

Central Bedfordshire Council: Local Plan Research – September 2017

**Central
Bedfordshire**



Key findings

- **The Local Plan:** Residents think it is important to develop a Local Plan (99% said so), and most agree with the Council's plans and proposals (84%).
- **Principles:** The guiding principles behind the Plan resonate, especially the need for infrastructure to support growth, and subsequent findings suggest that observing these principles will garner support and help mitigate opposition.
- **Housing:** There is support for building more housing, especially affordable housing (96% agree).
- Although the majority support specific proposals for housing growth, there is some opposition with concerns about building on green belt, a loss of character, urban sprawl and lack of infrastructure to support growth.
- **Jobs:** Residents agree that the Local Plan should help create new jobs (94% agree).
- **Infrastructure:** Providing sufficient and appropriate infrastructure is universally supported. Ensuring this happens, and communicating plans and infrastructure improvements, will help mitigate some opposition to housing growth.
- **Countryside:** The majority accept proposals to build on countryside land (77% agree), although a notable minority oppose this (17% disagree). Almost all residents said there is a preference to build on brownfield land where possible (93% agree).
- **Demographics:** In general, younger residents and residents with children are more likely to support the plans and proposals, while homeowners, residents living in rural areas and in the North of Central Bedfordshire are less likely.
- **Consultation:** Most respondents had not responded to the consultation (95% had not). This means the survey has extended the reach of the draft Local Plan. Those that had responded to the consultation tended to be less supportive of the plans and proposals, suggesting that the survey has elicited more balanced and representative views.

Introduction

- Central Bedfordshire is currently developing a Local Plan.
- The Local Plan sets out how Central Bedfordshire will develop over the next 20 years and is a key strategic document, which will shape the economic and physical future of the area.
- The draft Plan has been rigorously developed, including substantial consultation with residents and stakeholders.
- However, consultations and engagement activity, despite being well conducted, can sometimes only elicit views from particular communities and interested parties.
- Consequently, Central Bedfordshire Council commissioned Public Perspectives to conduct a representative survey of local residents to complement consultation on the Council's draft Local Plan.
- The draft Plan underwent statutory Regulation 18 consultation, over an 8-week period from the 4th July 2017 until the 29th August 2017.
- In parallel, a telephone survey of a representative sample of 1,222 Central Bedfordshire residents aged 18+ was conducted in the last two weeks of the consultation.

Methodology

- The questionnaire was developed to closely match the formal consultation, and covers the draft Local Plan’s strategic principles and themes.
- The telephone survey was conducted using CATI (computer assisted telephone interviewing) to ensure interviews were administered consistently and data captured accurately.
- A quota sample method was adopted, with quotas set by age, gender, ethnicity and geography to ensure the survey is demographically representative. Interviews were conducted at different times of the day and different days of the week/weekend to ensure a good mix of respondents.
- The following table shows the profile of respondents compared to Central Bedfordshire’s population:

Profile	% of respondents	% in population (18+)
Female	50%	51%
Male*	49%	49%
18-34	25%	26%
35-54	38%	37%
55+	37%	37%
White British / Non-White British	91% / 9%	90% / 10%
Urban / Rural	62% / 38%	61% / 39%
North / South of area	51% / 49%	52% / 48%

*Plus 1% with ‘other’ gender.

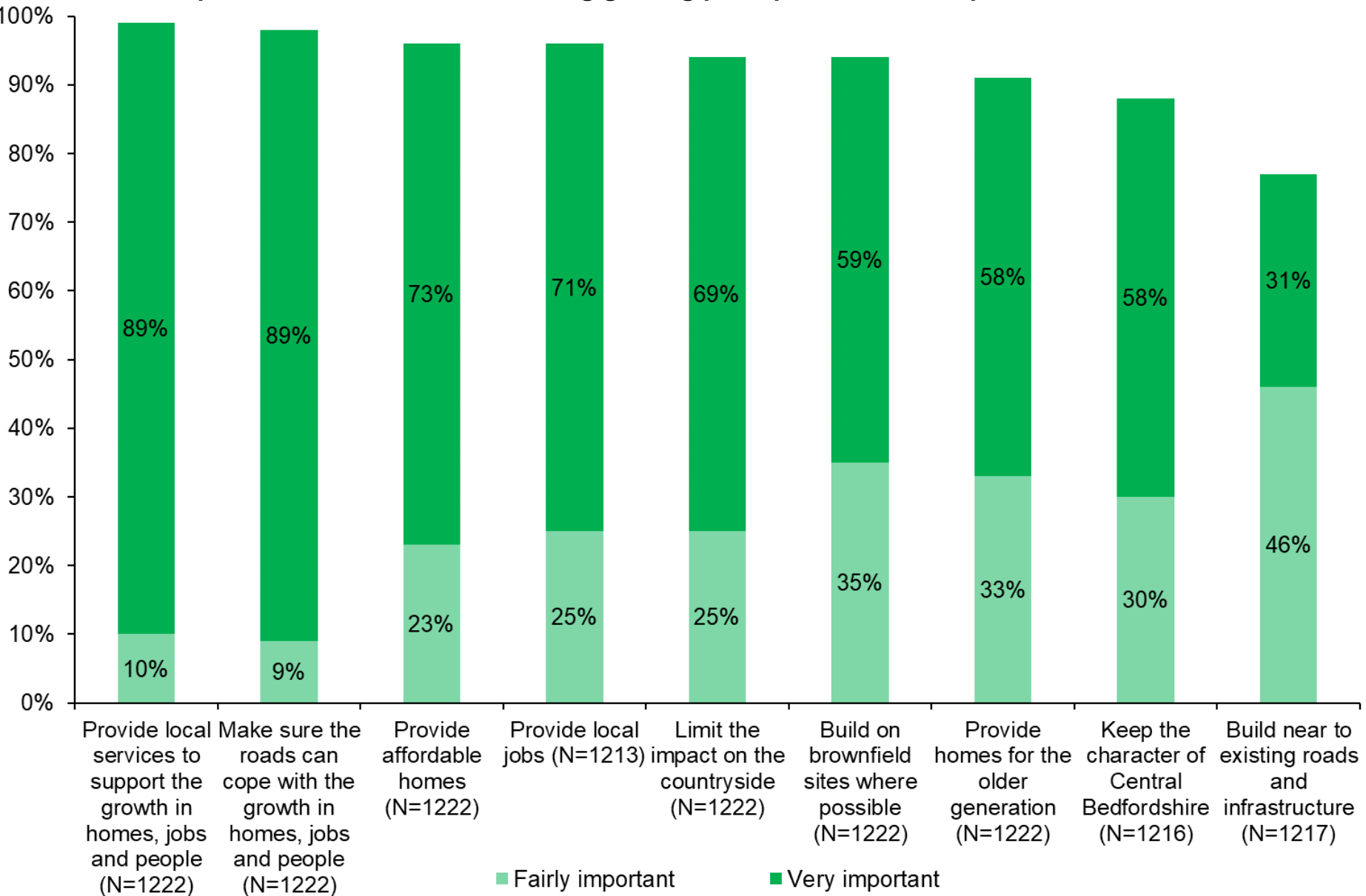
Results: General principles



Research
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Strategy Development

Key principles behind the Local Plan resonate strongly, especially around infrastructure

How important are each of the following guiding principles behind the plan?



