs of those surveyed, not as a full representation of public voting intentions across the south west of England.



### Content and channels for younger audiences

To reach younger audiences, it is vital that we meet them where they spend time, instead of expecting them to come to us. These audiences respond to visual storytelling and authentic, two-way discussion. Examples of effective social media tactics are:

**Polling on key issues:** Thought-provoking polls can start and continue social media discussions. Follow-up content is key to providing context to inform views.

**Humanising video content:** Short videos containing ‘quick thoughts’ from a project or leaders telling its story, local people setting out ‘what this means to me’ helps to develop the project’s ‘brand’, building audiences’ emotional connection to the project. This content does not have to be overproduced – in fact, for these audiences, the simpler the better.

**Animated content:** A ‘little and often’ approach to eye-catching content creates a drumbeat that over time instils benefits-focused messaging and drives engagement with projects. This is particularly effective content for paid, targeted content which can be tailored to the needs and priorities of different audiences.

# Understanding and perceptions of infrastructure

Public support for infrastructure is closely linked to understanding and clarity about purpose, benefit and impact. Infrastructure that is visible, relatable and clearly connected to daily life generates stronger support. Where benefits feel abstract or indirect, infrastructure is deprioritised and engagement declines. Trust is reinforced by transparency: clear explanations of need, honest discussions around trade offs, and demonstrable responsiveness to community feedback.

## Understanding and support by age

Levels of understanding and support for infrastructure vary across age groups. Younger adults report the highest levels of perceived understanding, with nearly half of those aged 25–34 saying they understand infrastructure “very well” (Figure 3).

This group is also among the most supportive of infrastructure investment in their local area – with 63% of them stating that they would “strongly support”

a local infrastructure project, (which is nearly double the number of people who would strongly support local infrastructure than in any other group), and 95% of them stating support overall (see Figure 4).

This relationship between understanding and support is important. **People who feel familiar with infrastructure and its role in everyday life are more likely to recognise its value and support new investment.**

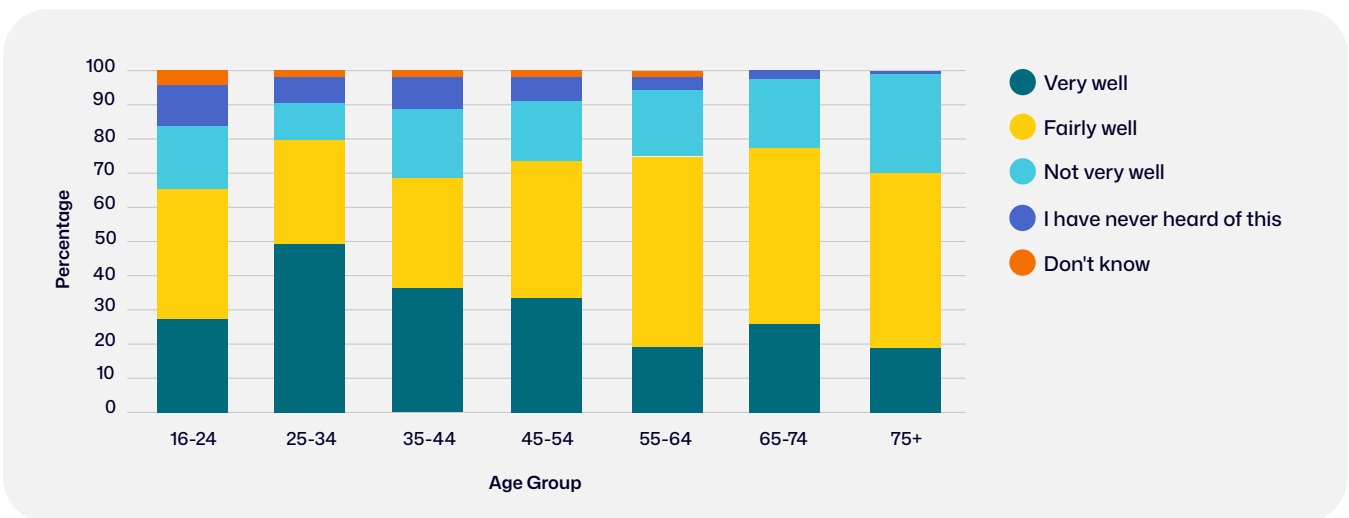


Figure 3. Understanding of infrastructure by age

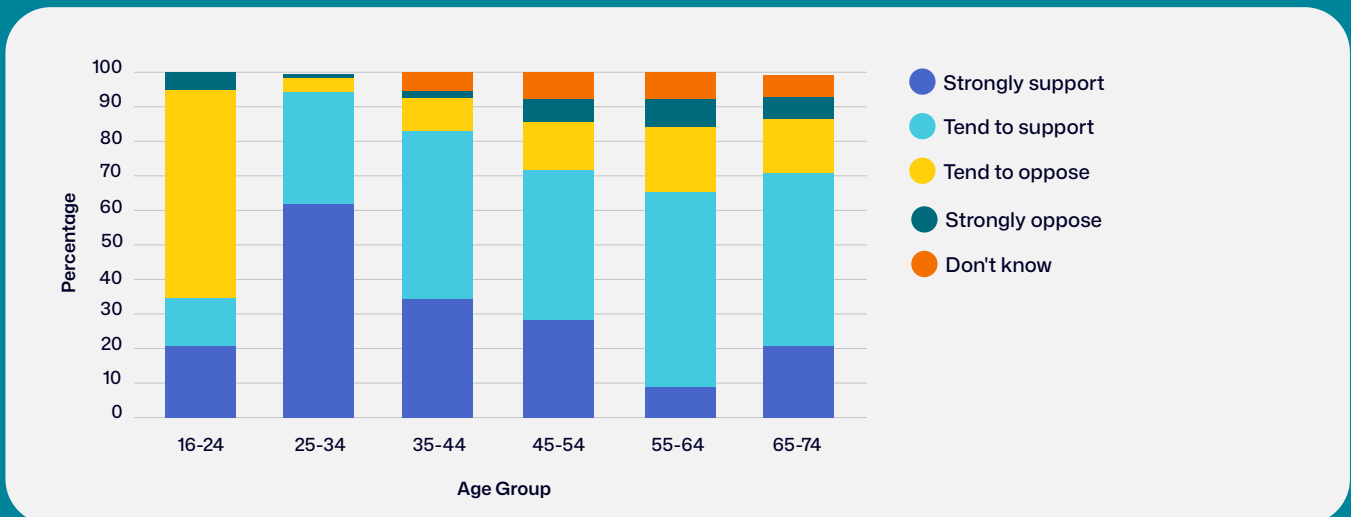


Figure 4. Support for infrastructure 'where I live' by age

## Visible issues drive priorities

Figure 5 shows the public's top 10 priorities. With transport featuring three times and schools and hospitals both coming within the top three, it is clear that participants prioritise infrastructure that directly affects their day-to-day lives.

