



GROSVENOR



I LIVE HERE TOO

Why young people want a stake in the future of their neighbourhood

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This research was commissioned to support the launch of Voice.Opportunity.Power, a free toolkit to enhance youth participation in how places are made and managed, created by Grosvenor Britain & Ireland, Sport England, the TCPA and ZCD Architects.

Find out more about the toolkit at VoiceOpportunityPower.com

FOREWORD

We design places that young people have to use but never ask them what they want or if they like what we are designing. That is the clear rebuke from the research published in this new report.

That community participation should be meaningful is no longer part of the debate about how we make and manage places.

The time of any credible developer - from the private or public sector - presenting their plans to the community without an open exchange of views on the designs, their trade-offs and benefits is long gone.

But in seeking to increase participation, we have often focused on the number of participants, not their diversity or how well they represent the whole community.

Young people aged 13-24 make up 1 in 7 of our population, and one quarter of our society is under 19. They are the ultimate consumers of our work, inheriting both the benefits and consequences of the decisions we make today.

What you see in this research is a generation that's highly engaged, shaped by different experiences, and motivated by different aspirations and social norms than their predecessors, the Boomers, Gen X and Millennials.

Yet our study of the experiences of 16-18 year olds - people old enough to drive and in many cases consume alcohol, vote and marry - shows that young adults are almost entirely excluded from conversations about the future of the place where they live.



Without change we will continue to build to suit the lives of those most likely to participate and face losing perspectives and attitudes that will not, and could not, emerge from other groups.

When Grosvenor launched its community charter, Positive Space, earlier this year, we set out how we would broaden the conversation about planning and placemaking and involve people of all ages and backgrounds.

We think that involving young adults should be a routine part of how places get built and managed. And though policy change might be coming, nobody needs to wait.

So from our perspective, this new national youth engagement toolkit, [Voice.Opportunity.Power](#) we created with Sport England, the TCPA and ZCD Architects could not be more timely. It provides a free off-the-shelf framework to help people meaningfully engage young adults in the future of the places where they live.

Backed at the time of launch by nearly 30 developers, councils, designers and youth organisations, it gives me hope that in future we can focus on the quality of engagement - not whether it's being done at all.

James Raynor
CEO, Grosvenor Britain & Ireland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although nearly a quarter of people in the UK are under 19, this research by Grosvenor Britain & Ireland shows that young adults have almost no influence in the planning or management of places, despite their unambiguous desire to contribute.

This is despite Article 12 of the UN Convention on the rights of the child, adopted by the UK in 1992, establishing the right of every child to freely express their views, in all matters affecting them, and the subsequent right for those views to be given due weight, according to the child's age and maturity, as well as the duties required by the Equality Act (2010).

However, the planning system is catching up. The 2020 UK White Paper 'Planning for the Future', designed to streamline and modernise the planning system, notes "(public) consultation is dominated by the few willing and able to navigate the process – the voice of those who stand to gain from development is not heard loudly enough, such as young people".

Following on from its research on [trust in the planning system](#) in 2019 and the launch of its [community charter, Positive Space](#), Grosvenor Britain & Ireland commissioned this study to gain a better understanding of young adults' views on activism, community engagement and the opportunity to have a voice in the future of their neighbourhood.

The research, undertaken by Beatfreeks, an insights consultancy focussed on

young people, canvassed over 500 16-18 year olds from across the UK. To gain a rich understanding of values, beliefs and experiences, participants were from a representative demographic spread of young adults from both urban, suburban and rural places and socio-economic backgrounds.

89%¹ of this national sample of young adults said nobody had ever asked their opinion about the future of their neighbourhood and only **8%** had taken part in a public consultation.

This sits uncomfortably against a figure of **91%** of respondents stating they had engaged in some form of community engagement or activism in their lives and over **97%²** responding positively to the question "Would you like a say in the future of your neighbourhood?"

The consistency of responses and the experience of young adults across the UK from urban, suburban and rural places was notable, with just questions surrounding trust and power demonstrating differences in experiences and perspectives.

The following paper details the full findings of the research and unveils the startling extent to which young adults are today alienated from discussions on the future of the places where they live.