Key principles commentary

- 99% of residents said it is important to **provide services to support growth** (1% said this is unimportant) and 98% said it is important that **roads can cope with growth** (none said this is unimportant).
- 96% said the Plan should **provide affordable homes** (2% said this is unimportant). Residents aged 18-34 supported this principle slightly more than other residents - 97% stated this is important, including 83% very important, compared with 94% of older residents, including 69% that said it is very important. 40% of 18-34 year olds in this survey live with their parents, 30% rent and just 30% are buying on a mortgage, which may explain these findings.
- 96% said the Plan should **provide local jobs** (1% said this is unimportant). This was most strongly supported by unemployed residents (100% said it is important, including 95% that said it is very important).
- 94% said the Plan should **limit impact on the countryside** (1% said this is unimportant) and **build on brownfield where possible** (3% said this is unimportant). Older residents support these principle more than younger ones. For example, 96% of residents aged 35+ said this principle is important, including 76% that said it is very important, compared with 90% of residents aged under 35, including 49% that said it is very important.

Key principles commentary contd

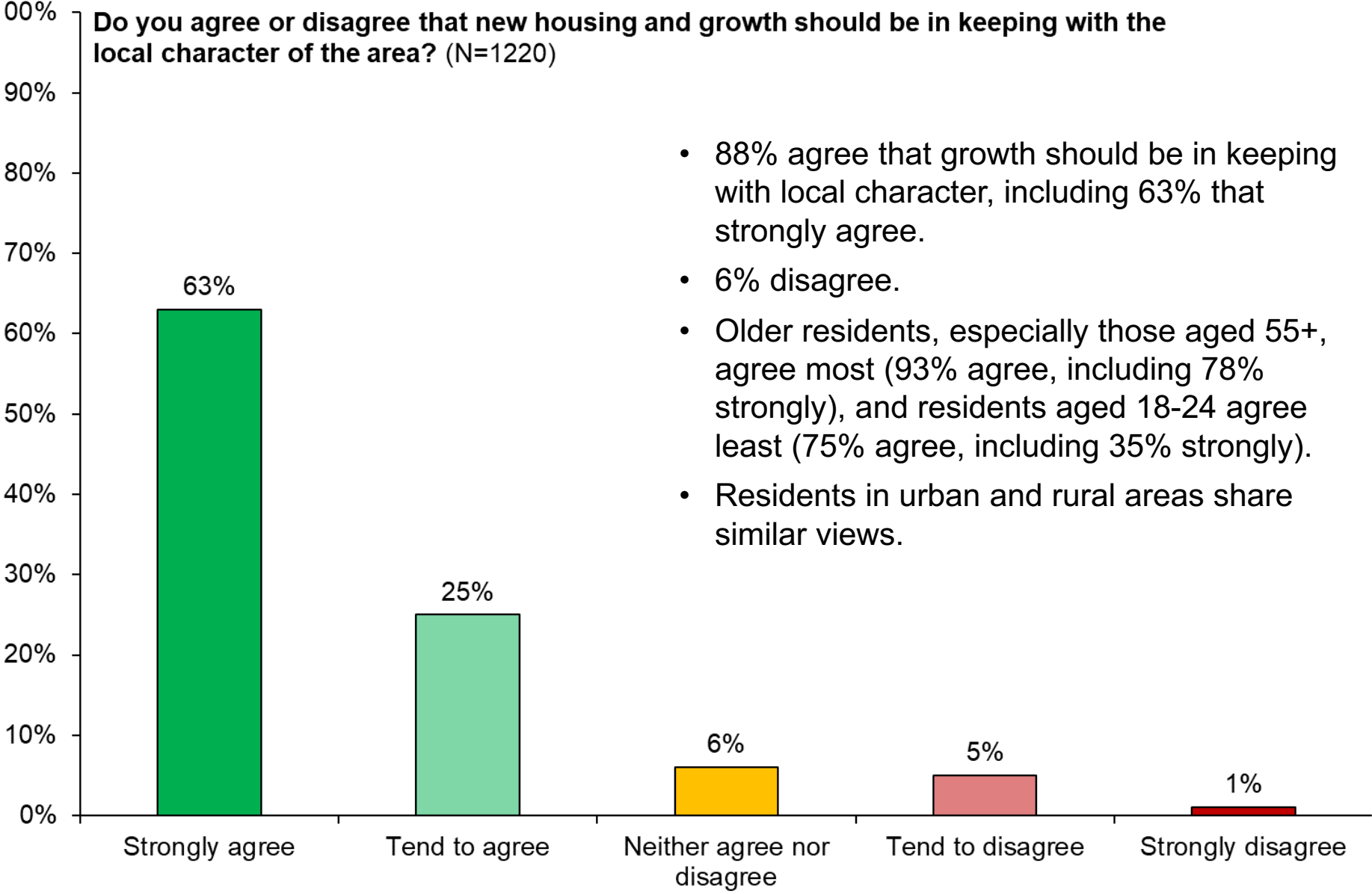
- 91% said the Plan should **provide homes for older people** (2% said this is unimportant). This principle was supported most strongly by residents aged 65+ (94% said it is important, including 69% that said it is very important), and least strongly by residents aged under 35 (87% said it is important, including 48% that said it is very important).
- 88% said the Plan should **keep the character of the area** (5% said this is unimportant). Residents in urban and rural areas shared similar views on this principle. However, older residents supported this principle more than younger ones. For example, 65% of residents aged 35+ said this principle is very important, compared with 39% of residents aged under 35 (although each age group totalled to 89% stating it is important).
- 77% said the Plan should **build near to existing roads and infrastructure** (7% said this is unimportant).
- 166 residents provided supplementary comments about the principles they would like to guide the Local Plan. Over half of these reiterated the importance of providing sufficient services, especially schools, but also shops, medical facilities, leisure facilities and parking. Over 10% talked about the need for sufficient roads and public transport, including rail capacity and associated parking, to aide travel around the area and into London. A small number of comments implied that respondents agree with the principles, but they do not believe they are/will be followed because they feel there is currently too much development taking place, which is affecting the character of the area and their quality of life.

