

Research to explore resident attitudes towards climate action in Essex

Presentation to Essex Flood Partnership Board

ECC Policy Unit - Research and Citizen Insight

23 November 2021



Essex County Council

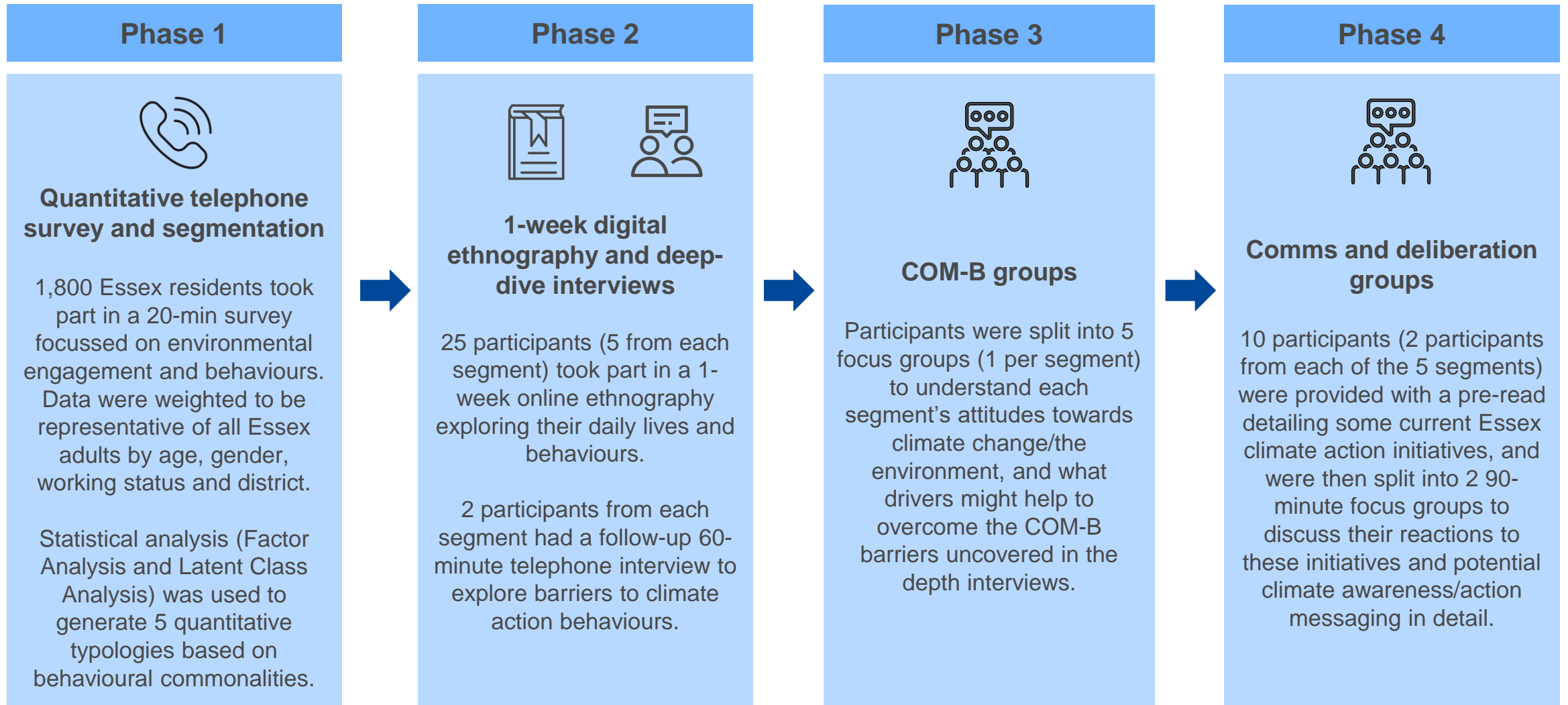
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Background

ECC's Research and Citizen Insight function worked with **BritainThinks** to undertake a programme of quantitative and qualitative research with **Essex residents**, to help understand people's **attitudes towards taking personal and collective action** on climate change.

The research was conducted between **March-June 2021** to inform and support the work of the **Essex Climate Action Commission** – including its Special Interest Groups - and its communication / engagement activities.

Methodology



Key findings

1

The vast majority of residents claim to be concerned about climate change. In practice, the issue often feels distant and less of a priority than other national and local concerns. Protection of local green spaces is potentially one 'bridge issue' that can bring abstract debates about climate action closer to home.

2

People over-estimate their current contribution and there is a disconnect between perceptions and reality of how certain behaviours impact climate change. Most are doing lower effort behaviours like recycling (lower impact) which they see as 'doing their bit' and fewer are doing more challenging but more impactful behaviours (e.g. switching from cars) which they would feel is 'above and beyond'.

3

Whilst many are open to changing their own behaviours, many environmentally-friendly options are seen as challenging to implement or viewed as presenting an unattractive lifestyle change. It will not be easy to shift entrenched behaviours and privileges that people currently have.

4

Across the behaviours the research explored, those where residents could appreciate there would be personal benefits are the ones where there is the greatest opportunity to effect behaviour change – namely, increasing the number of meat-free days, reducing food waste, and making home upgrades. The areas where participants couldn't see personal benefits, e.g. transport, will be the most challenging to effect behaviour change.

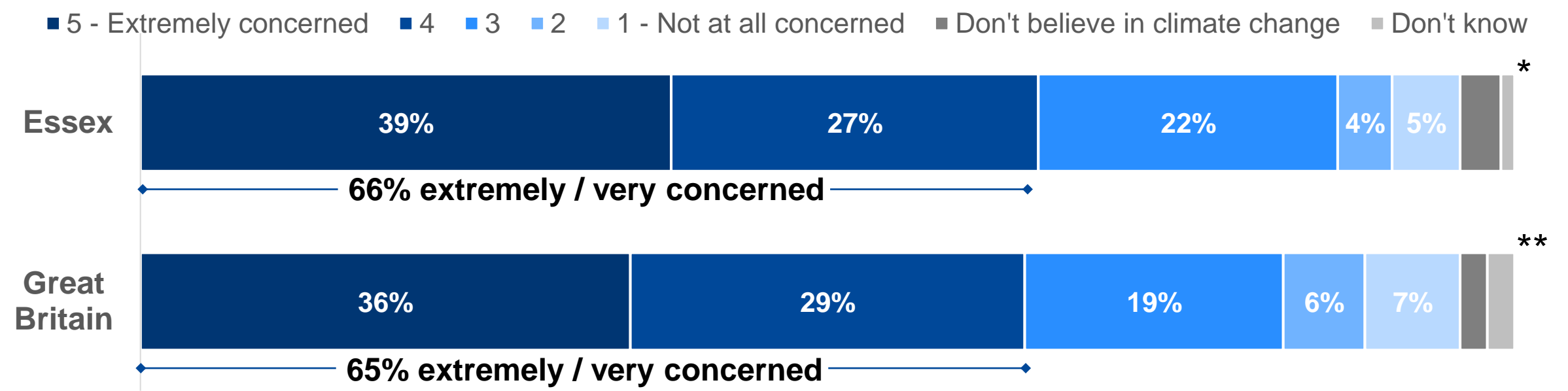
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Headline findings