¹Has anyone (like your local council or a property developer) ever asked your opinion on the future of your neighbourhood?
Yes: 59 No: 479

² Would you like a say in the future of your neighbourhood, e.g. on changes to local housing, streets, parks or places that are special to you? Yes: 316, Sometimes or on Somethings: 204, No: 18

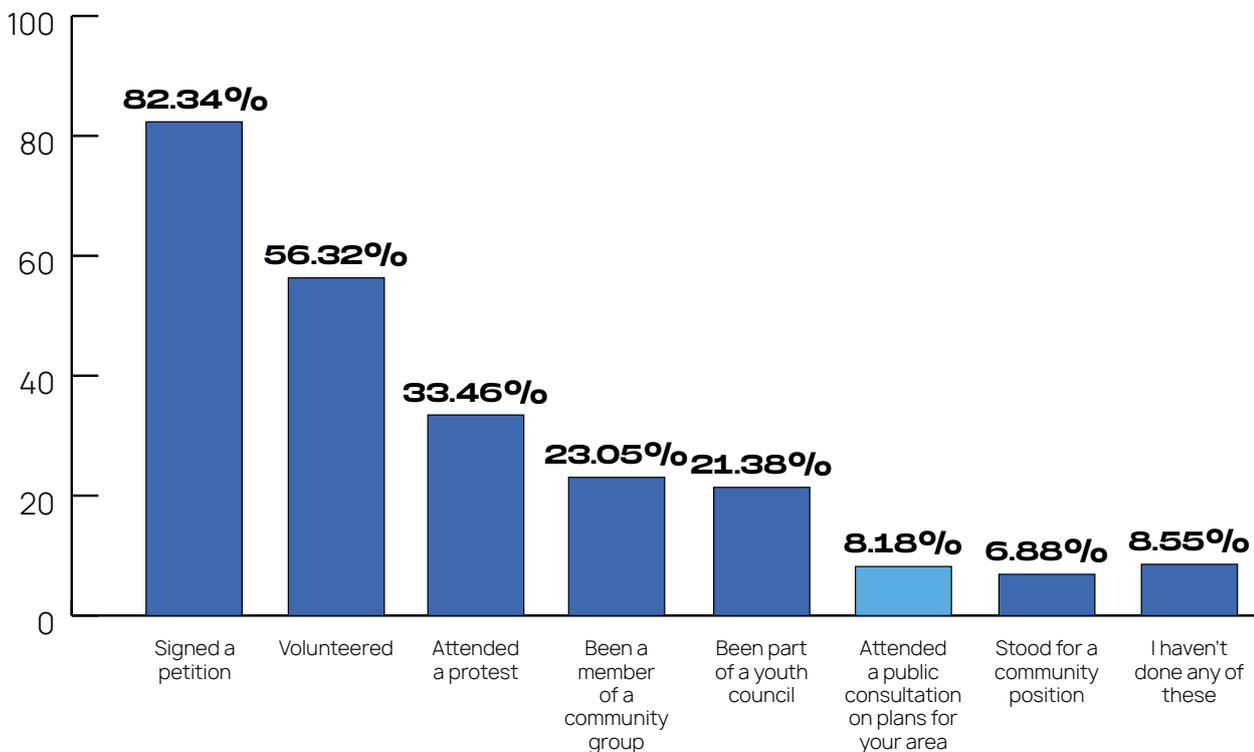
FULL FINDINGS

An online survey canvassed 538 young adults aged 16-18 from across the UK. The sample was analysed to ensure that it was largely representative of the UK population and was found to be robust.



Request the quantitative findings by emailing britainandireland@grovsenor.com

**Have you taken part in, or done, any of the following?
Choose any that apply**



With over **91%** of respondents participating in some form of activism, the results demonstrate that young adults are highly engaged. This included **21%** reporting that they had been part of a youth council and **23%** stating that they had been part of a community group (**10%** stated they had done both of these).

Only **8.6%** of respondents³, stated that they had never taken part in any form of activism or community engagement listed.