Results: Housing



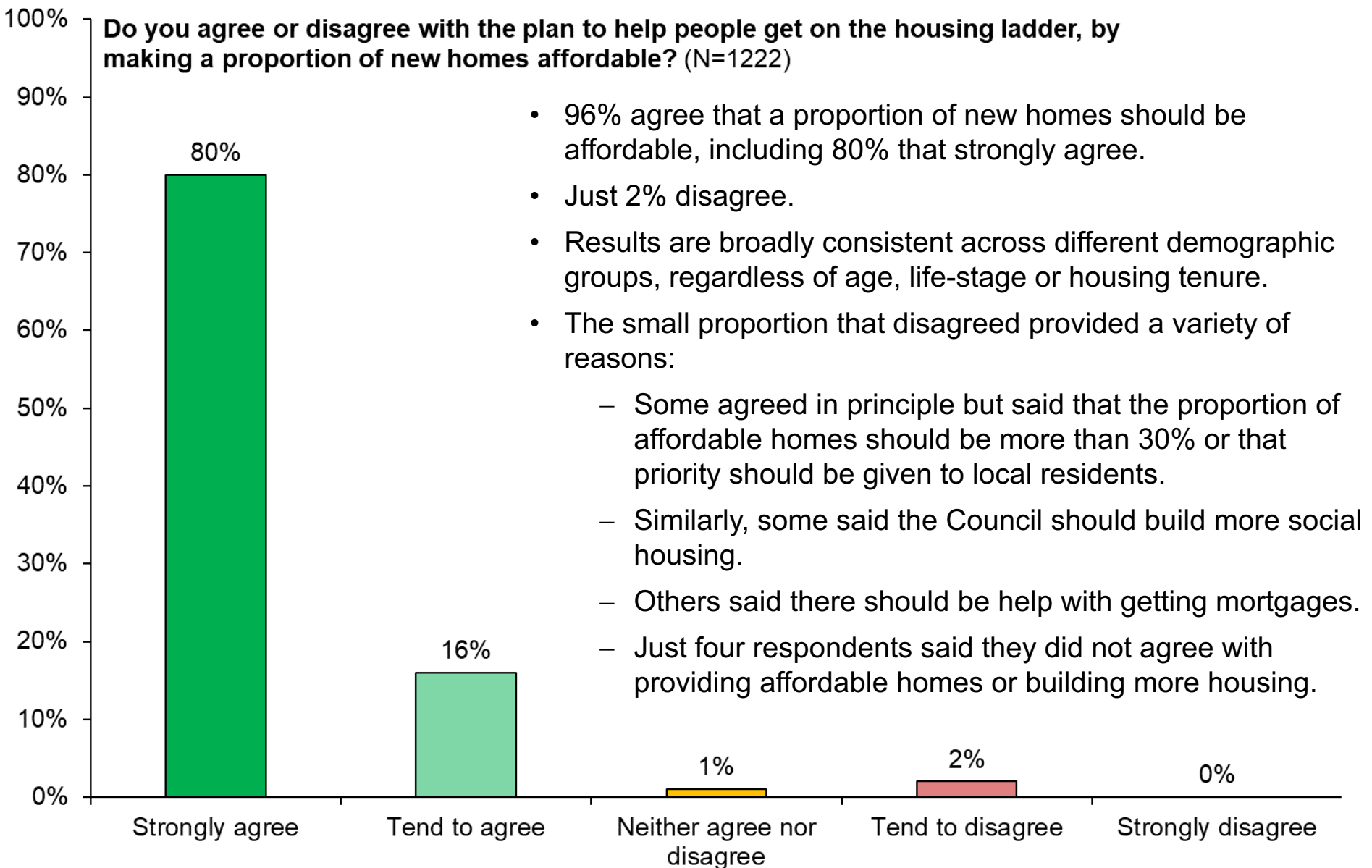
Research
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Nine in ten residents said it is important that growth should be in keeping with the character of the area



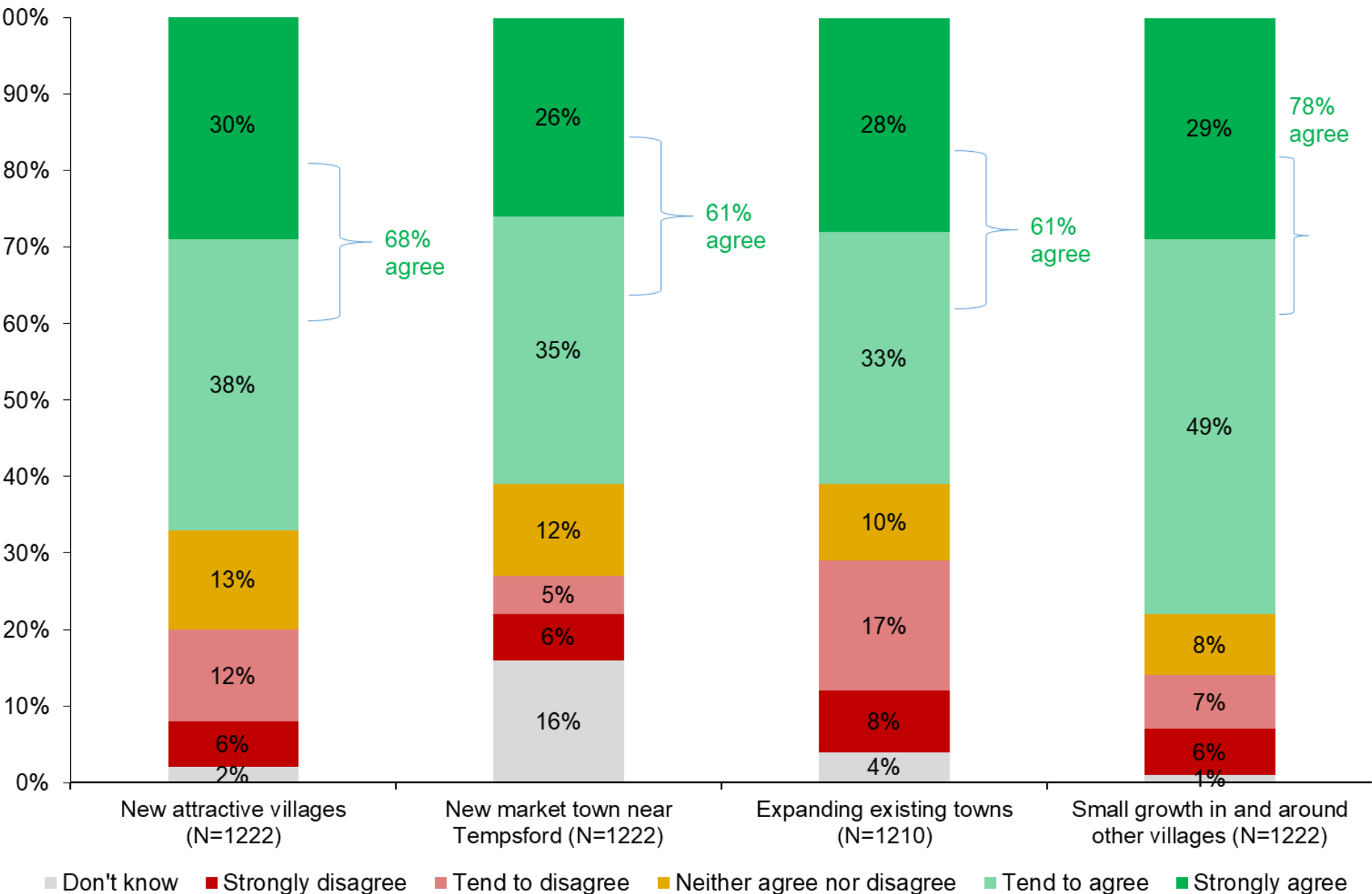
- 88% agree that growth should be in keeping with local character, including 63% that strongly agree.
- 6% disagree.
- Older residents, especially those aged 55+, agree most (93% agree, including 78% strongly), and residents aged 18-24 agree least (75% agree, including 35% strongly).
- Residents in urban and rural areas share similar views.

Almost all residents agree with making a proportion of new homes affordable to help people get on the housing ladder



The majority agree with the proposals to deliver housing growth, albeit with some notable disagreement and uncertainty

Do you agree or disagree with the following proposals to deliver this housing growth?