Essex residents are concerned about climate change - but only a small number of residents see it as a top priority

Two-thirds of Essex residents said they are ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ concerned about climate change, in line with the national population

On a scale of 1 to 5, how concerned, if at all, are you about climate change? Alternatively, please tell me if you don't believe in climate change. (1 = not at all concerned, and 5 = extremely concerned).,



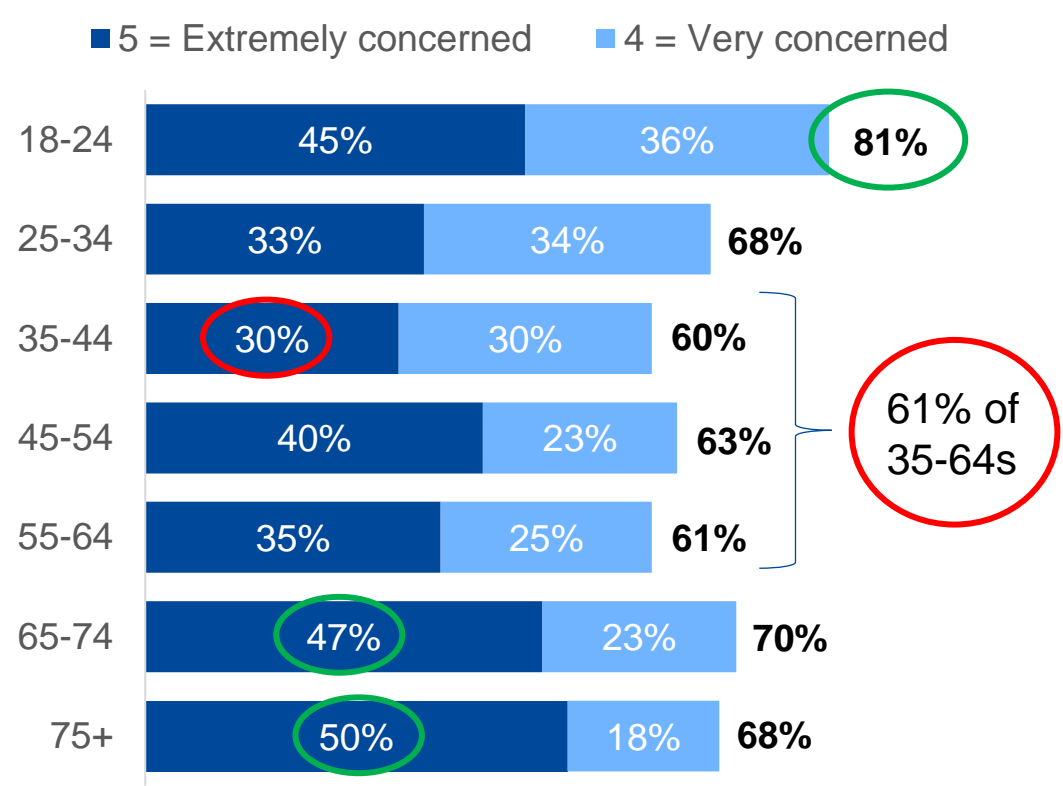
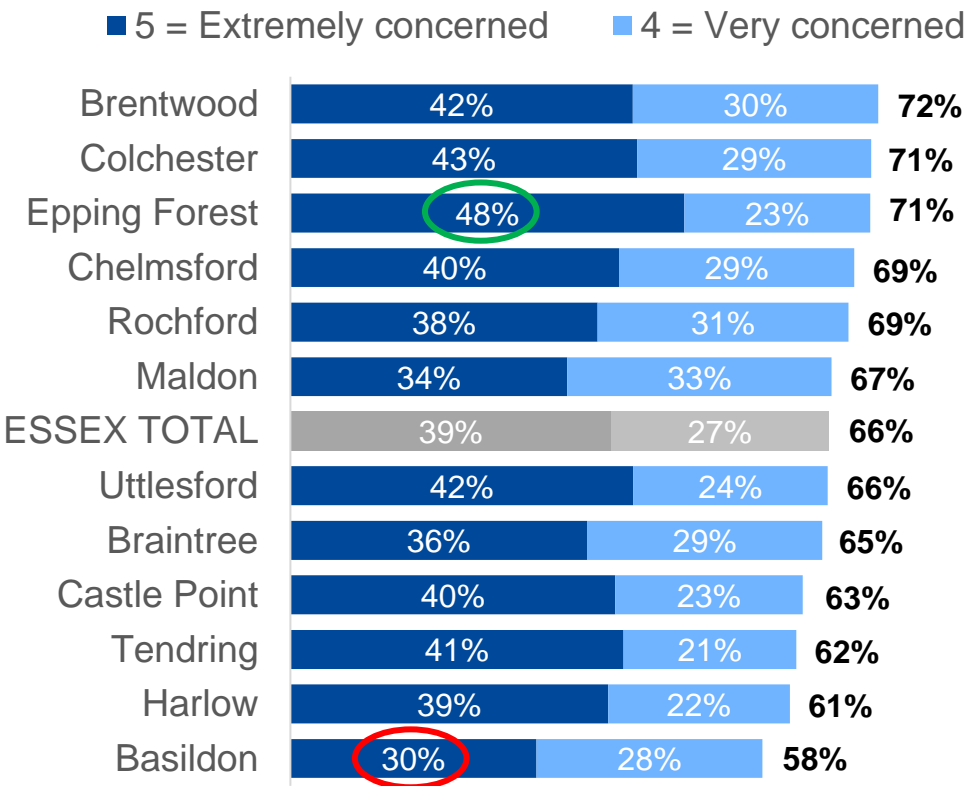
*Essex: 3% 'I don't believe in climate change' / <0.5% 'Don't know'
**Great Britain: 2% 'I don't believe in climate change' / 2% 'Don't know'

BASE: All respondents (Essex: 1,800 / GB: 995)

Variations in climate concern are seen by age and district/borough

On a scale of 1 to 5, how concerned, if at all, are you about climate change? Alternatively, please tell me if you don't believe in climate change. (1 = not at all concerned, and 5 = extremely concerned).,