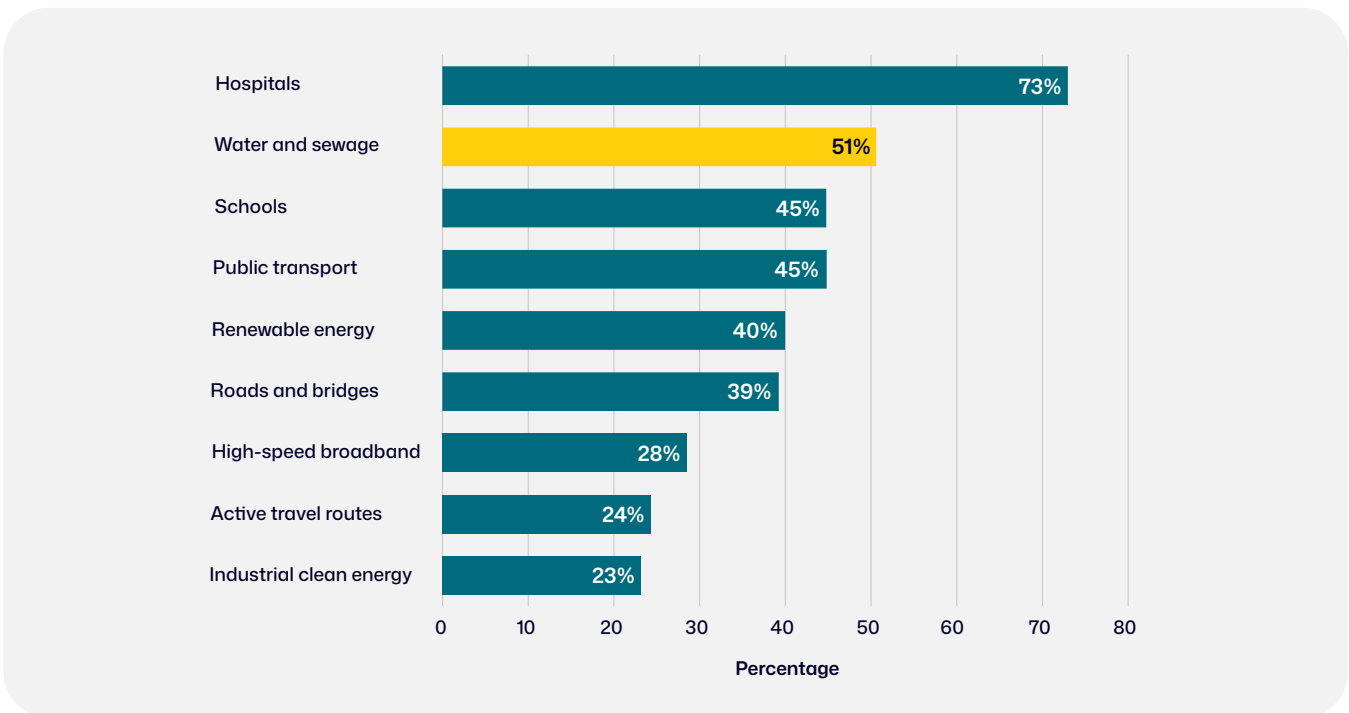


Figure 5. Top 10 public priorities, indicated by the percentage - of respondents selecting each category within their top three.

### The power of the media

As Figure 5 shows, water and sewage are a top priority, despite not being instinctively linked to infrastructure by the public. This suggests that while the issue may not feature prominently in people's day-to-day thinking, it nonetheless provokes strong opinions.

This illustrates the power of the media in bringing conversations about infrastructure into the mainstream. Although stories about water and sewage are largely negative, it does show how leveraging widespread communications channels can drive engagement on key topics.

### Support without participation

Although younger respondents tend to show strong support for infrastructure and net zero objectives, they rarely appear in formal consultation processes. Traditional engagement methods, such as public meetings, consultation documents or statutory notices, do not typically align with how younger audiences discover information or choose to participate. As a result, consultations often capture a relatively narrow set of views, typically from older residents or those with specific objections, even when broader public sentiment may be more supportive.

This participation gap has important implications for infrastructure planning. A narrow feedback base, particularly one that is biased against a project, risks skewing data and preventing constructive discussions about how to improve scheme design.

It also means that decision-makers may hear a disproportionate share of critical or concerned voices, which may ultimately undermine confidence in a project's viability. Addressing this imbalance requires engagement approaches that reach people where they already spend time, particularly through digital platforms and more accessible forms of storytelling.

## Infrastructure projects: Benefits and trade offs

Most people we surveyed are not strongly supportive of, or opposed to, local infrastructure, but are open and undecided. For this to-be-convinced audience, local relevance is critical. People respond most strongly to benefits that feel tangible and immediate, such as improved services, local jobs, economic investment, healthier environments and better quality of life.

By contrast, abstract or national narratives, including broader climate goals, are less persuasive when presented on their own (see Figure 6).

While many people recognise the importance of decarbonisation, support is strongest when infrastructure is framed around clear, tangible benefits, particularly at a local level.

Health, wellbeing, jobs, economic resilience and quality of life consistently resonate more than abstract national or global goals.

Connecting national ambitions to everyday outcomes helps bridge the gap between policy objectives and public understanding, thereby making the purpose and value of projects clearer to those who remain undecided.