Housing proposals commentary

- 68% agree, including 30% that strongly agree, with the **proposal to create new attractive villages**, in or near Marston Vale, Biggleswade and Aspley Guise. 18% disagree.
 - Younger residents aged under 35 (86%) agree more than older residents (61% agree).
 - Residents with children (80%) agree more, compared with residents without dependent children living at home (61% agree).
 - Homeowners (64%) agree less than other residents (78% agree).
 - Results are broadly consistent by geography.
- 64 respondents explained why they disagree with the proposal. Over half said they disagreed with building on green belt land and were concerned with the loss of countryside (especially Marston Vale and Aspley Guise). About a fifth were concerned that the new villages would lack sufficient infrastructure (ditto), and place pressure on existing infrastructure. About a fifth said that these new villages would lack character and/or would effect the character of existing villages and towns, in some cases creating an ‘urban sprawl’ due to lack of separation between old and new developments. About a tenth said they were against the principle of building new developments in these areas in general.
- 61% agree, including 26% that strongly agree, with the **proposal for a new market town near Tempsford**. 11% disagree.
 - Younger residents aged under 35 (82%) agree more than older residents (54% agree).
 - Residents with children (71%) agree more, compared with residents without dependent children living at home (55% agree).
 - Homeowners (56%) agree less than other residents (71% agree).
 - Residents in rural areas (48%) agree less than those in urban areas (69% agree) (and it appears that residents in and around the Tempsford area agree less than other residents, although sample sizes are too small to make firm conclusions).

Housing proposals commentary (contd)

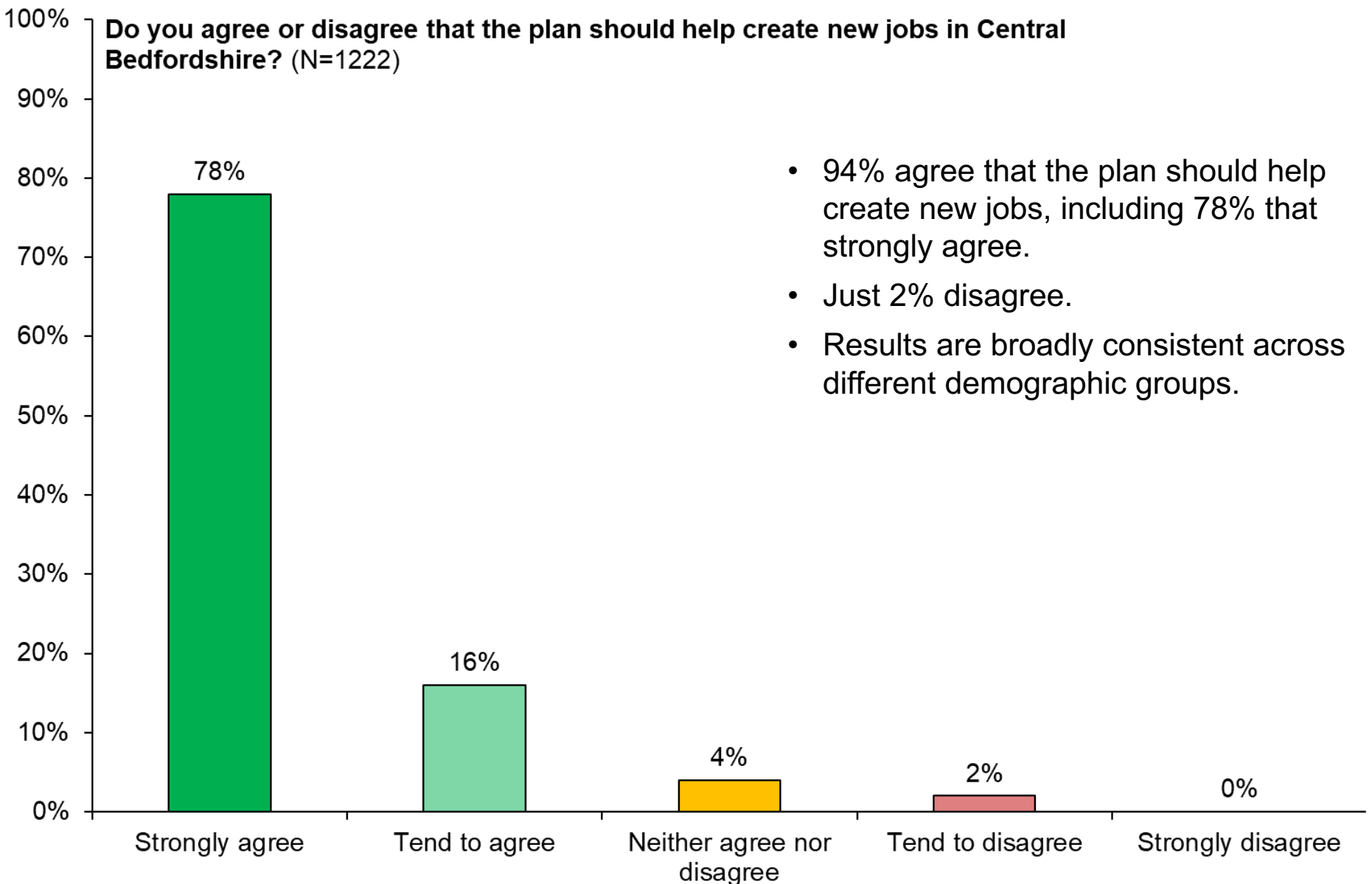
- 61% agree, including 28% that strongly agree, with the **proposal to expand existing towns** (North of Luton, West of Luton, East of Arlesey and Wixams southern extension). 25% disagree.
 - Younger residents aged under 35 (75%) agree more than older residents (57% agree).
 - Residents with children (73%) agree more, compared with residents without dependent children living at home (54%).
 - Homeowners (57%) agree less than other residents (70% agree).
 - Residents in rural areas (50%) agree less than those in urban areas (68% agree).
- 85 respondents explained why they disagree with the proposal. Over half disagree because they are concerned that expanding towns will mean they will merge/over-take neighbouring villages and small towns (this was cited as especially the case for the proposed expansion around Luton). A similar number also expressed concerns about a lack of infrastructure to support the expansion. About a fifth raised concerns about building on countryside. Over a tenth raised concerns about Luton becoming too big, and its social/economic problems effecting neighbouring areas. A small number said that Wixams is already too big and that accompanying infrastructure has not been provided for the existing houses. A small number also mentioned the expansion around Arlesely effecting the character of the local area.
- 78% agree, including 29% that strongly agree, with the **proposal for small growth in and around existing villages**. 13% disagree.
 - Residents with children (87%) agree more, compared with residents without dependent children living at home (73%).
 - Residents in rural areas (68%) agree less than those in urban areas (85% agree).

Results: Jobs



Research
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Community Engagement
Strategy Development