Charts show % extremely / very concerned

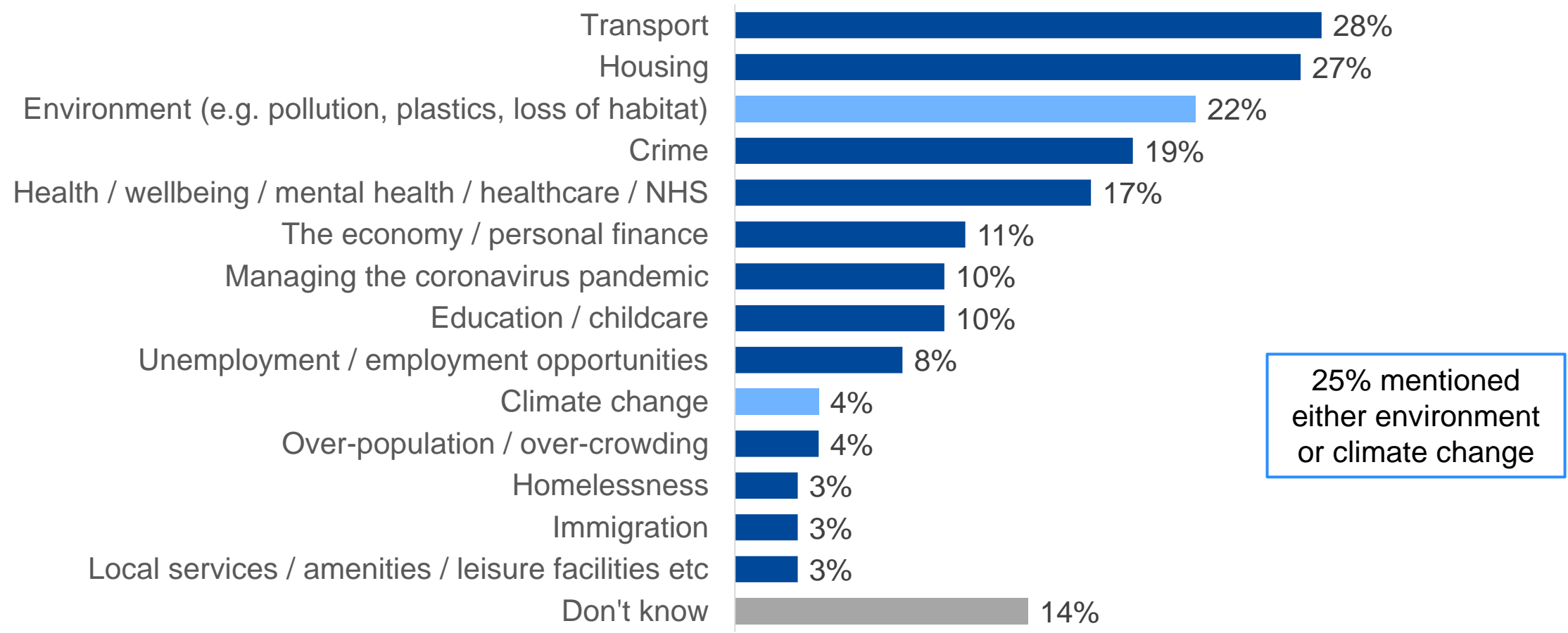


BASE: All respondents (Essex: 1,800)

○ Demotes statistically significant difference vs the Essex total at the 95% confidence level

But when asked to identify the top issues facing Essex over in the next 5 years, few spontaneously mention climate change

Thinking about the next 5 years, what do you think are the top three issues facing ESSEX?



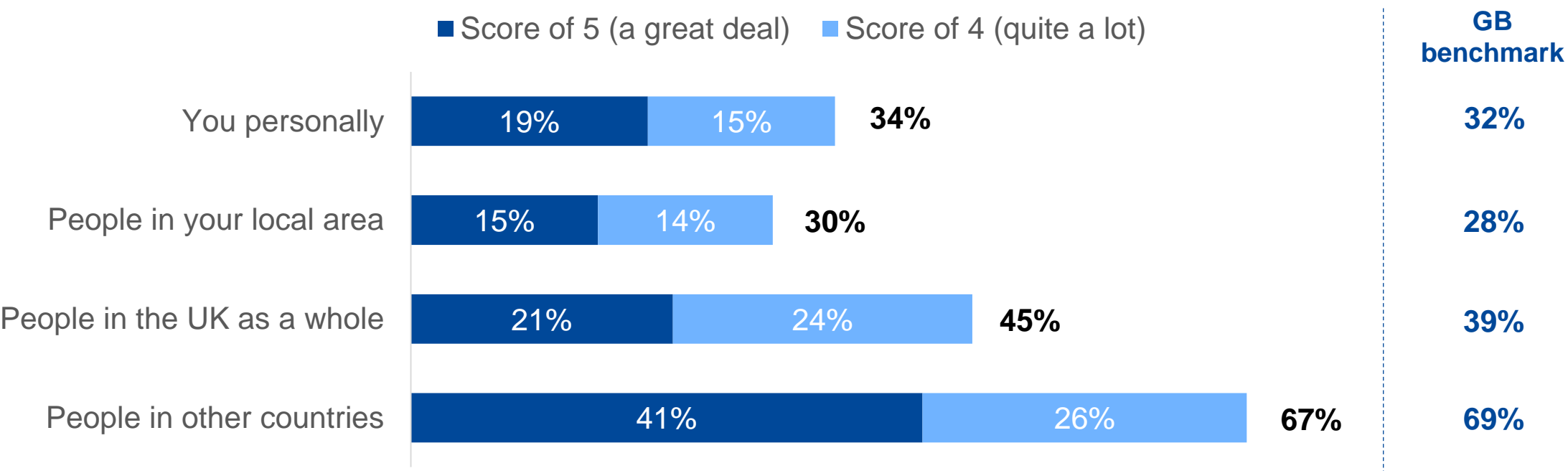
BASE: All respondents (1,800)

Chart shows all issues mentioned by 3% or more

Many see climate change as something that affects other people and other places

Climate change is seen as currently having a greater impact elsewhere in the UK and worldwide than in Essex...

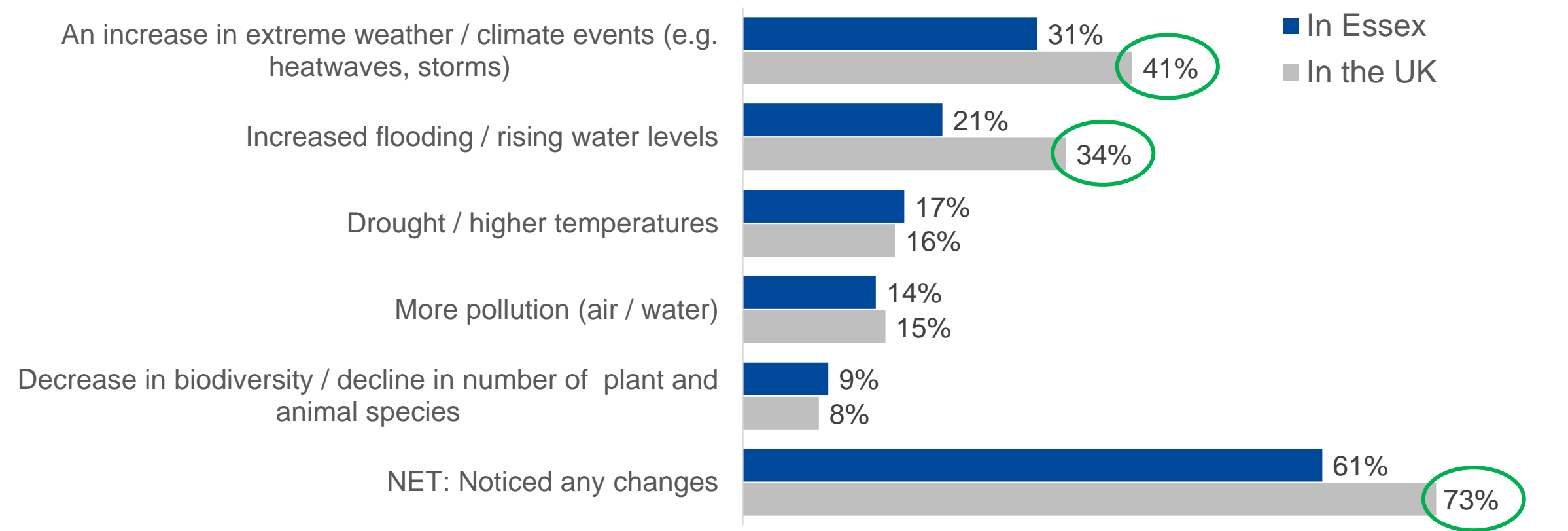
On a scale of 1 – 5, to what extent are each of the following currently impacted by climate change?
(1 = not at all and 5 = a great deal)