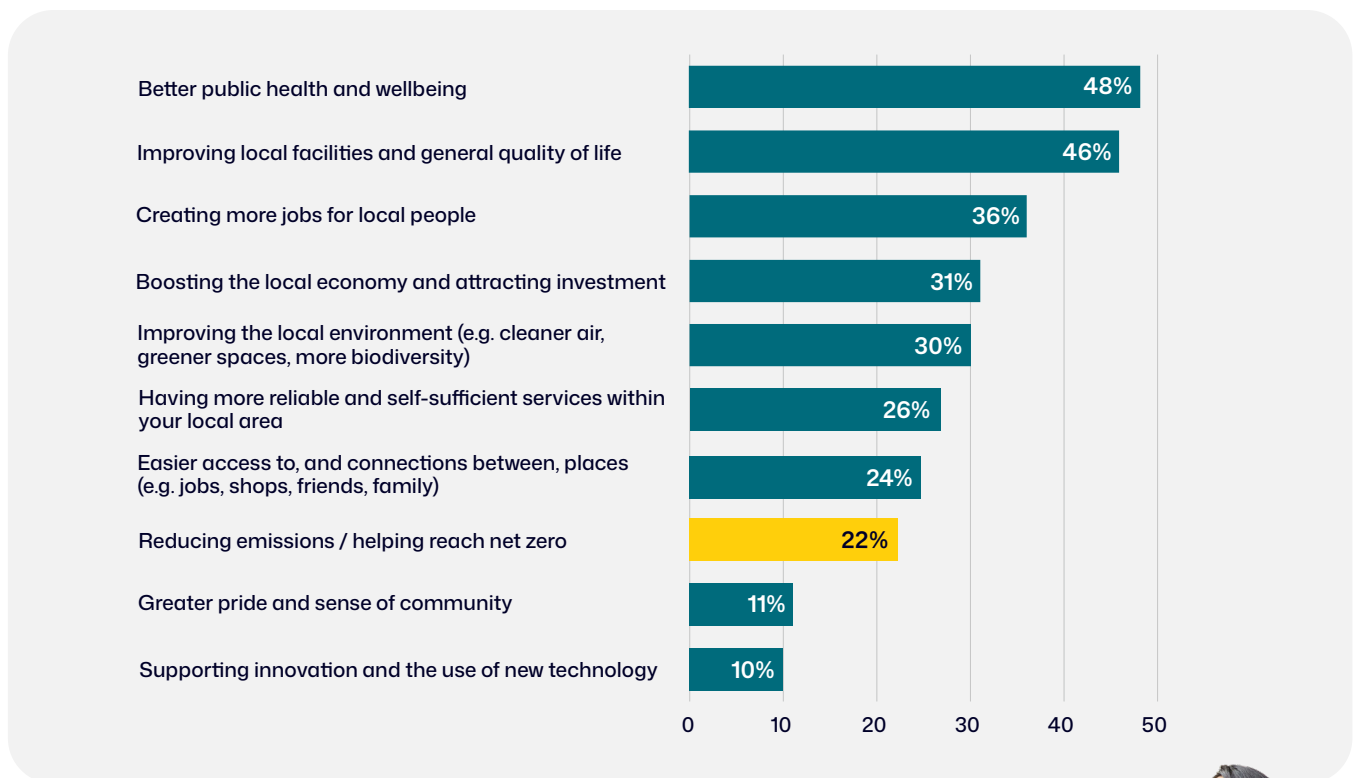
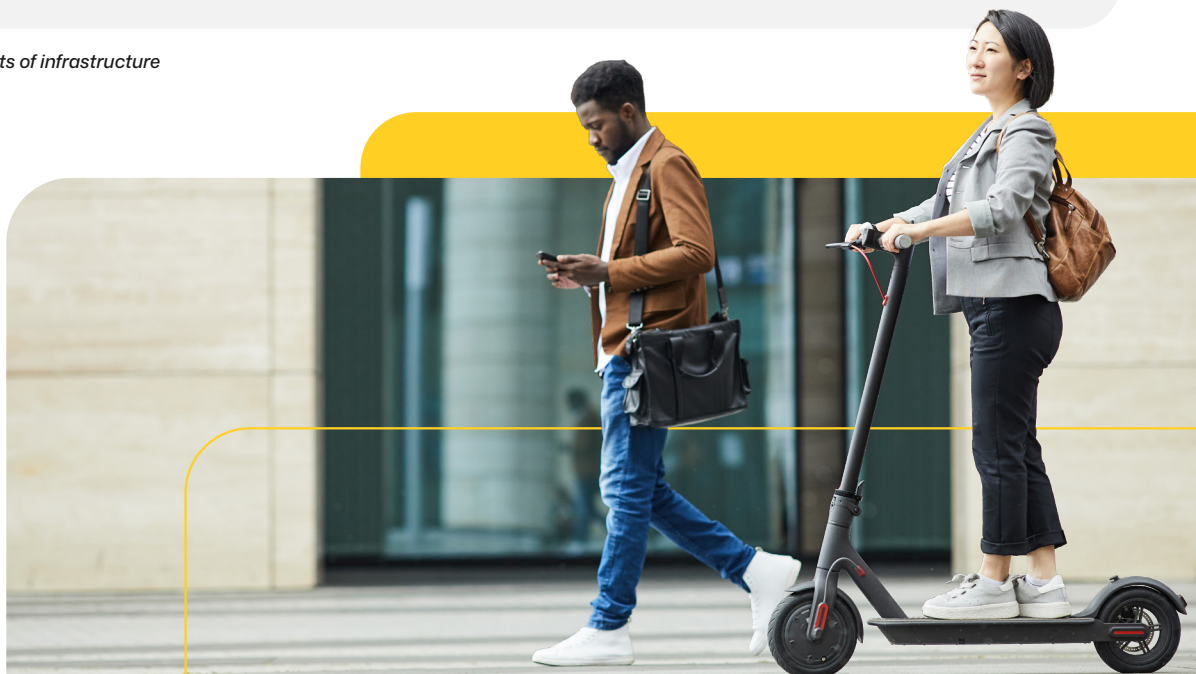


Figure 6. Perceived benefits of infrastructure





### Willingness to accept trade-offs for infrastructure

As shown in Figure 7, nearly half of respondents say they would be willing to accept disruption, but acceptance levels are lower for impacts on the natural environment or for additional financial costs, such as taxes, levies or direct charges.

Beyond the overall hierarchy of benefits, the research highlights the importance of clarity around trade-offs. People are not automatically resistant to disruption, but they expect this to be acknowledged openly and explained in plain terms. When they understand why a project is needed, what it will deliver, and how impacts will be managed, their willingness to support it increases significantly.