Almost all residents agree that the Local Plan should help create new jobs



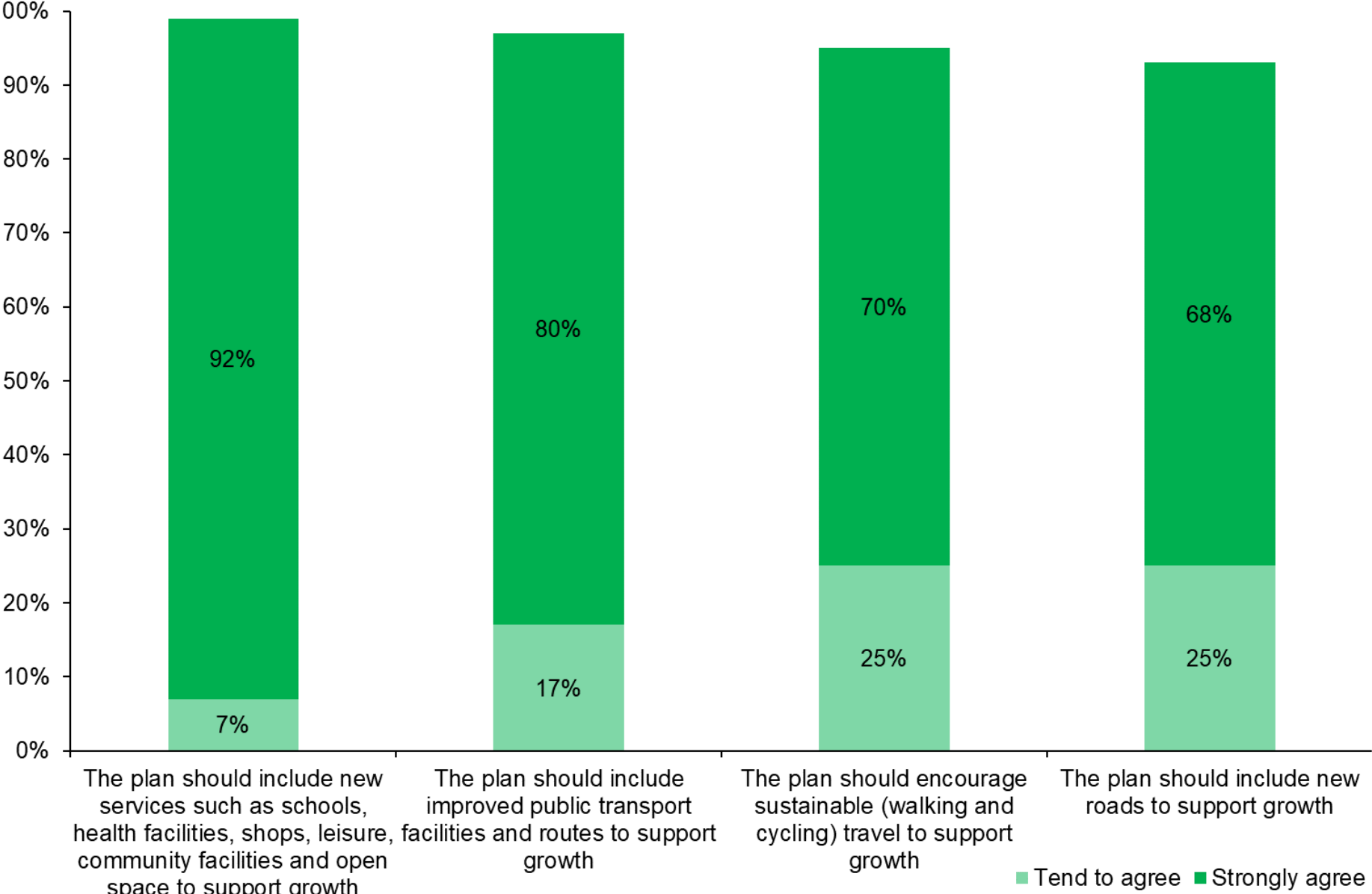
**Results:
Infrastructure**



Research
Evaluation
Community Engagement
Strategy Development

There is strong agreement for the Local Plan to include sufficient and appropriate infrastructure to deliver housing growth

Do you agree or disagree with the following proposals to deliver this housing growth? (N=1222)



Infrastructure commentary

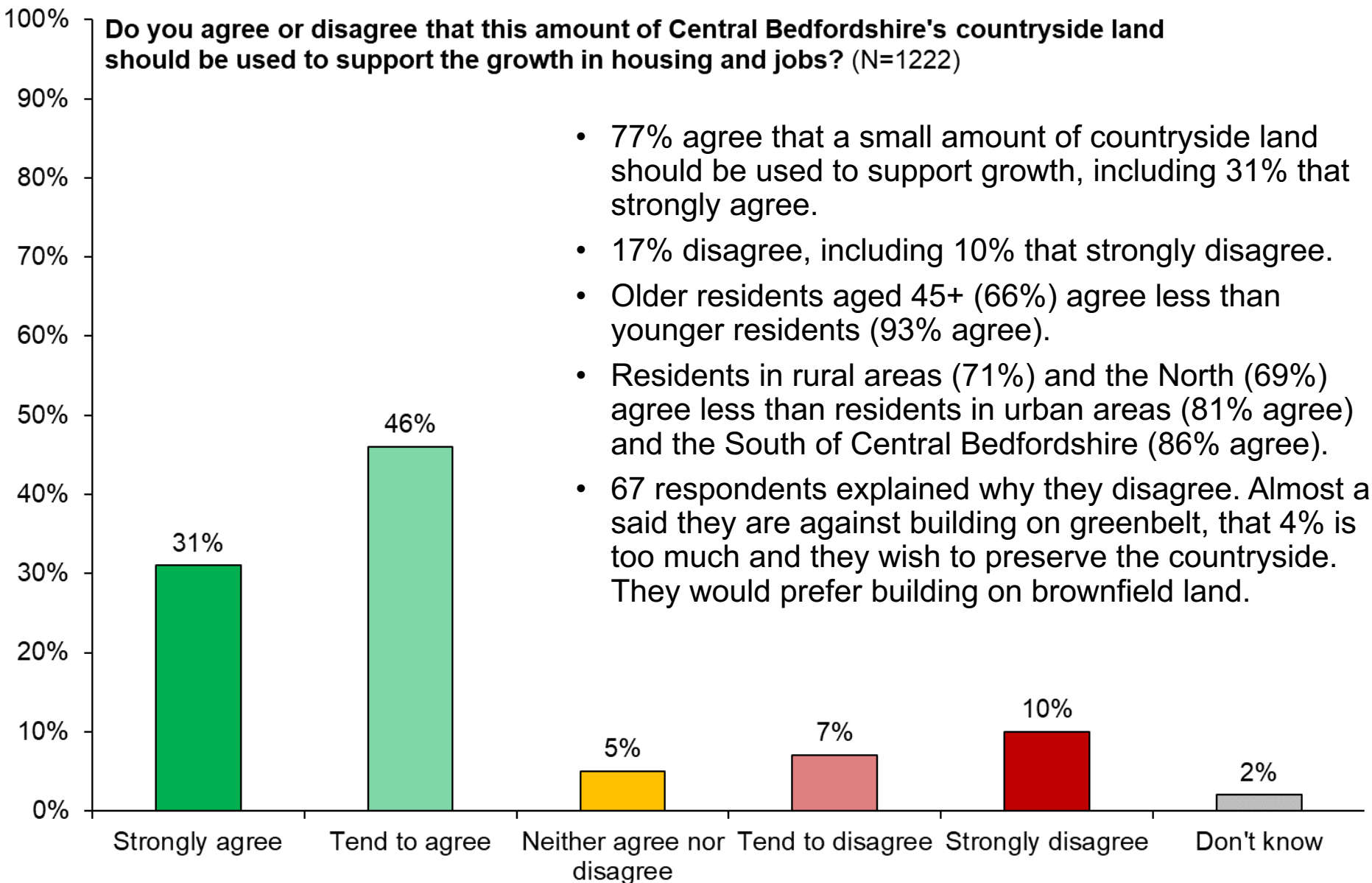
- 99% of residents agree that the Local Plan should include **new services such as schools, shops, health, leisure, community facilities**, including 92% that strongly agree.
- 97% of residents agree that the Local Plan should include **improved public transport facilities and routes**, including 80% that strongly agree.
- 95% of residents agree that the Local Plan should **encourage sustainable travel**, including 70% that strongly agree. 1% disagree.
- 93% of residents agree that the Local Plan should include **new roads to support growth**, including 68% that strongly agree. 1% disagree.
- For all four questions, results are broadly consistent across different demographic groups.
- 84 respondents provided responses to the question: “Are there any other issues that should be considered to help support sustainable growth in housing and jobs in Central Bedfordshire?”. Most of these simply re-stated the importance of the aforementioned, in particular mentioning schools, shops, health and community facilities and facilities for young people. They also mentioned improving *existing* roads, as well as building new roads. Several also mentioned the importance of ensuring that infrastructure is put in place at the same time as the housing, rather than some time after. About a tenth of respondents that provided comments mentioned ensuring there are sufficient jobs. A small number of respondents mentioned the need for more parking or increased policing. A small number of respondents also cautioned against too much growth, and infrastructure development.