BASE: All who believe in climate change (Essex: 1,758 / GB: 978)

...with fewer Essex residents having noticed increased extreme weather events or flooding in Essex (versus the UK) over the last 5 years

Over the last 5 years, what changes have you noticed in Essex/ UK which you believe to be a result of climate change?

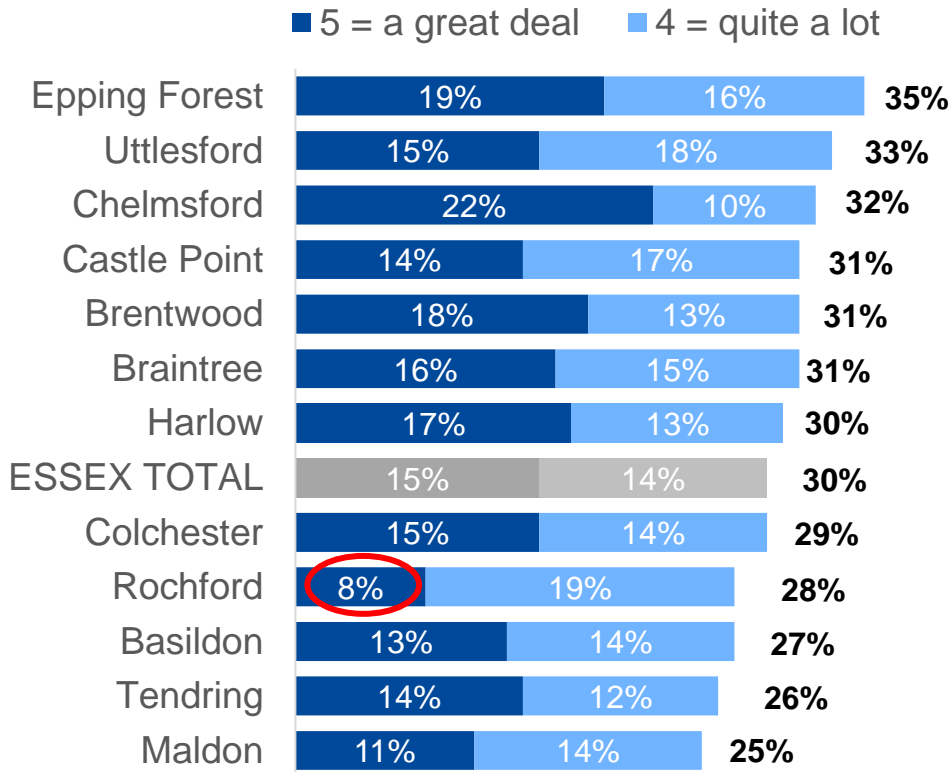


BASE: All who believe in climate change (1,758)

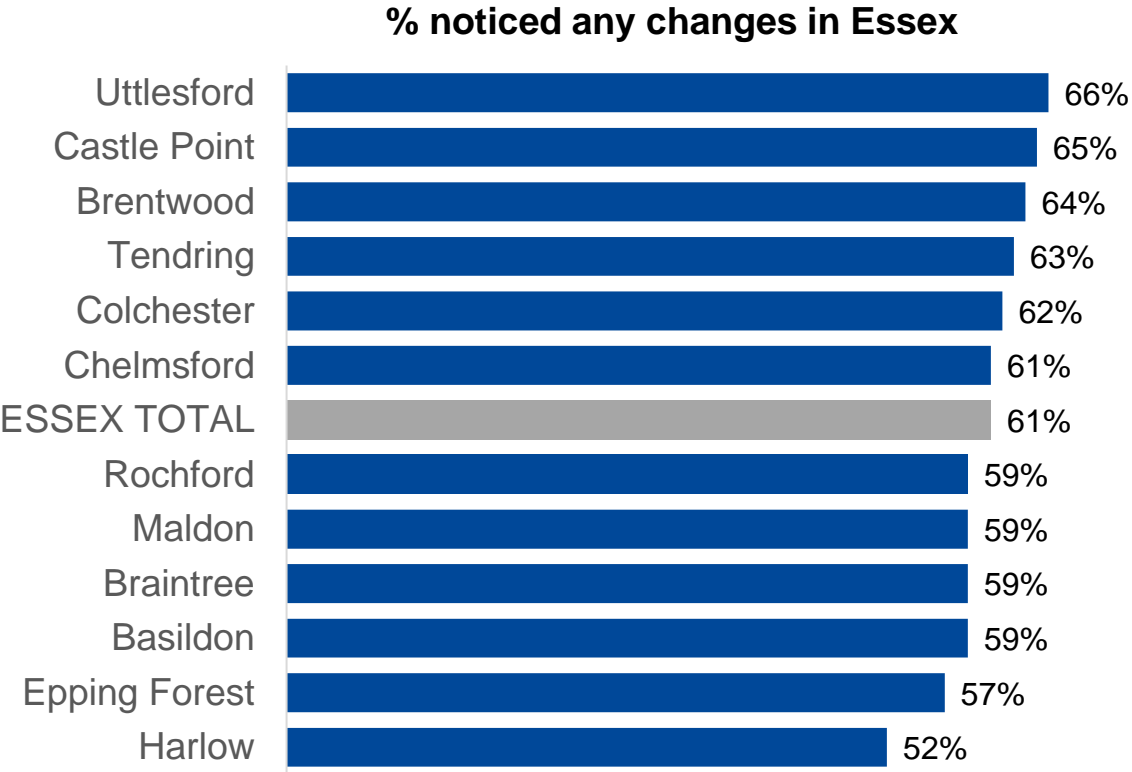
Chart shows all changes mentioned by 3% or more
Demotes statistically significant difference at the 95% confidence level

Perceptions vary slightly across districts/boroughs

On a scale of 1 – 5, to what extent are each of the following currently impacted by climate change:
PEOPLE IN YOUR AREA



Over the last 5 years, what changes have you noticed in Essex which you believe to be a result of climate change: **NOTICED ANY CHANGES**



BASE: All respondents (Essex: 1,800; c.150 per district)


○ Demotes statistically significant difference vs the Essex total at the 95% confidence level

Responses by district/borough show some, but not significant, variation

Over the last 5 years, what changes have you noticed in Essex which you believe to be a result of climate change?