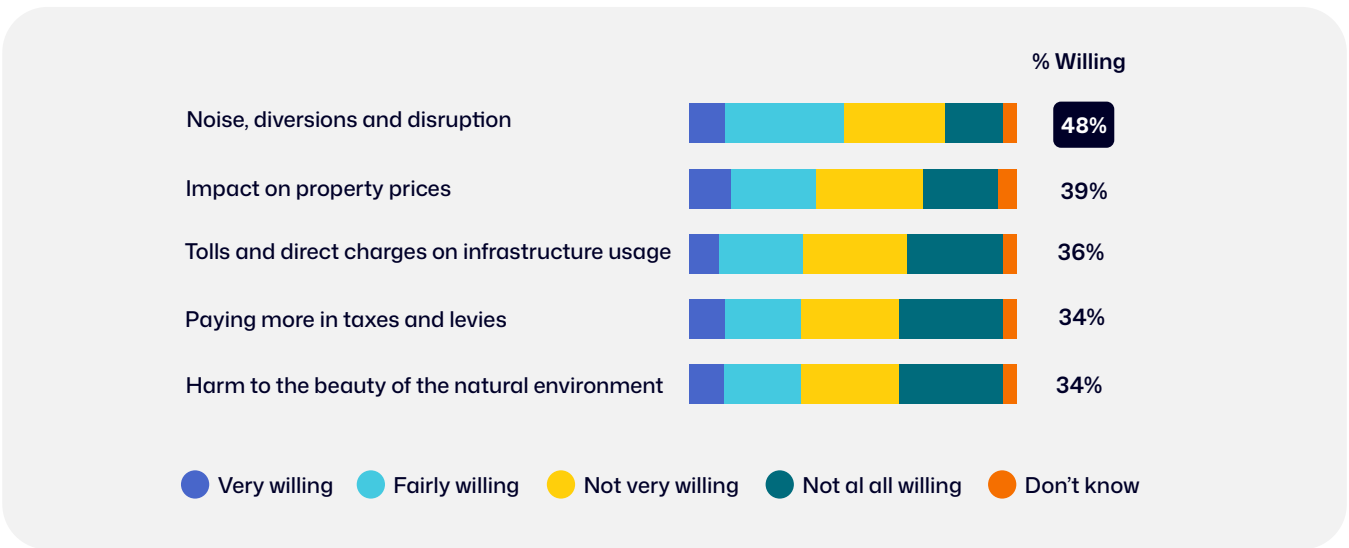


Figure 7. % of participants willing to accept a range of trade-offs



### Building acceptance around delivery

Nearly half of those surveyed would accept disruption if they understood the project's need and benefits. However, this depends on:



**Reassurances** about environmental mitigation and restoration



**Understanding** the economic opportunities



**Proactive advance communications** about *where*, *when*, and *for how long* disruption will take place.

# Attitudes to the net zero agenda

Across all age groups, understanding and support do not always move together. People may feel informed without feeling convinced, or supportive in principle while remaining cautious about specific projects.

## Understanding of the net zero agenda

While most people (91%) recognise the term 'net zero', only 58% of respondents could correctly define it when asked (see Figure 8). This gap can create toxic narratives borne of misinformation - causing emotional reactions unanchored from policy intent.

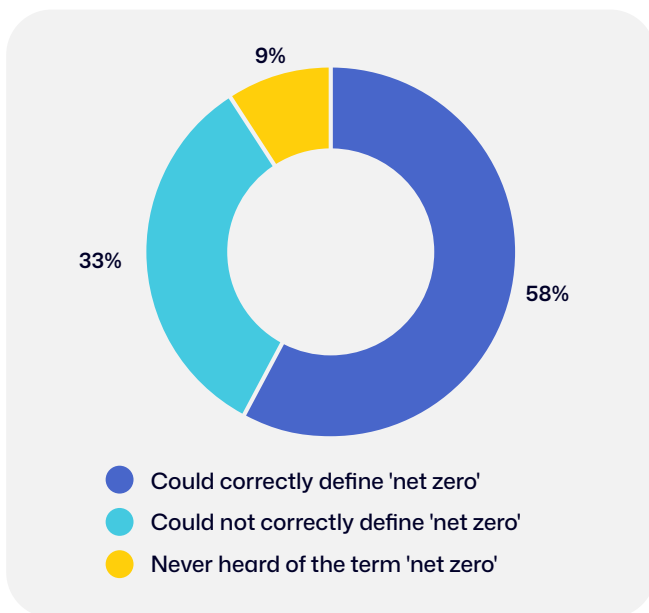


Figure 8. Understanding of the term 'net zero'

### Misplaced anger with 'net zero': A true story

Although not part of this report, separate qualitative research<sup>4</sup> revealed substantial misunderstanding regarding the net zero agenda. When asked for their opinion on the net zero agenda, one respondent stated:

*“ I don't like [net zero]. I think it's a bit of a hoax... I think it's going to be used to isolate people and control them. Too many cameras and everything being digitalised. This high surveillance is like... something out of like George Orwell... isn't it? ”*

The respondent in question was clearly mistaken in their understanding of the term 'net zero', associating it with automated data collection and artificial intelligence instead of decarbonisation and nature restoration. This illustrates how a term can become bigger than its meaning - creating negative feelings without shared understanding about the topic in question.

This anecdote highlights the importance of clarity and accessibility in all communications around infrastructure projects. Assuming prior knowledge around the net zero agenda and the reasons for it, or indeed any topics around policy, engineering or planning, risks alienating audiences from the outset or angering them based on assumptions which do not reflect the facts.



<sup>4</sup> Copper Consultancy, Norfolk and Suffolk focus group, April 2025



### Support for net zero objectives: Do the 'face value' statistics show the full picture?

When asked a straightforward question on support for the net zero agenda, participants showed a high level of support (75%) with only 19% of people opposing it (Figure 9).

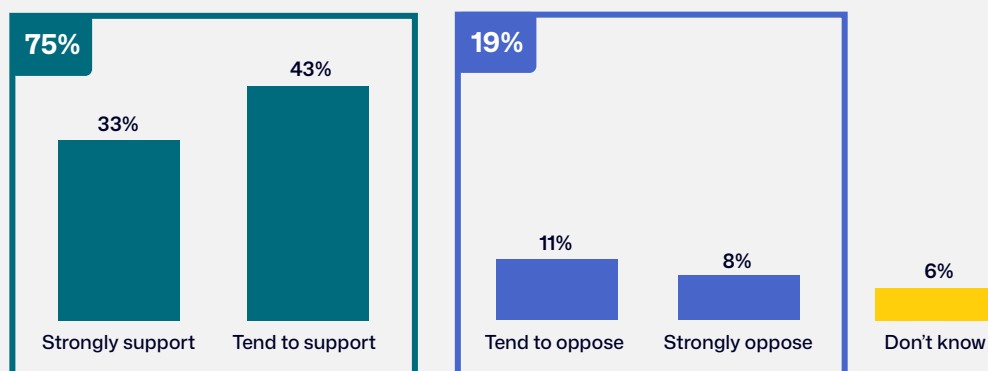


Figure 9. 'Face value' support for the net zero agenda

However, support slipped when the question was framed in a way that considered specifics on how and why we would deliver this agenda – with nearly half of respondents stating that they would prefer for the UK to focus on other priorities (Figure 10).

This suggests that beneath the headline statistics, many people are more concerned with immediate cost of living and public health issues than decarbonisation.