**Results:
Countryside and
environment**



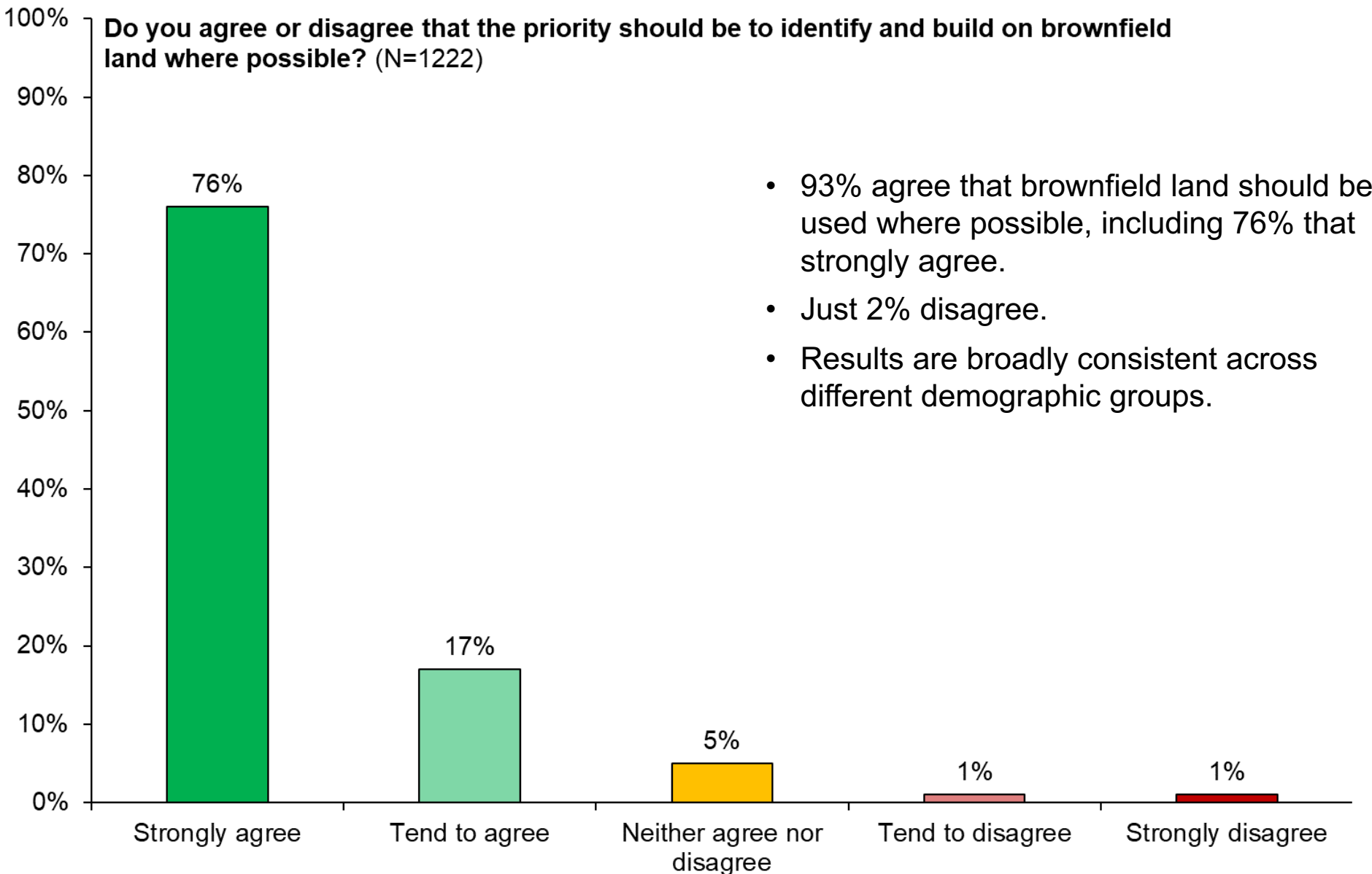
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A majority agree that a small amount (about 4%) of countryside land should be used to support growth