When asked what kind of issues they had engaged on, **54%** said they had engaged on a national or global political issue, and **47%** said it was a local political issue^{4,5}.

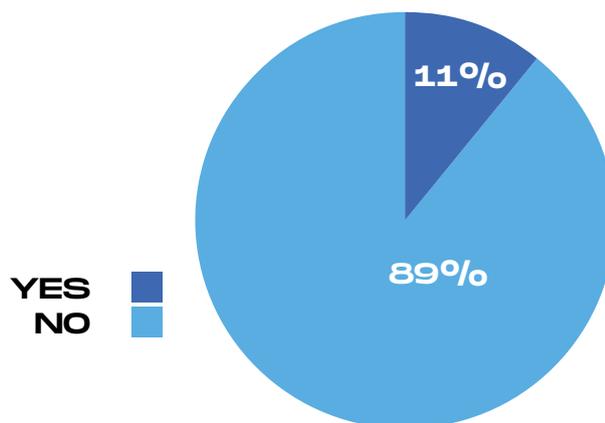
³ 15.20% of young men, 6.14% of young women

⁴ People were allowed to select multiple responses.

⁵ 25.28% stated it was with regards to changes in their local area that they supported, and 17.66% changes they disagreed with. 36.80% noted that it was with regards to the environment and/or climate change

Consultations – Are young adults included?

Has anyone (like your local council or a property developer) ever asked your opinion on the future of your neighbourhood?



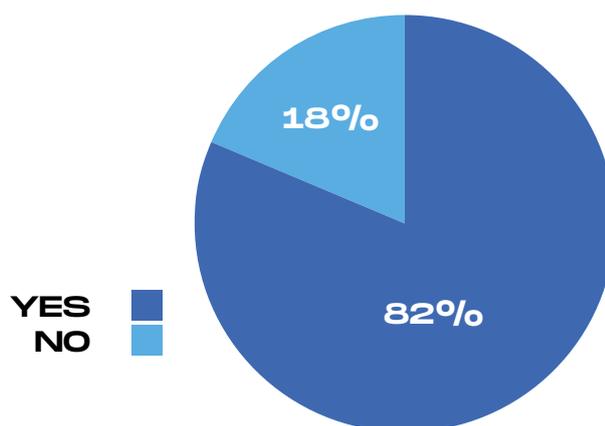
That only **8%** of young adults surveyed have been involved in a public consultation on any issue underlines the fact that **89%** of those surveyed had never been asked their opinion on “*the future of their neighbourhood by groups such as a local council or a property developer*”.

This begs the question: why, when such a large number of young people have been so engaged within their communities generally, have so few been involved in the future of their neighbourhood’s built environment?

Would young adults like to be asked?

Of the 479 who answered ‘no’ to the question ‘*Has anyone (like your local council or a property developer) ever asked your opinion on the future of your neighbourhood?*’ **82%** stated that they would like to be involved.

Would you like to be asked about the future of your neighbourhood?



When all respondents were asked a similar question, the gap between how many young adults want to have a voice in changes to their community and how often they are being engaged in the process was further highlighted. **97%** of respondents gave a positive response to the question “*Would you like a say in the future of your neighbourhood, e.g. on changes to local housing, streets, parks or places that are special to you?*”. Only **3%** said no⁶.

⁶58.73% responded yes, 37.91% responded “sometimes or on somethings”

Why?

Responding to an open question on 'why' young adults want to be asked and be involved in the future of their neighbourhood, the answers fell broadly into 7 categories:



Inclusivity - Young adults believed that everyone within a community should have a say and a voice.



Future - Participants believed young people are the future of communities, so they should have a say in that future.



Deserving - Respondents simply stated that they deserve a voice as much as anyone else, and often noted that as a group they felt unheard and unimportant in their community.



Community - Respondents discussed the idea of community membership or being a part of the community and wishing to have an active voice within it.