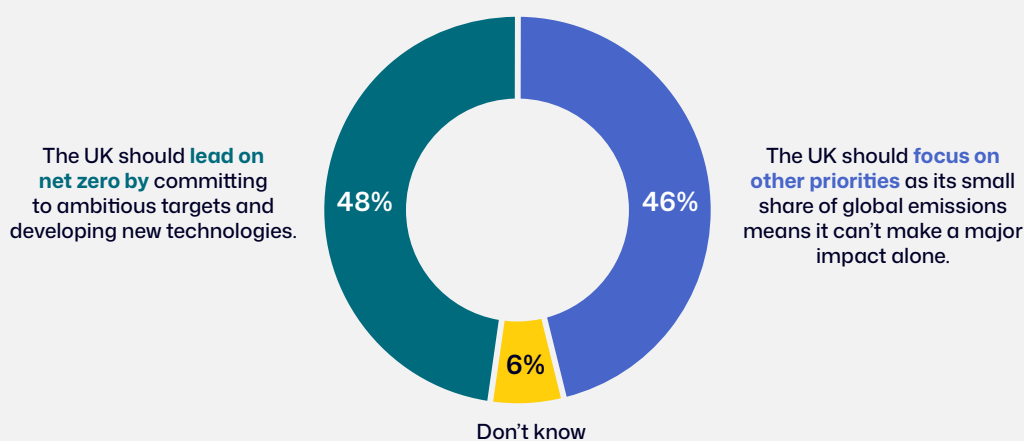


Figure 10. 'Trade off' statements about the net zero agenda.

## Does age impact views on the net zero agenda?

Using the same statements as in Figure 10, Figure 11 shows a breakdown, by age, between those in support of the net zero agenda, and those who would prefer the UK to focus on other priorities. Support for this agenda is very high among younger people. For example, amongst those aged 25 to 34, **71% of people believe the UK should lead on the net zero agenda**. As age increases, support for the net zero agenda weakens.

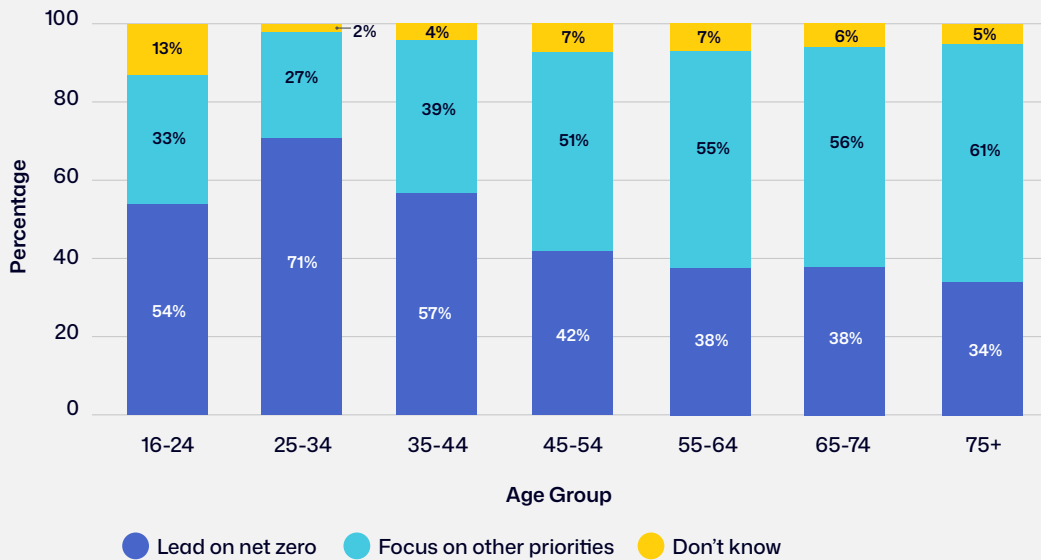


Figure 11. Support for net zero by age

Younger audiences tend to show closer alignment with net zero objectives and higher baseline support for infrastructure, particularly where it delivers visible local benefits. For many younger people, net zero concerns are part of a wider worldview shaped by climate awareness, and perceptions around fairness and future security.

Older audiences are more likely to balance support against perceived cost, disruption and personal impact. Practical considerations such as affordability, reliability and fairness play a stronger role in shaping views.

### Support for net zero is based more on values than understanding

Whilst there is loose correlation between understanding and support for the net zero agenda, this support is far more closely aligned with age and values. This suggests that the net zero agenda is seen as a political, as opposed to a practical, consideration.



## Building consensus around the net zero agenda

The research shows that the term 'net zero' on its own is rarely persuasive. Although many people say they understand the concept, understanding and support is shallow – particularly when it is presented as a distant or abstract objective that will cost them both time and money. As a result, discussions framed around targets, timelines or emissions can feel disconnected from people's immediate concerns, particularly during a period when cost-of-living pressures dominate personal priorities.

## What net zero benefits unite the public?

When comparing the perceived value of project benefits (see Figure 12), the research shows that benefits associated with reducing emissions was the point around which people disagreed most, with some ardently supporting these goals and others placing little to no value on them. Where attitudes shift is when the net zero concept is translated into tangible, lived experience.

People respond more positively when the concept is linked to things they can see and feel, such as affordable energy, healthier homes, improved local environments, better transport or more reliable services.

These are concrete benefits that demonstrate what the net zero agenda delivers for *them*, not just for the planet.

This shift in framing matters because it changes the emotional and practical lens through which people judge trade-offs. When the net zero agenda is presented as a set of sacrifices or behaviour changes with unclear personal return, scepticism increases. But when it is linked to improvements in comfort, safety, affordability or community wellbeing, the rationale becomes clearer and support becomes more stable.