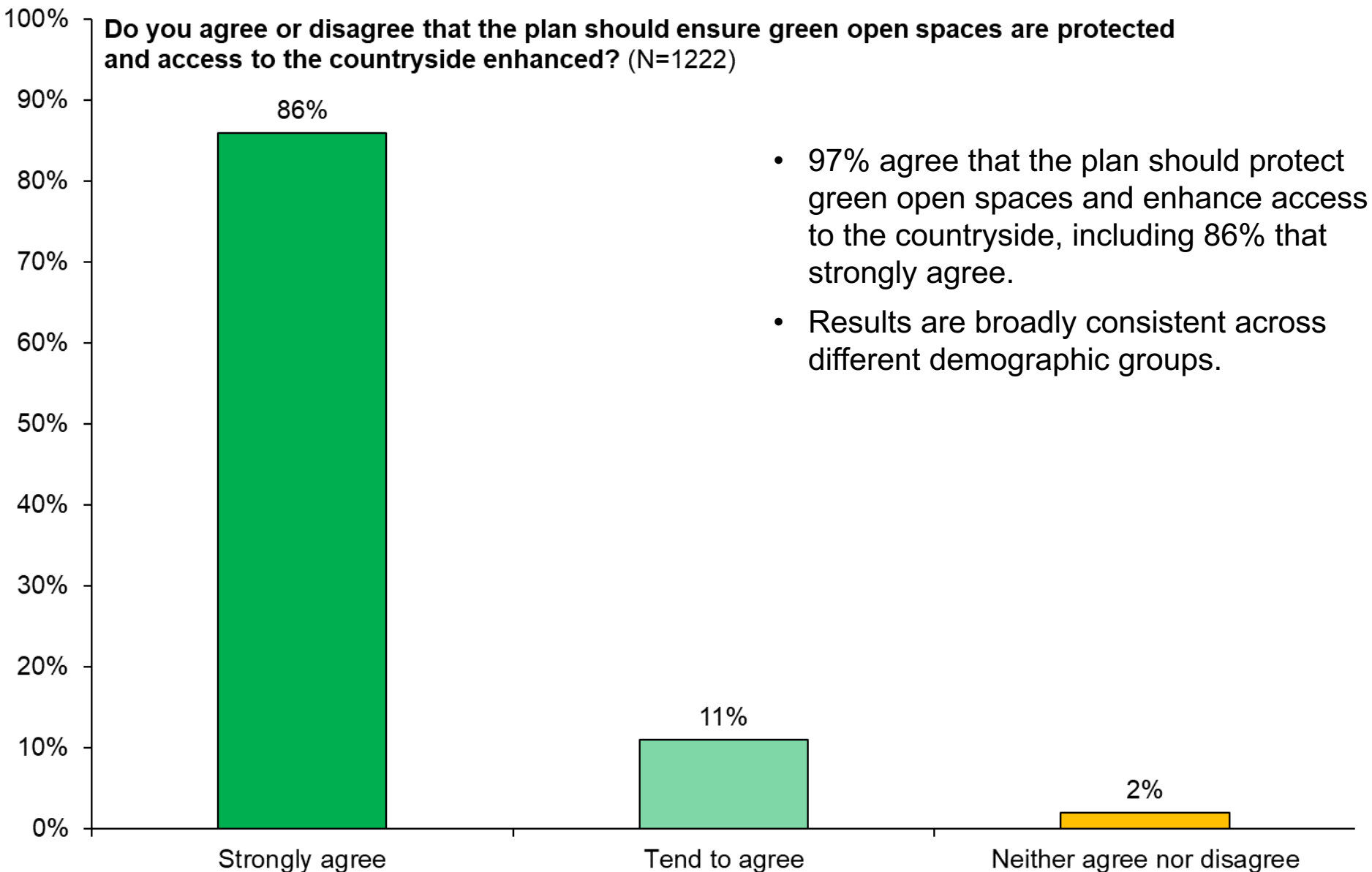


- 77% agree that a small amount of countryside land should be used to support growth, including 31% that strongly agree.
- 17% disagree, including 10% that strongly disagree.
- Older residents aged 45+ (66%) agree less than younger residents (93% agree).
- Residents in rural areas (71%) and the North (69%) agree less than residents in urban areas (81% agree) and the South of Central Bedfordshire (86% agree).
- 67 respondents explained why they disagree. Almost all said they are against building on greenbelt, that 4% is too much and they wish to preserve the countryside. They would prefer building on brownfield land.

Almost all agree that brownfield land should be used where possible



Almost all agree that the plan should protect green open spaces and enhance access to the countryside