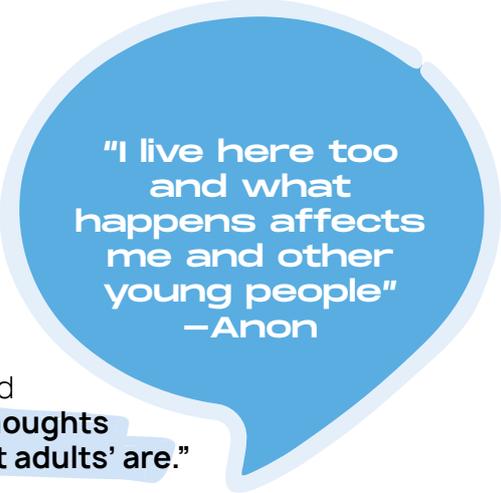
Effect - A significant number mentioned that they should be given a voice as the changes would affect young people directly. Some mentioned that they would have to live with the changes the longest within their community.



Environmental - A small proportion mentioned they would like a voice to protect communities from environmental damage or to improve the environment.



New perspective - A small proportion discussed the different perspectives that young people have, and how that should be valued in their community.



**"I live here too
and what
happens affects
me and other
young people"**
—Anon

There was, in many of the answers, an undeniable feeling of frustration at the question, with a large number emphatically stating that they deserved to be consulted on issues in their community that would affect them.

One young adult simply stated **"Why not?"** (Wales, 16, female), and many agreed with the statement: **"Because I have a mind, and thoughts and opinions, and they are not listened to in the same way that adults' are."** (Stafford, 18, female)

The overarching trend between the categories of Inclusivity, Future, Deserving, Community and Effect was one of feeling that young adults were denied a voice in something that would ultimately affect them far into the future, and a frustration that they felt that input was being denied or ignored.

Of the young adults who spoke about bringing a new perspective to the table, they focused on their knowledge of their communities, of what they could look like in the future, and the dangers of ignoring any group within their community.

One young person said **"because young people have an opinion too...it's important that we don't just let the same type of people make decisions and instead provide different perspectives"** (London, 17, female) and another **"Denying young people a voice in changes blocks new perspectives that could be really helpful in the development of a community"**. (South West England, 17, female).

The 18 respondents who answered 'no' to the question 'would you like to be asked about the future of your neighbourhood?' discussed disaffection with the process, or a lack of confidence that they would be listened to.

A few mentioned that considered their time better spent on other issues and activism, and some mentioned that they didn't think that they had the confidence or expertise to be involved.

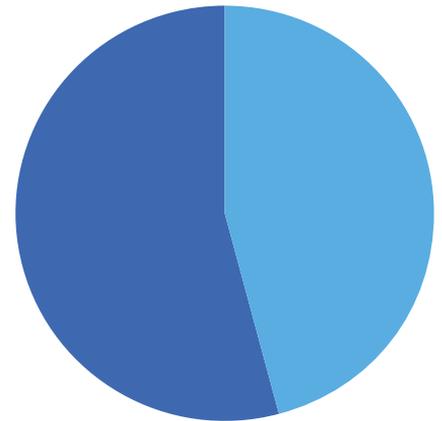
Are we really listening?

Only 59 **(11%)** respondents said they had ever been asked their opinion on the future of their neighbourhood⁷.

When followed up with a question on the quality of the engagement, experiences were mixed - **46%** said they didn't feel listened to and **54%** said that they did.

Did you feel listened to?

YES
NO



Open responses on what made young adults feel listened to fell into three categories:



Groups

They were part of a campaign or group that was listened to, mainly youth councils, but also activist groups.



Value

They felt the people involved in the consultation were listening to them and valued their voices.



Close the loop

They had been told the results of their engagement.

Overall, young adults felt listened to when the people engaging showed that they were listening, cared and respected their voices, and when they were told the results of what they had participated in.

Those who didn't feel listened to noted that they didn't see any change after they had given their opinion, and that they didn't feel that the person asking was interested.

One respondent said the person conducting the consultation was **"rather annoyed that I gave my opinion not what he wanted to hear"** (East Midlands, 17, female) while another said **"They didn't take any notes - not interested one bit"** (London, 16, female).

The importance of feedback was also emphasised: **'(it) isn't a yes or no question for me...I feel listened to when I am talking but nothing seems to change'** (Liverpool, 16, female).