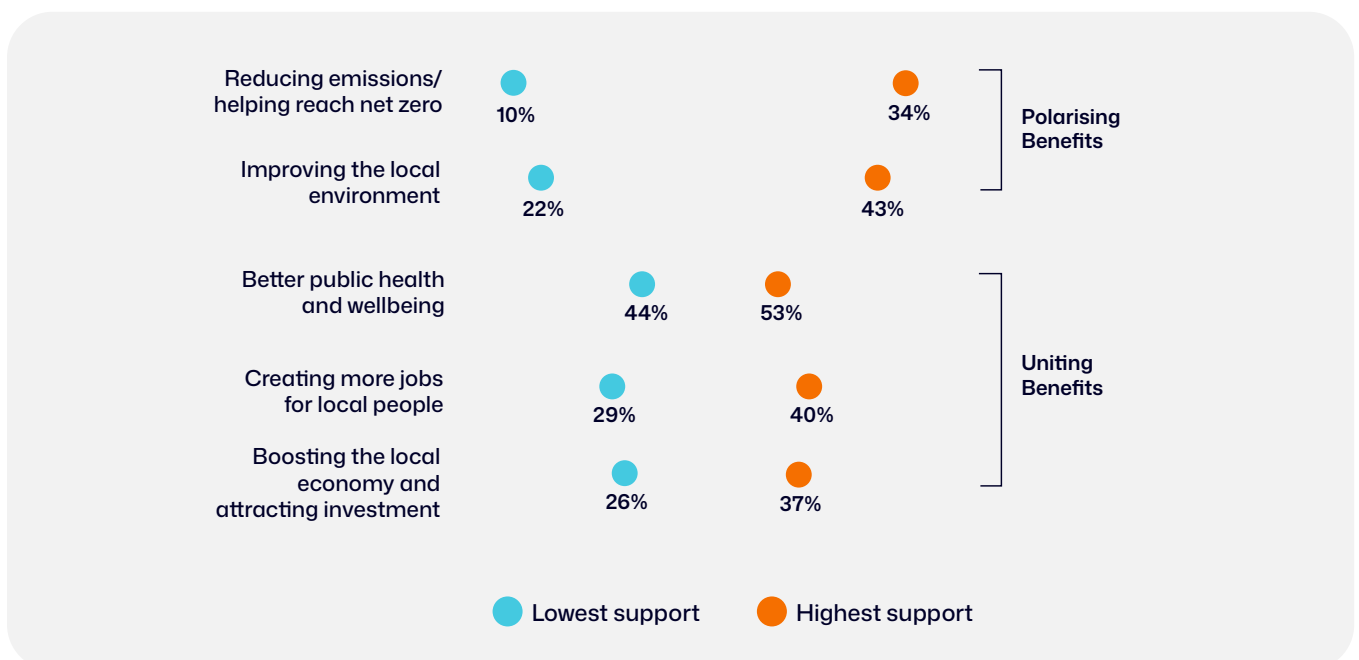


Figure 12. Polarising vs. uniting project benefits

## Homegrown sustainability: Attitudes and behaviours

In addition to examining attitudes to major infrastructure, we also explored attitudes, everyday choices and consumer, retrofit and travel behaviours. We measured the likelihood of, and barriers to, uptake of particular behaviours.

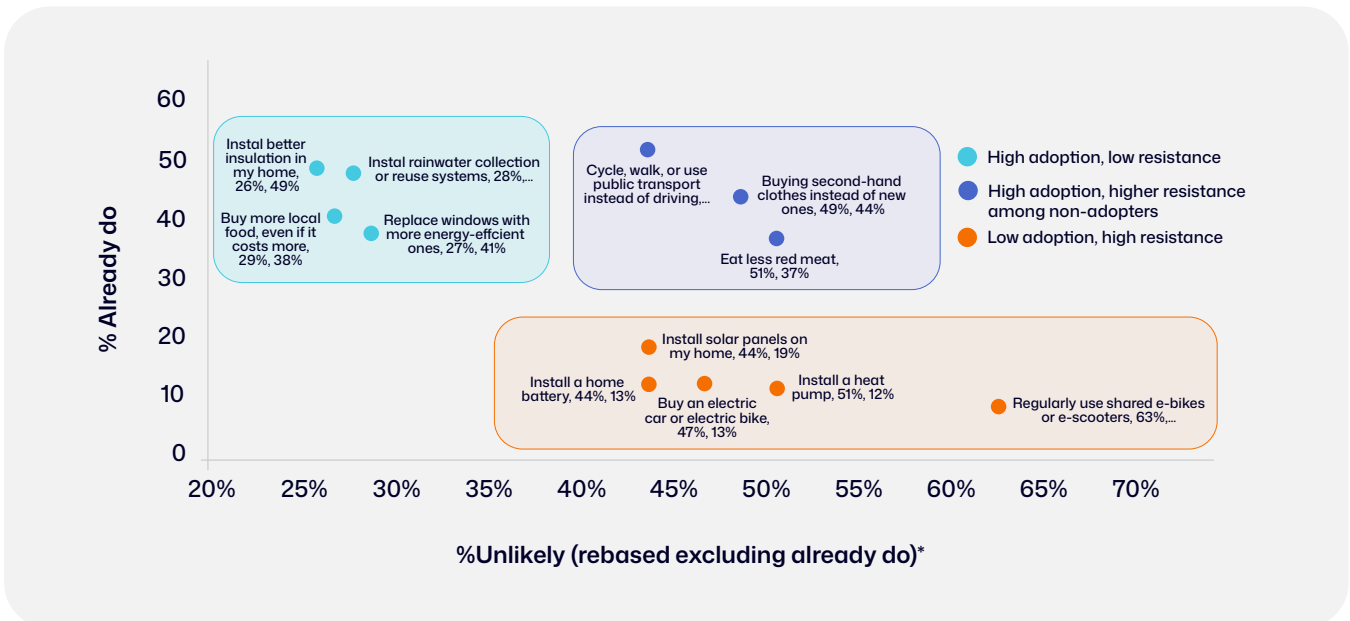


Figure 13. Sustainable behaviour groupings

The three groupings in Figure 13 represent the following categories:

**Quick wins:** People have **high adoption of and low resistance** to these behaviours, which include installing insulation and rainwater reuse systems, replacing windows and buying more local food. These are behaviours which are perceived as easier to adopt – and many respondents have already done so.

**Identifiers:** These behaviours, which include sustainable transport, buying second-hand clothes, and eating less red meat, are seen as lifestyle choices – many people already choose them, and see them as part of who they are. The reasons for avoiding adoption are not because individuals can't achieve them, but because they don't see these behaviours as part of their identity. **People are decisive** about these choices – showing they already understand what is involved and have decided whether or not to include them in their lifestyle.

**Confidence gaps:** These behaviours, which include installing home batteries, solar panels and heat pumps, buying electric cars or bikes, or using shared e-bikes or e-scooters are behaviours towards which people exhibit **low adoption and high resistance**.

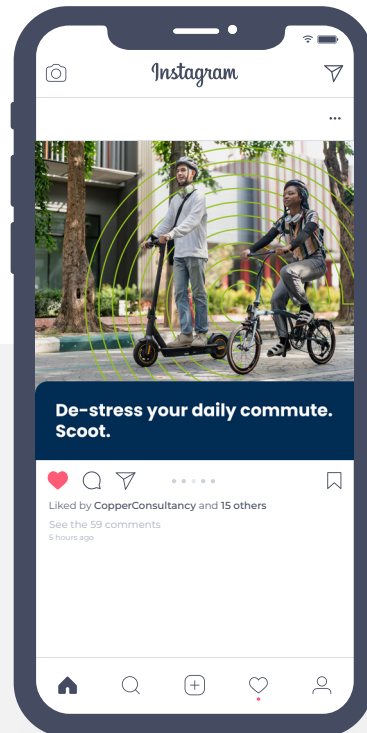
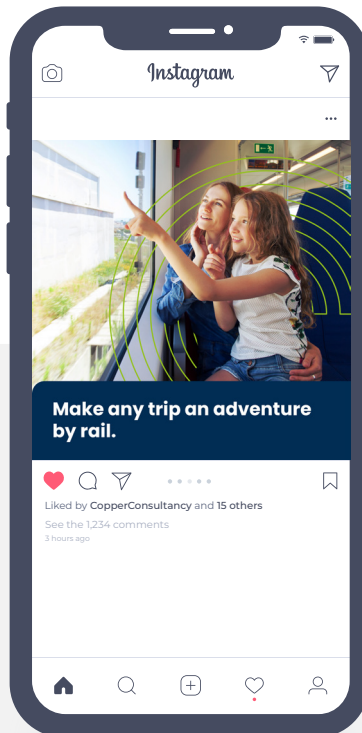
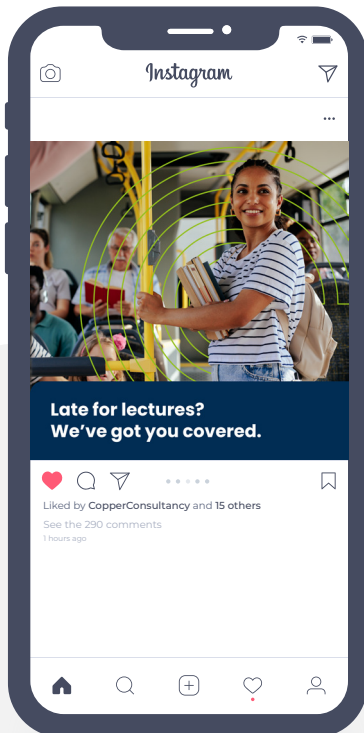
Although there may be suppressed appetite for some of these behaviours, particularly if it means an overall reduction in regular spending, people do not have a clear idea of what is involved in these investments or how to achieve them.