	ESSEX TOTAL	Basildon	Braintree	Brentwood	Castle Point	Chelmsford	Colchester	Epping Forest	Harlow	Maldon	Rochford	Tendring	Uttlesford
An increase in extreme weather / climate events	31%	31%	35%	30%	31%	32%	36%	26%	29%	29%	31%	28%	26%
Increased flooding / rising water levels	21%	18%	23%	23%	21%	20%	19%	24%	16%	25%	22%	20%	25%
Drought / higher temperatures	17%	17%	21%	19%	15%	19%	19%	11%	10%	14%	14%	17%	17%
More pollution (air / water)	14%	12%	15%	18%	13%	16%	14%	16%	8%	8%	14%	17%	13%
Decrease in biodiversity / decline in plant / animal species	9%	9%	11%	9%	8%	9%	12%	11%	5%	10%	5%	7%	13%
Don't know	19%	17%	21%	15%	17%	17%	17%	26%	27%	20%	21%	20%	21%
None	18%	21%	18%	19%	17%	20%	19%	17%	20%	18%	15%	15%	11%
<i>NET: Noticed any changes</i>	61%	59%	59%	64%	65%	61%	62%	57%	52%	59%	59%	63%	66%

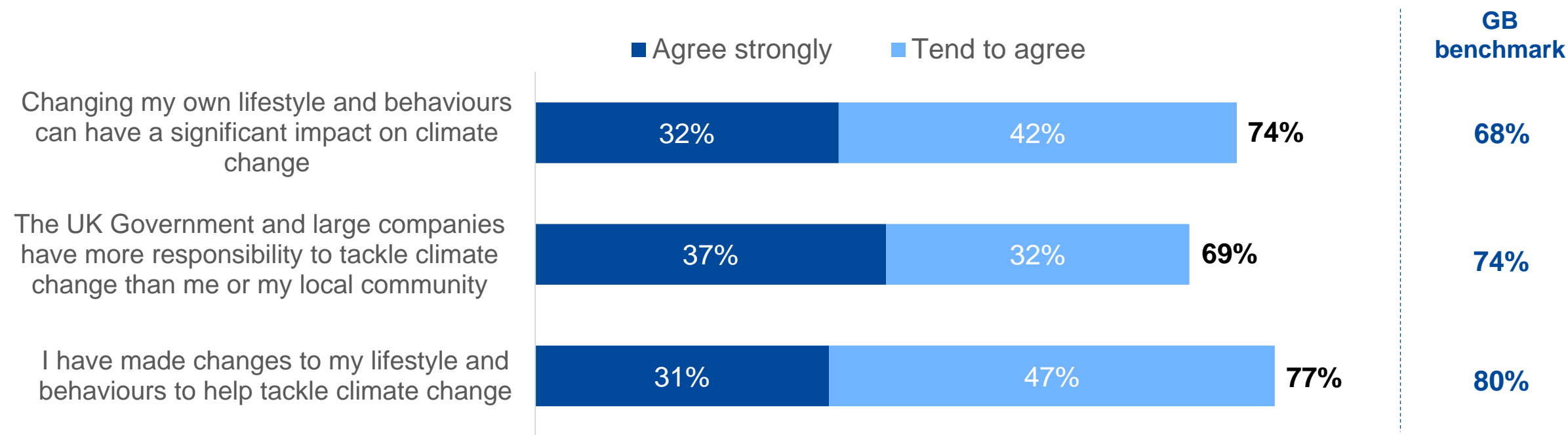
BASE: All who believe in climate change (Essex: 1,758; c.145 per district)

Table shows all changes mentioned by 3% or more
 Demotes statistically significant difference vs the Essex total at the 95% confidence level

Most residents acknowledge that their actions impact on climate change, but many expect Government and business to take the lead

Although three-quarters agreed that changing their behaviours can have a significant impact, the Government and large companies are also seen as having greater responsibility for the issue

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



BASE: All who believe in climate change (Essex: 1,758 / GB: 1,002)

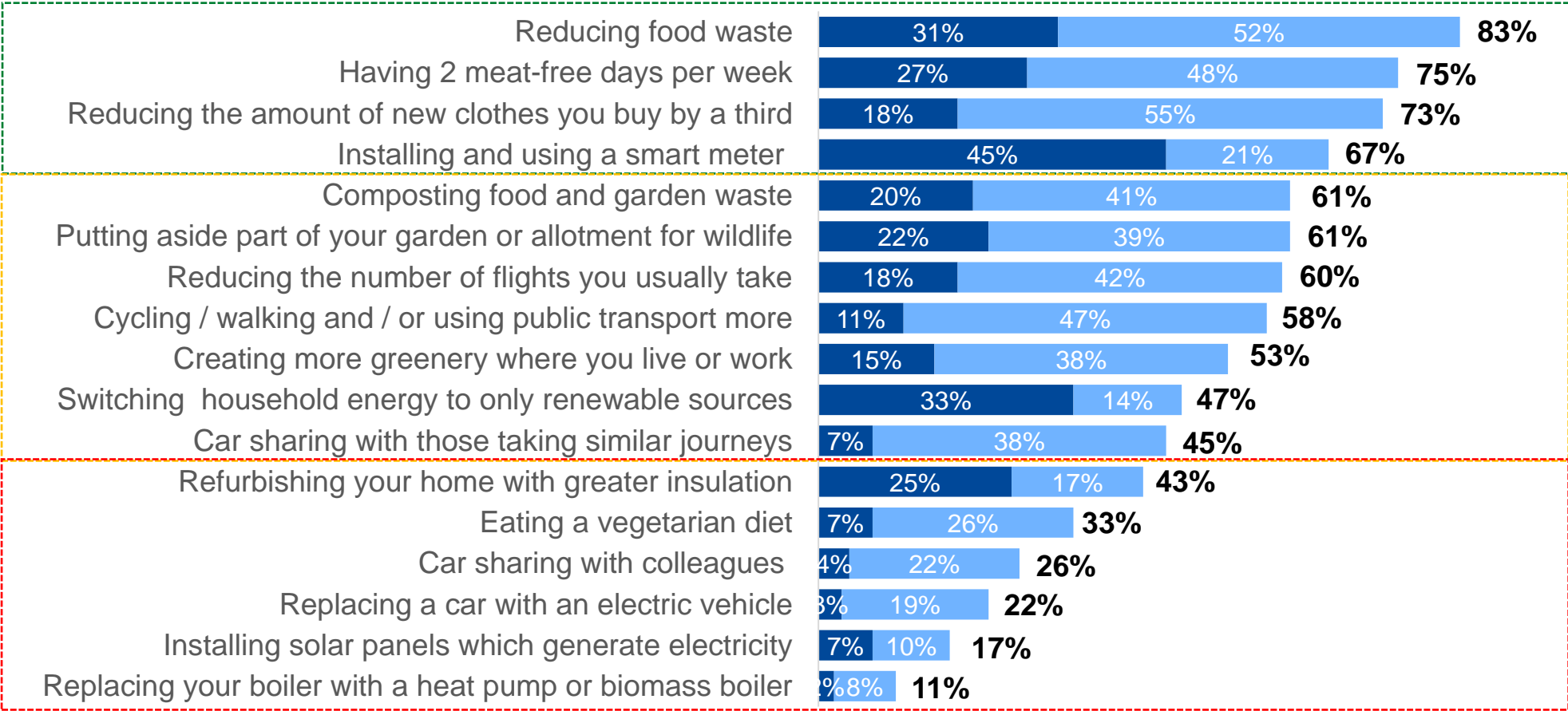
Residents claim to have made lifestyle changes, but only a small number of behaviours are widespread