If young people leave a consultation feeling valued, but they aren't able to appreciate what difference their opinion made or the trade-offs in decision making, they are unlikely to be incentivised to participate again.

⁷Has anyone (like your local council or a property developer) ever asked your opinion on the future of your neighbourhood?

Does it matter where you live?

The consistency of responses and experiences of young adults across the UK – from urban, suburban and rural places - is notable.

There was little difference on whether they had been asked about changes to their neighbourhoods, or on whether they participated in activism.

Young adults from urban and suburban areas were however more likely to speak up about housing and the environment, whereas those from rural communities were more likely to speak up about local transport issues as well as the environment.

With only a very few participants reporting that they 'always struggle to pay their bills' a thorough analysis of the impact of financial security on levels of activism and community engagement was not possible within this study and warrants further, separate, investigation.



of young adults from rural locations said they were most likely to speak about transport issues

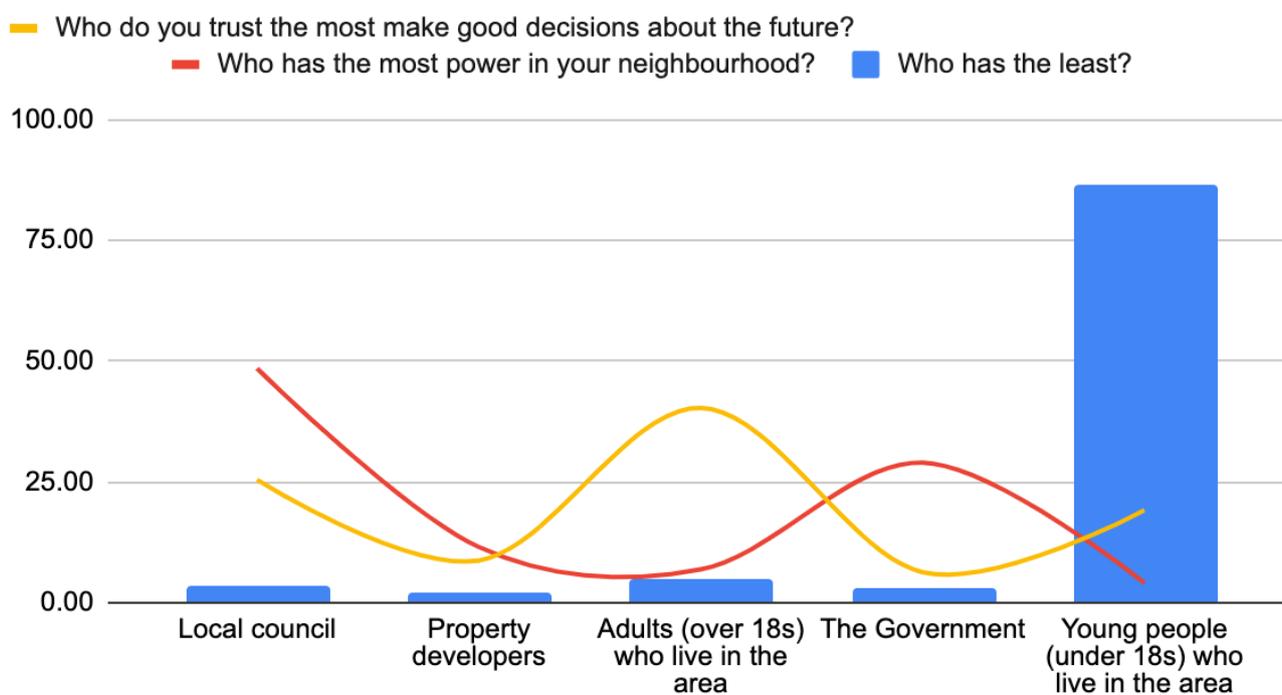


of young adults from urban areas said they were most likely to speak up about housing issues



The environment is a key issue for young adults wherever they live

Who do you trust?



The final questions centered on the perception of power in communities, and who young adults trust the most to make good decisions about the future of their neighbourhoods.