## Driving sustainable transport uptake

In the South West, private vehicles account for around 44%<sup>5</sup> of carbon emissions so modal shift is a top priority for regional governments. Whilst around 50% of respondents already use sustainable transport, non-adopters simply do not see it as a choice for them. We reviewed the reasons given for not adopting sustainable travel behaviours. Whilst for some it is genuinely not an available option, many others simply do not see it as part of their identity. For non-adopters, convenience is also a bigger blocker than cost, so it is important to:

- Promote the speed and frequency of services
- Shift perceptions on who uses public transport: An effective behavioural change tactic is to use targeted content that reflects the language and appearance of specific audiences.



<sup>5</sup> Note: this figure varies slightly by sub-region

# Engagement challenges



## Narrow participation

Current engagement approaches tend to draw responses from older, more informed or more oppositional audiences. Younger and time poor groups are under represented despite often holding broadly supportive views.



## Complexity and accessibility

Technical language and dense materials create barriers for many audiences, leading to disengagement or the sense that consultation is “not for them”.



## Perceived lack of influence

Many people believe decisions are already made, reducing the incentive to engage – particularly among those broadly supportive.



# Recommendations

## Segment audiences by support and influence

Public and stakeholder audiences broadly fall into three groups:

1. **Supportive** – Focus on maintaining trust and enabling advocacy
2. **Open but undecided** – Prioritise understanding, relevance and dialogue
3. **Opposed** – Focus on listening, clarifying and mitigating risk, not conversion

Tailoring engagement to these groups improves effectiveness and reduces unnecessary conflict.

## Build understanding before asking for views

Engagement should start with accessible explanations of need, context and benefit, using visual tools, plain language and relatable examples.

## Make benefits tangible and local

Abstract narratives should be translated into everyday outcomes that matter to people where they live.

## Be transparent about trade-offs

Honest discussion of disruption, cost and environmental impact builds credibility and trust.

## Engage continuously, not episodically

Engagement should be seen as an ongoing process, reinforcing a consistent narrative over time rather than a one-off consultation exercise.

## Close the feedback loop

Trust is built when people feel heard, and can see how their inputs have been taken onboard. Maintaining a robust and accessible 'you said, we did' narrative throughout communications shows communities that project teams are listening, and encourages further engagement as projects progress.

# Conclusion

## *From consultation as a process to engagement as a journey*

Public support for, and engagement with, infrastructure and net zero will not be built through louder messaging or greater technical detail. It will be built by recognising differences in experience and values, and by making the case in ways that feel relevant, fair and grounded in everyday life.

Shifting from consultation as a process to engagement as a journey offers a route to more inclusive participation, stronger public confidence and more resilient infrastructure delivery – outcomes that will be essential as the South West navigates the challenges and opportunities ahead.



## Appendix: Driving engagement with audiences: deep dive

This section is intended to provide further insights and recommendations to advise project teams on how to engage audiences effectively.

### Segmenting audiences by sentiment and influence

The public and stakeholders can be split into three categories around project perceptions. Broadly, objectives should seek to push respondents clockwise around the 'outcomes wheel' shown below.

- 1. Supportive – build advocacy:** engagement focuses on maintaining confidence and turning support into advocacy.
- 2. 'To be convinced' – build understanding:** proactive communications and engagement is around highlighting projects, their importance, and why public feedback matters.
- 3. Opposed – build trust:** engagement focuses on de-escalating emotional responses, and demonstrably listening to and understanding concerns. If handled sensitively, it is possible to generate practical, issues-based discussions instead of blanket opposition.

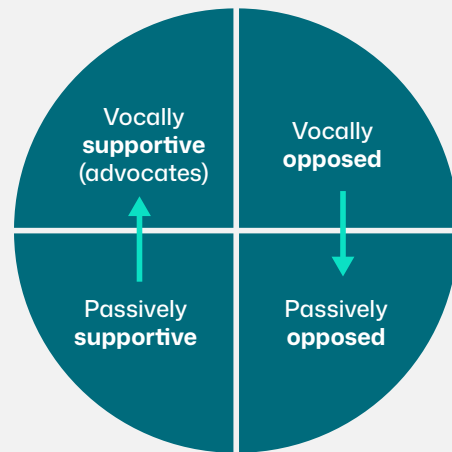


Figure 14. Outcomes wheel





### Supportive audiences

This group can be seen as natural advocates – so the objective is to provide them with a platform to vocally support local projects and make it as easy as possible to do so.

Advocates do not have to hold public office or be community leaders to influence public opinion – with the rise of social media, ‘grass root’ advocacy can just as effective as that of elected representatives or industry leaders. Tactics could include:

- Creating advocacy videos that tell the story of a project or programme in the words of local people or stakeholders.
- Asking them to write letter to the editor in the local press – providing pre-drafted copy and key messages is an effective way to make it easy as possible for them to do so, and to ensure on-message advocacy.

Seeking their help in spreading the word of major project milestones like consultations or submissions via their networks and channels helps to drive a wider and more representative feedback base.

### Undecided audiences

This is the largest group and represents the greatest opportunity to both influence hearts and minds, and drive robust, representative engagement. Understanding of a project’s need and benefits tends to be lower in this group, so it is vital to:

- **Build understanding** of projects and their wider context, by using visual materials such as schematics and animated explainers to set out the issues in an accessible and compelling way.
- **Clearly articulate the local benefits**, rooting these in evidence and real-world contexts. Eye-catching infographics will help set out project need and benefits, whilst videos help audiences to connect emotionally with its aspirations.
- **Tailor messaging and content** to align to specific audiences’ needs and priorities – demonstrating understanding of local challenges and setting out how the project will meet them.



