

THE POTENTIAL FOR RURAL FAMILY HOMES

A SURVEY REVIEW - SPRING 2026



CONTENTS

	Page
1 Foreword	3
2 About HAI	4
3 Background	5
4 Objective & Methodology	6
5 Recommendations	7
6 Findings	8
7 Appendices	15
8 The HAI Team	20



— FOREWORD

The findings of this much-needed study offer a clear and compelling case for changing the current regulations that pertain to “one-off” homes. This will enable the building of thousands of much needed rural family homes, sustaining vibrant rural communities and countering rural depopulation.

In 2006 there were 23,250 of this type of home built. Had this level of building kept pace with population growth we would now be building 33,000. Last year, in 2025 we built 5,900, well below demand levels, which, with the right practical solutions could see this market grow to 12,000+ homes. This will require a strategic focus on enabling solutions that balance good planning practice and regulatory reform.

The last few years have seen major innovations in low embodied carbon (LEC) solutions and climate-resilient building technologies. Since 2019 there have been advances in heat pumps, biobased insulation, solar PV, battery storage, smart energy management systems, low-carbon construction materials, high-performance building envelopes, and advanced water treatment and management systems. And since 2019 we have also seen profound cultural changes such as working from home and the increasing number of electric cars. In February 2026, the CSO reported that 956,700 people were working from home - more than three times the pre-Covid level. And the share of electric cars has grown from 13% in 2019 to 56% in 2025. Ireland exceeded its 2025 Climate Action Plan targets for EV adoption, with over 200,000 electric vehicles now on Irish roads. Together these changes ensure that a newly built rural family home is more sustainable than ever before.

With this in mind, the survey’s findings highlight both the potential and the obstacles in achieving momentum in this important solution to housing our population.

A holistic approach - combining streamlined regulation, and sustainable development practices - can unlock this potential while ensuring long-term economic, social, and environmental benefits. Implementing the survey’s recommendations will accelerate numbers and contribute meaningfully to addressing the housing crisis. A shortage of housing is the problem. The solution is to build houses. This document sets out a clear roadmap for this to happen.



Tara Brennan

President, Hardware Association Ireland,
Marketing & Development Director, Chadwicks Group



— ABOUT HAI

Hardware Association Ireland's mission is to advance the mutual interests of, and deliver relevant benefits to, hardware and builder's merchants and building material suppliers through effective representation, training and development, market intelligence and networking opportunities.

Our role is to:

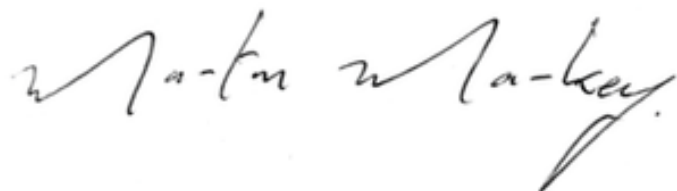
- Be the voice of our sector.
- Improve the overall market environment for the sector.
- Improve the operational performance of our members.
- Ensure members have relevant information.

Since 1938 Hardware Association Ireland (HAI) is the national trade association representing hardware, building materials, DIY, homewares and garden at retail, wholesale, and manufacturing level.

Our 400 members, through their 700 outlets, make a valuable contribution to the economy of Ireland. From family run businesses to publicly quoted companies, HAI members are an important presence in cities, towns, and villages throughout the country. Our members directly employ over 26,000 people, and they underpin the jobs of a further 178,000 builders and trades professionals. We uniquely represent all levels of the supply chain.

The sector has an annual turnover of €4.0 billion (CRO), pays wages in excess of €1 billion and it is a significant contributor to the public purse. HAI speaks with one consolidated voice and fulfils a unique and vital role in connecting merchants with their suppliers in a non-commercial environment. HAI members play a key role in the construction supply chain, providing an efficient and effective route to market for building material products and a vital source of credit to customers.

We represent over 400 employers in the industry, and our members operate in one of Ireland's key economic sectors. New builds, renovations, empty home rejuvenation, and retrofitting are major barometers of and a contributor to the nation's economic success.