When asked who they trusted the most to make good decisions about the future of their neighbourhoods, young adults looked mainly to the community. **40%** picked adults in the area and **19%** other young people, highlighting the weight given to local lived experience and need for wide participation in the planning process.

When asked who has the most power in communities, a significant difference in answers between those who self-reported as more, or less, financially secure was seen. Not one person who identified as of a lower socioeconomic status⁸ answered 'young people', and when asked who had the least, **100%** said young people. This may indicate that young adults from a lower socioeconomic background feel more disempowered in their neighbourhoods. But, as before, the sample size for this group was small.

⁸This was determined by financial status, those responding "We always struggle to pay our bills".

CONCLUSION

Involving young people should be a routine part of how we make and manage places.

This research shows the startling extent to which they say they want a stake in the conversation. But it also reveals a process that, to date, has simply not been designed for their needs or to capture their opinions and perspective.

The young adults who engaged in this research are representative of a generation more engaged in politics and aware of the repercussions, both positive and negative, that change can have on their neighbourhood.

Ultimately, planning reform needs to enshrine youth engagement as an integral part of the process and Grosvenor supports this ambition in the White Paper.

However, we think the gap can be easily addressed far earlier and more simply by public and private sector organisations committing to meaningful participation and early, open dialogue with communities. The new national youth engagement toolkit, Voice.Opportunity.Power launched alongside this research is one key way to make it happen on the ground.

Find out more about the national youth engagement toolkit backed by almost 30 organisations on launch at www.VoiceOpportunityPower.com

METHODOLOGY

Grosvenor and Beatfrees co-designed a dynamic and responsive survey to gain a better understanding of young adults' views on activism and community engagement and how they felt about the opportunity to have a voice in the future of their neighbourhoods.

The survey, open to 16-18 year olds in UK, ran from 21 August to 23 September 2020.

This was split into three sections;

- **About You:** to capture demographic information, including where young people lived and their socioeconomic status,
- **Issues that matter to you, and what action you have taken:** questions on previous engagement and activism, and what issues would most likely to speak out about in their local community, and
- **Your neighbourhood:** which looked at their knowledge, understand and experience of community change and property development.

538 responses were analysed as a cohort, and by whether they stated they lived in a rural, suburban, or urban area, and by socioeconomic status. The sample was analysed to ensure that it was largely representative of the UK population and was found to be robust.

It was important to ensure that, as highlighted above by the UK Government White Paper, this survey was not only answered by those 'willing and able to navigate the process', but by a diverse and representative selection of young people.

This was achieved by ensuring that the survey was made and worded in an accessible, clear and concise way, and advertised on platforms with a high proportion of engaged 16-18 year olds.

A breakdown of the data can be accessed by emailing britainandireland@grosvenor.com

METHODOLOGY

Participant breakdown

538 participants

| Where do you live? | | |
|----------------------|-----|--------|
| West Midlands | 124 | 23.05% |
| London | 100 | 18.59% |
| South East England | 61 | 11.34% |
| North West England | 53 | 9.85% |
| Yorkshire/Humberside | 40 | 7.43% |
| South West England | 29 | 5.39% |
| East Midlands | 28 | 5.20% |
| East of England | 26 | 4.83% |
| Wales | 26 | 4.83% |
| Scotland | 23 | 4.28% |
| North East England | 21 | 3.90% |
| Northern Ireland | 7 | 1.30% |

| How old are you? | | |
|------------------|-----|-------|
| 16 | 212 | 39.4% |
| 17 | 239 | 44.4% |
| 18 | 87 | 16.2% |

| How do you describe your gender? | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|--------|
| Male | 125 | 23.23% |
| Female | 391 | 72.68% |
| Non-binary | 12 | 2.23% |
| Prefer not to say | 8 | 1.49% |
| Prefer to self identify | 2 | 0.37% |

| How would you describe your family's financial situation? | | |
|---|-----|-------|
| We live comfortably | 224 | 41.6% |
| We can always pay our bills, but money is tight | 233 | 43.3% |
| We sometimes struggle to pay our bills | 72 | 13.4% |
| We always struggle to pay our bills | 9 | 1.7% |

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Find out more about the toolkit at VoiceOpportunityPower.com



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