### Opposed audiences

Whilst this may be the most vocal group, these audiences typically represent a fragment of the population. Typically, this group demands most energy from projects and it is vital to demonstrate willingness to listen and build trust, whilst building a baseline of understanding to prevent opposition borne of misunderstanding or missing information.

Opposition groups frequently rally and campaign against projects. If projects do not proactively engage supportive and undecided audiences, there is a risk that these groups can pull public opinion towards their perspective.

However, it is sometimes possible to prevent the mobilisation of opposition groups by engaging proactively with them and helping to identify specific issues driving their concerns, which can move them from a place of vocal to passive opposition (see Figure 14. Outcomes wheel).

Where this is not possible, **proactively counterbalancing** any opposition communications with a positive, benefits-focused campaign rooted in robust facts will boost understanding of projects, their need and benefits to neutral or undecided audiences before opposition groups can influence opinions. Ensure known areas of weakness are tackled internally before any campaign, to ensure that spokespeople and engagement staff are armed with pre-authorised lines to take.

## Driving engagement with younger audiences

Younger people are essential to engage for two reasons:

- **They will inherit the infrastructure that we are designing today** – so their needs, priorities and concerns are of upmost importance in defining objectives and developing solutions.
- **Their views are typically underrepresented at consultation** – giving us a biased evidence base that does not consider the full range of needs. This is particularly significant given the **high support** we see from younger age groups.

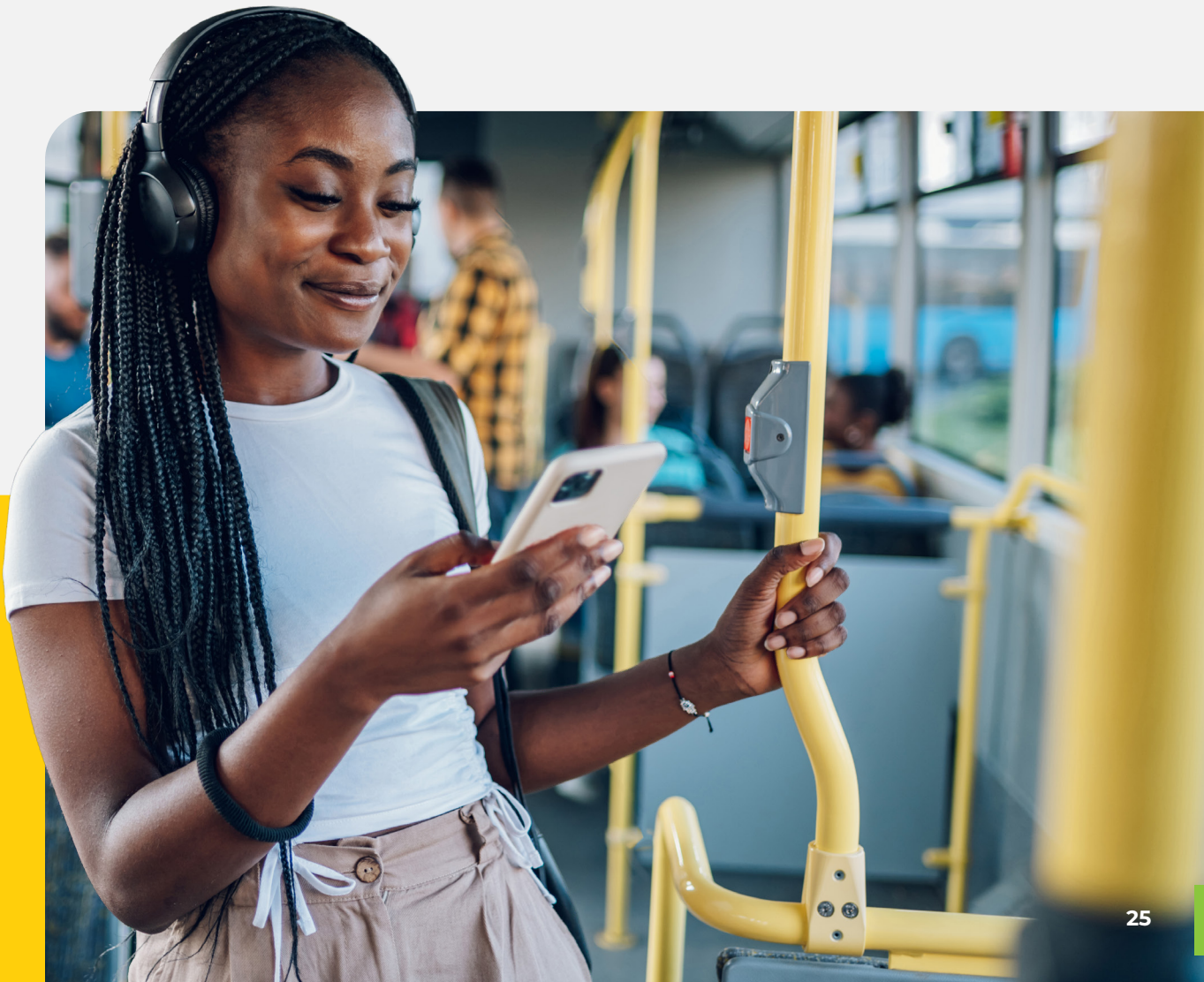
We know that younger people consume their information in very different ways to their older counterparts: where traditional media is favoured for those aged 55+, those under 35 predominantly get their news from social media, podcasts and peer-led platforms.

It is also critical to remember that many younger people do not feel that public discourse, such as public consultations, are applicable to them. Added to that, they are among the most time-poor audiences, so they are less capable of delving into complex information around multiple other priorities.

To that end, the job of the infrastructure community is not just to engage these groups, but to **drive behavioural change** around infrastructure engagement – to help them see that infrastructure consultation is in fact ‘for them’; and **make it as easy as possible** for them to contribute their views.

This requires us to **reframe how we talk about infrastructure; go to the places they spend time** (instead of expecting them to come to us); and leverage the increasingly sophisticated tools at our disposal to **ensure visibility and relevance**. Specifically, this should involve:

- **Taking a campaign approach**, creating multiple touchpoints with projects to drive engagement amongst lesser-heard groups. Marketing statistics suggest that a person needs to come into contact with a brand around 12 times in a range of media before making a purchase. The same logic applies to driving people to get involved in a consultation if they’ve never considered it before.
- **Summarising consultation information** with at-a-glance, visually clear explainers
- **Providing easy options** for time-poor participants to provide feedback. Visually clear interactive feedback maps complement surveys for user-led feedback.







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