Those which have been widely adopted tend to be largely those requiring lower effort and less cost or inconvenience

Reducing waste and making small changes to diet were considered the easiest changes for residents to make – whilst home energy improvements, significant diet change and changing car related behaviours were considered the most difficult

Ease of adopting changes

■ Already doing/done ■ Would find easy (Score of 4-5)



Actions around reducing waste, and small changes to diet are most commonly considered easy

Making changes to gardens/greenery or making transport changes are less likely to be considered easy

Home energy improvements, significant diet changes and changing car related behaviours are least likely to be considered easy

Q19. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very easy and 5 = very difficult, how easy or difficult would you find doing the following things?
 BASE: All respondents (1,800)

**Residents do not fully understand the impact
certain behaviours can have on tackling
climate change**

Do Essex residents understand which actions could have the greatest impact on efforts to tackle climate change?

- The survey sought to explore residents' understanding of which actions could potentially have the greatest impact on efforts to tackle climate change in the UK, assuming widespread adoption.
- To help quantify the survey responses, data on emission mitigation potentials across a range of actions is taken from Ivanova et al (2020)*, allowing the rankings of each to be compared, and actions to be categorised as either higher or lower impact.
- In the paper, the authors synthesize emission mitigation potentials across the domains of food, housing, transport and other consumption, based on findings from 53 studies in a meta-review.

- The paper identifies the following actions with higher mitigation potential (not presented in order of potential):
 - Dietary shift (e.g. vegan, vegetarian)
 - Transport mode shift (e.g. active, public transport), car-free
 - Reduction in overall travel demand
 - Upscaling of electric vehicles
 - Renewable-based heating and electricity
 - Home refurbishment and renovation (i.e. energy-efficient retrofit)

* Ivanova et al (2020), Quantifying the potential for climate change mitigation of consumption options, Environmental Research Letters Volume 15 Number 9, available at: <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab8589>

Essex residents significantly overestimate the impact of recycling on tackling climate change, whilst underestimating the potential impact of changing diet and home heating

Percentage of residents who believe each activity has a significant impact on tackling climate change (score of 4 or 5)

significant impact on tackling climate change (score of 4 or 5)			Actual impact (rank)*	Actual impact (category)*
Recycling as much as possible	<div></div> 80%		10	Lower
Cycling / walking and / or using public transport more	<div></div> 69%		4	Higher
Switching household energy to only renewable sources	<div></div> 67%		3	Higher
Replacing a petrol / diesel car with an electric vehicle	<div></div> 66%		1	Higher
Reducing food waste	<div></div> 65%		7	Lower
Taking one less long-haul flight (7+ hours) per year	<div></div> 59%		2	Higher
Composting food waste	<div></div> 53%		11	Lower
Reducing the amount of new clothes you buy by a third	<div></div> 48%		9	Lower
Installing and using a smart meter to monitor energy usage	<div></div> 42%		8	Lower
Replacing a boiler with a heat pump	<div></div> 36%	[25% said 'don't know']	5	Higher
Eating a vegetarian diet	<div></div> 35%		6	Higher

Q23: For the following actions, and imagining the majority of people in the UK did this action, please indicate what impact you think that each would have on efforts to tackle climate change. Please give a score from 1 to 5, with 1 being no impact, and 5 being the most significant impact any one action can have.

BASE: All who believe in climate change (1,758)

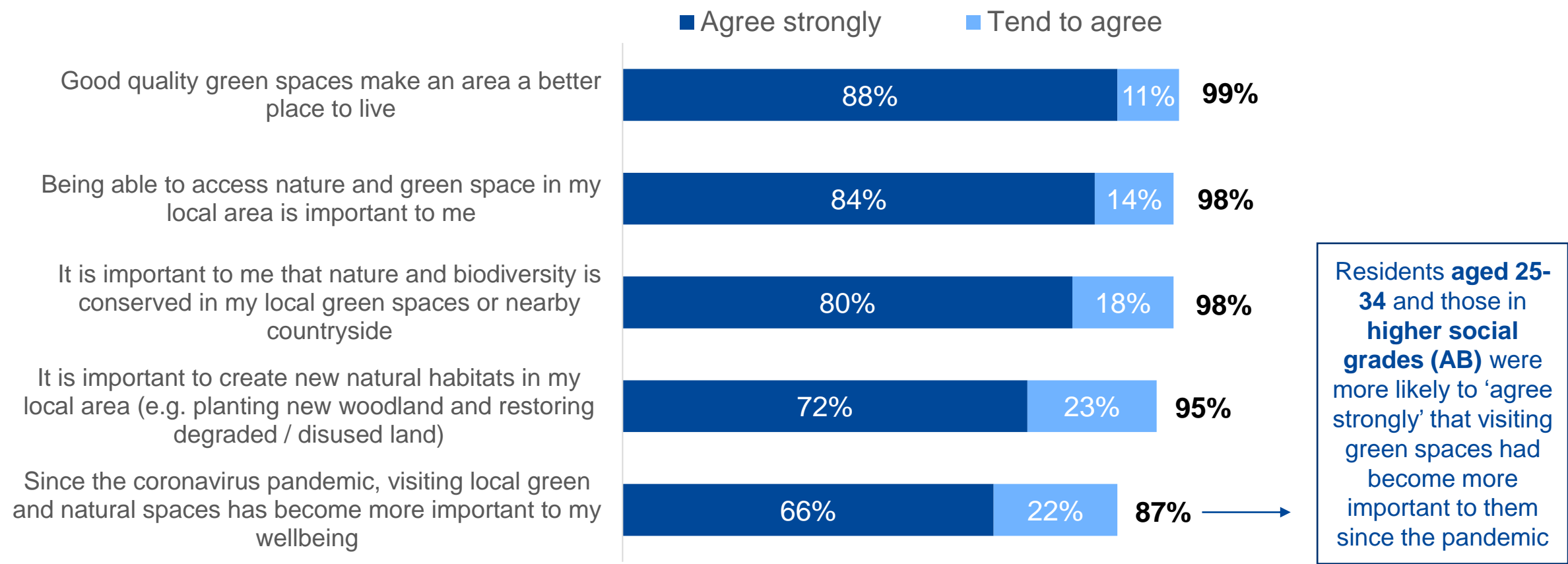
* Derived from Ivanova et al (2020), Quantifying the potential for climate change mitigation of consumption options, Environmental Research Letters Volume 15 Number 9, available at:

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Essex residents are highly connected to local green spaces – a sentiment strengthened by the pandemic

Essex residents are highly connected to local green spaces – a sentiment strengthened by the pandemic

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about green spaces?