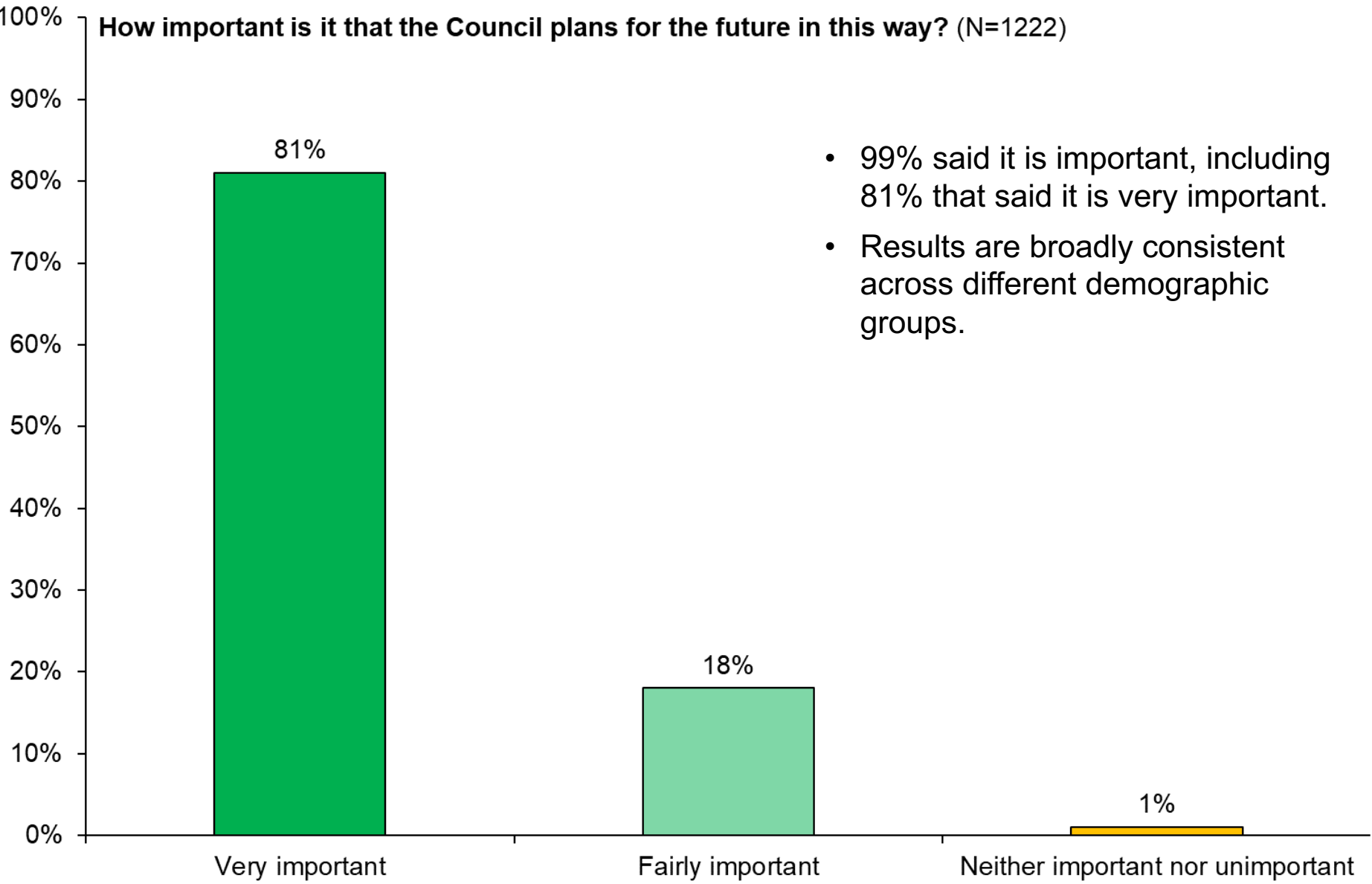


Results: The Local Plan



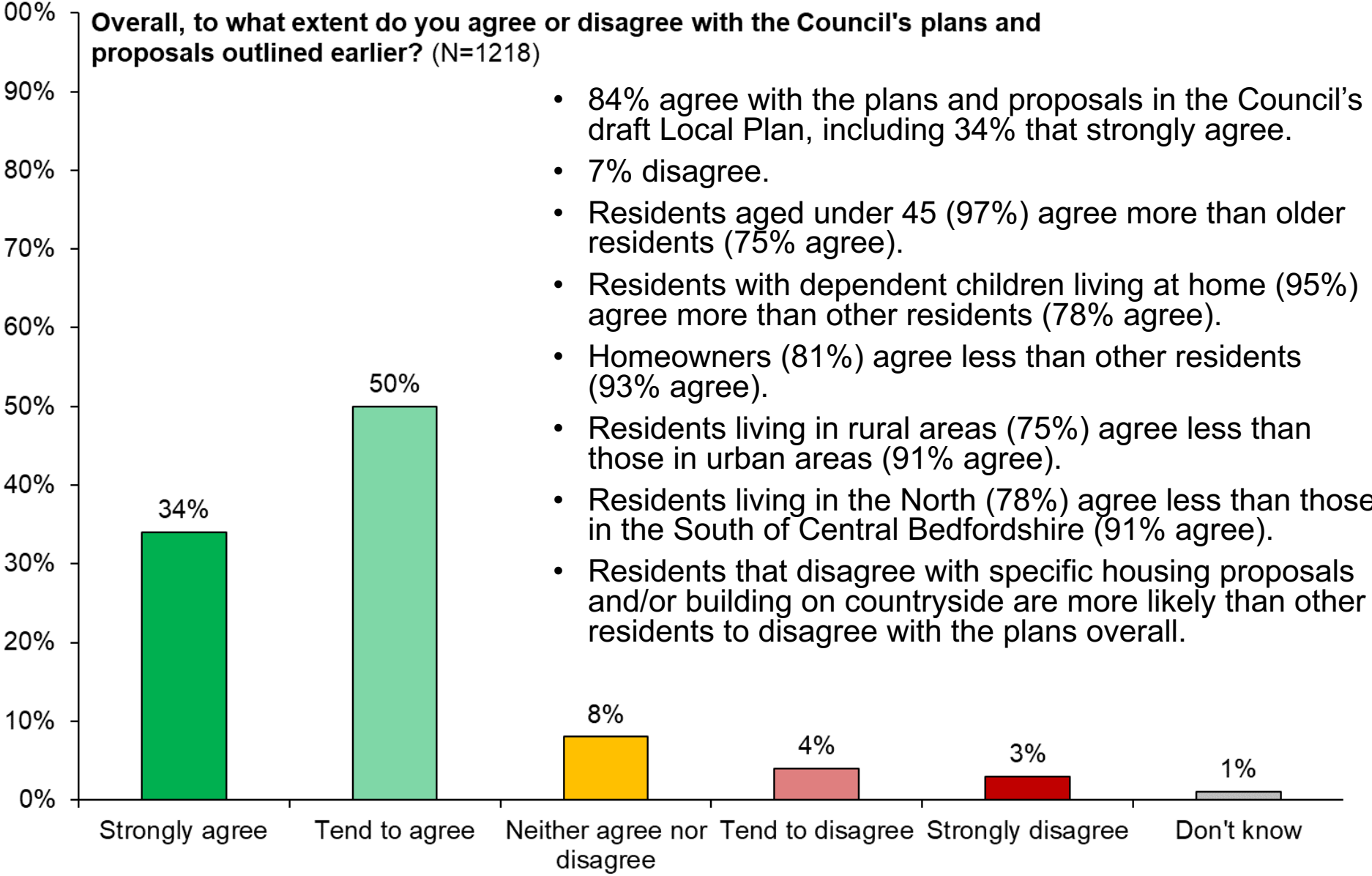
Research
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Almost all residents said that it is important the Council adopts a Local Plan

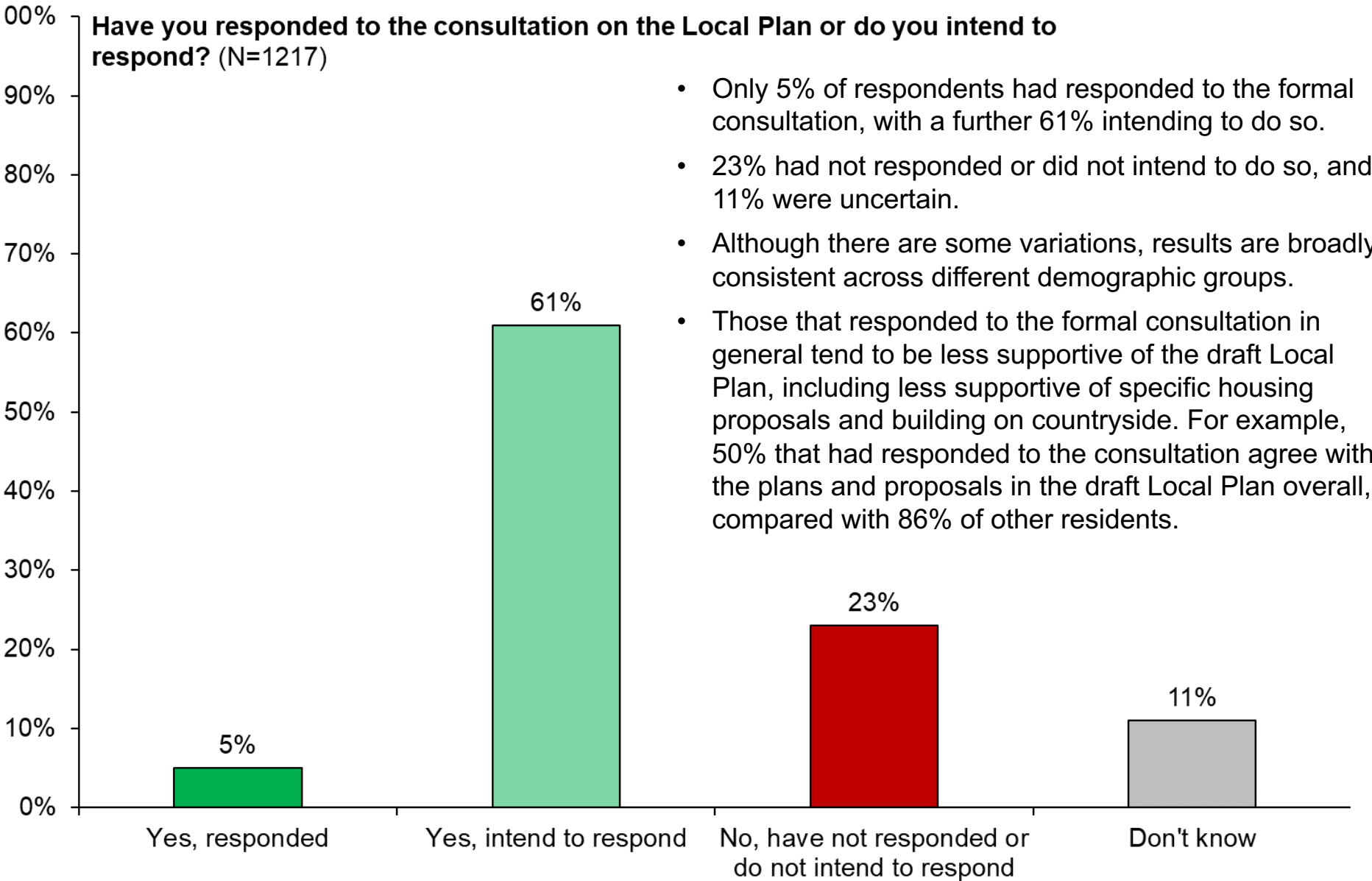


- 99% said it is important, including 81% that said it is very important.
- Results are broadly consistent across different demographic groups.

Over four-fifths of residents agree with the plans and proposals in the Council's draft Local Plan, with demographic variations reflecting those highlighted previously



Most had not participated in the consultation at the time of interview, therefore extending the reach of the consultation and draft Local Plan



- Only 5% of respondents had responded to the formal consultation, with a further 61% intending to do so.
- 23% had not responded or did not intend to do so, and 11% were uncertain.
- Although there are some variations, results are broadly consistent across different demographic groups.
- Those that responded to the formal consultation in general tend to be less supportive of the draft Local Plan, including less supportive of specific housing proposals and building on countryside. For example, 50% that had responded to the consultation agree with the plans and proposals in the draft Local Plan overall, compared with 86% of other residents.

Additional comments

- 131 respondents provided additional comments:
 - About a quarter of these respondents reiterated the importance of sufficient infrastructure being built to support housing and population growth.
 - About a fifth re-stated the importance of affordable housing.
 - About a fifth cautioned against too much growth, said they felt the housing targets were excessive (or overly ambitious) and/or said they were against notable growth, which undermined the local character of the area.
 - Over a tenth reiterated that they are against building on the countryside and prefer the use of brownfield land.
 - A small number of respondents said that developers need to be held to account, and follow the Local Plan to ensure they build sufficient infrastructure and meet affordable housing targets.
 - A small number of respondents welcomed the opportunity to participate in the survey, and to provide their views on important and complex issues.