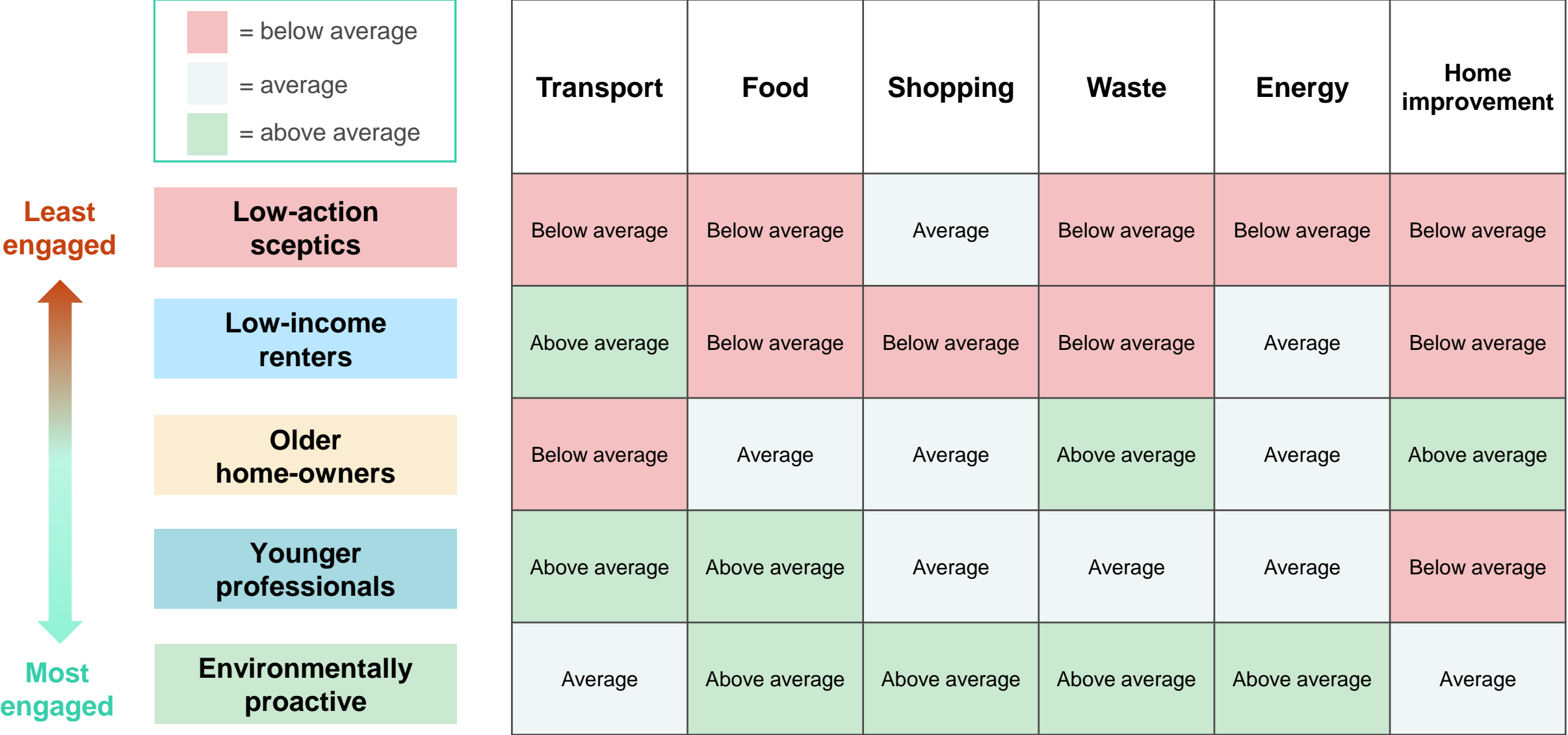


Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about green spaces? By green spaces, we mean public spaces in towns, such as parks, rivers and community gardens, and countryside areas such as woodlands, country parks, rivers and the coast. **BASE:** All respondents (1,800)

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Resident segments

Statistical analysis revealed Essex residents can be split into five segments based on their current climate action behaviours




Each segment has different opportunities and barriers to behaviour change (1)

SEGMENT	Low-action sceptics	Low-income renters	Older home-owners
% of Essex population	28%	10%	24%
% extremely / very concerned about climate change	42%	66%	72%
PROFILE	They lean male, middle-aged, and work full-time, with children at home.	Typically older residents (65+) who are less financially secure.	Tend to be relatively affluent 'empty-nesters' who are moving towards retirement.
BEHAVIOURS	They typically recycle but do few other positive behaviours.	Typically have some meat-free days, try to conserve energy and use public transport.	They typically recycle, have some meat-free days and have some home upgrades.
BARRIERS	They feel time- and budget-restricted and are unlikely to go out of their way. Do not feel personally responsible for the environment.	Cost and time are their core priorities and key barriers to change. They also lack access to some services.	They lack awareness and knowledge about eco-energy behaviours and newer kinds of home upgrades – and a sense of the benefits.

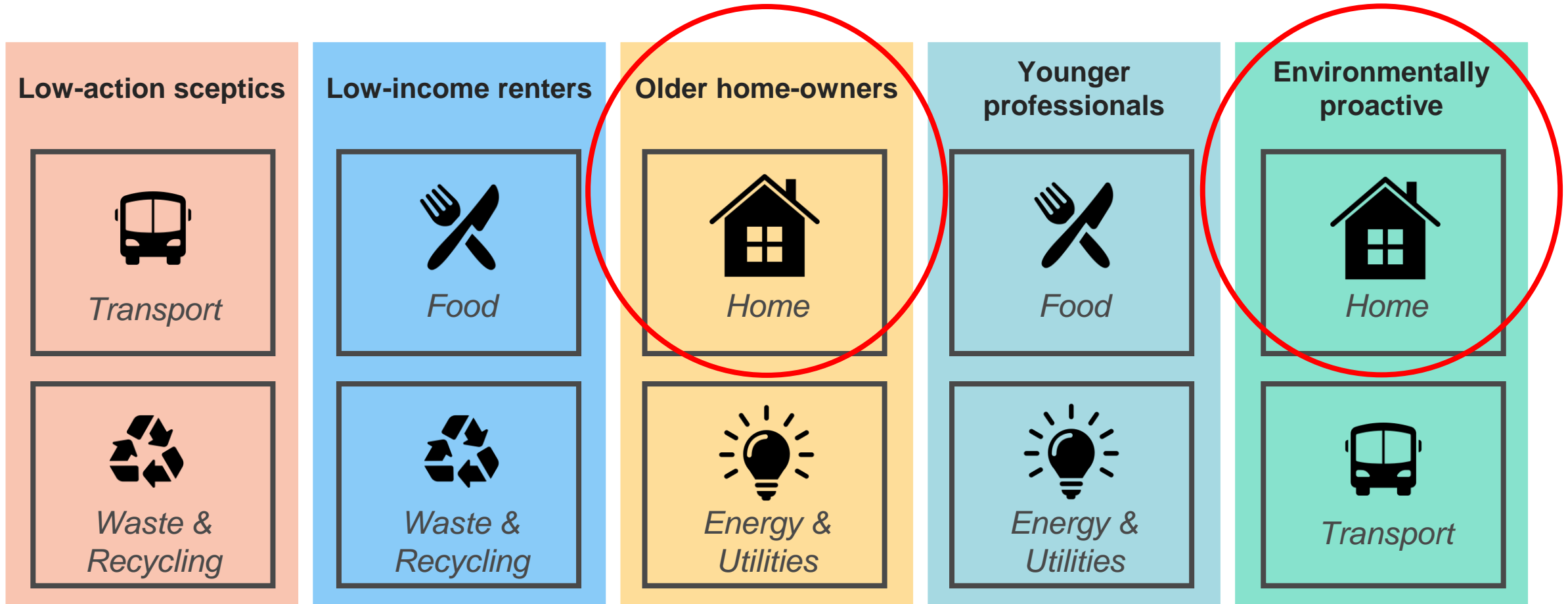
Each segment has different opportunities and barriers to behaviour change (2)

SEGMENT	Younger professionals	Environmentally proactive
% of Essex population	25%	14%
% extremely / very concerned about climate change	78%	83%
PROFILE	Typically young couples (without children or with young children) in stable jobs.	Lean towards young to middle-aged affluent females (likely with kids at home).
BEHAVIOURS	Engaged with eco behaviours across waste, shopping, food and transport.	Highly engaged with positive behaviours across all areas except transport.
BARRIERS	Lack of awareness, knowledge and prioritisation in energy, transport and home upgrades – and lacking a sense of benefit.	Some lack of awareness with newer home upgrades; a sense they're doing their bit so don't need to act in other areas.

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Barriers and drivers towards permeable paving and rewilding gardens

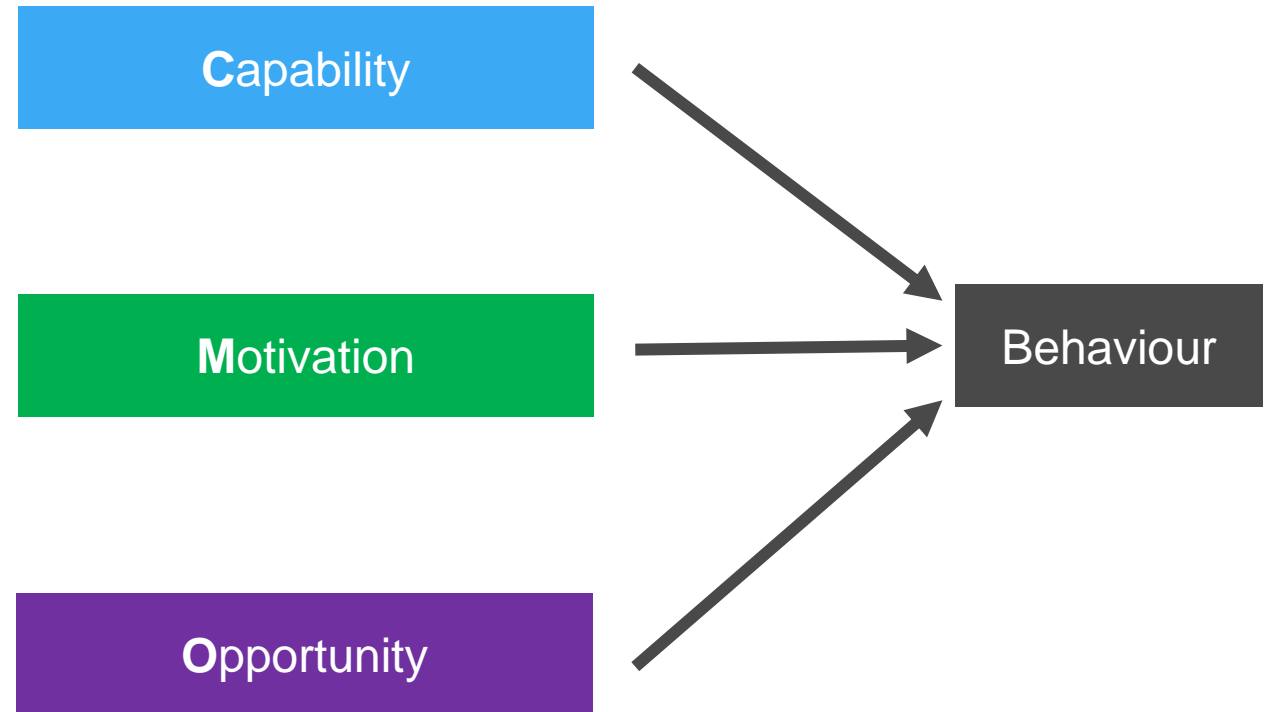
The qualitative research explored two areas of climate action behaviour in detail with each resident segment



These areas were chosen based on where there was deemed greatest opportunity for change for each segment

The COM-B framework was used to identify barriers and drivers to doing the target environmental behaviours

- Physical skill, strength or stamina
- Psychological skills or knowledge
- Reflective (plans, intentions, evaluations)
- Automatic (emotional reactions, desires, impulses inhibitions, reflex)
- Physical (time, resources, location, cues)
- Social (interpersonal influences, social cues, cultural norms)



Primary barriers to installing permeable paving / rewilding garden

Potential drivers to installing permeable paving / rewilding garden

Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of the impact of permeable paving / rewilding of gardens is very low – almost no one had heard of this and few would know how to go about doing this. • (Environmentally proactive) Awareness of rewilding is higher than in other segments and there is more interest, but some are still confused about how they would go about doing this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness around the impact of changes relating to garden wildlife and waste run-off on the environment, as well as options for permeable paving. • This information should also proactively address questions around the process (e.g. reliable tradespeople, or which aspects of the work residents could do themselves).
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low knowledge also meant that many weren't convinced these changes were worth the time/cost investment. • (Older homeowners) This segment are quite 'house proud' and would need to be confident these changes won't affect the aesthetic of their property. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's an opportunity to build on excitement around green space / nature generated through the pandemic to underline the benefits of rewilding gardens / how this can be made to look attractive. • (Environmentally proactive) This segment are more likely to have taken steps towards rewilding in their own gardens, so may also be attracted to incentives such as 'Grow Your Own' packs.
Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High upfront cost and anticipated disruption were also off-putting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting communications at those who are already looking to improve their gardens, and therefore are prepared for some disruption. • Offering smaller grants for tree planting / rewilding of gardens



Further information

Further information

Essex Open Data

- <https://data.essex.gov.uk/dataset/2kr03/essex-climate-action-research>

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