Martin Markey

Chief Executive Officer,
Hardware Association Ireland



BACKGROUND

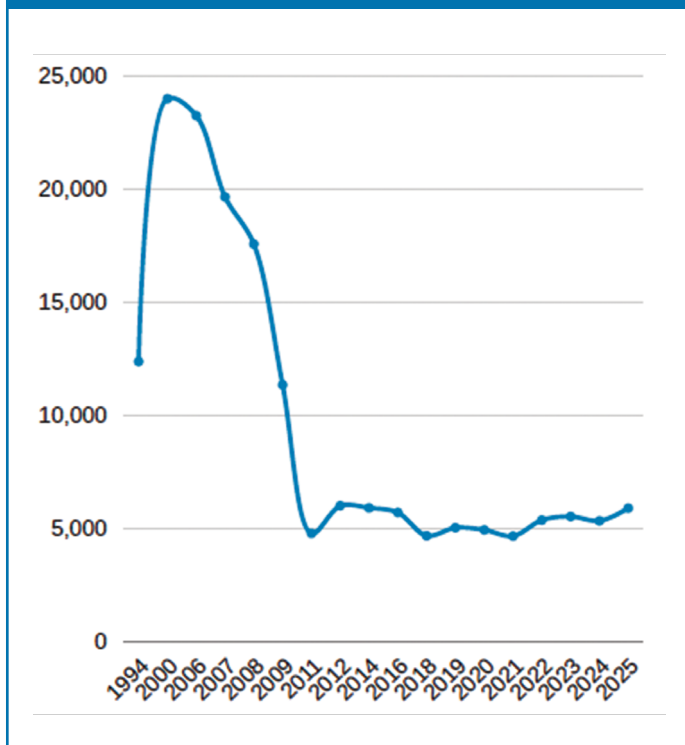
The shortage of housing, of all types, is a major challenge to us all.

The Housing Commission has estimated that, as of the 2022 Census, there was a housing deficit of between 212,500 and 256,000 homes. Home ownership amongst those under 44 has plummeted, and the number of working adults living at home with their parents has soared. Our birthrates have also crashed (CSO). The shortage of housing has caused house prices to soar, making them increasingly unaffordable for many citizens. While there is no silver bullet, the solution to housing will come from a number of sources and all types of housing.

As well as newly built housing schemes and apartments, rejuvenated empty homes above the shop properties and rural family homes will all need to be a part of the solution. The infrastructure and other challenges that beset new housing schemes will be addressed in the next couple of years. The incentives for empty homes are working and those for above the shop will come into place soon. All will add to the volumes required to meet annual demand and to clear the backlog.

However, even if conditions are favourable this is extremely unlikely to happen in the short term. This leaves one-off houses. In 2006 there were 23,250 built. If this had kept pace with population growth, we would now be building 33,000 per year instead of the 5,929 in 2025. (CSO)

CHART 1



One Off Homes Numbers 1994-2025

While we are unlikely to see volumes of 23,250, the current number at 5,929 is far too low. A doubling of volume to 12,000 seems achievable and timely.

Regulations brought in to protect Ireland from another property-related crash are now blocking rural family homes resulting in the destruction of rural communities and even more housing price inflation.

HAI had heard several stories from people who had built or endeavoured to build one off homes - mainly rural family homes. These anecdotes have been universally negative. However, anecdote does not underpin good policy. With this in mind HAI undertook this survey of stakeholders to evidence what is happening in the one-off segment of the housing market.

OBJECTIVE & METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to examine the role of one-off rural housing, particularly rural family homes, in addressing Ireland's housing shortage. To gather evidence-based insight from key stakeholders on how current regulations, planning practices, and market conditions are impacting the delivery of such homes, with a view to identifying practical, balanced policy solutions.

To ensure the research was informed by a comprehensive and balanced evidence base, HAI engaged with a wide range of stakeholders who collectively influence or are involved in rural housing. This approach captured perspectives across the full housing lifecycle, including material supply, design, planning, regulation, market dynamics, and policy development. By incorporating professional, operational, market-led, and political viewpoints, the methodology ensures that the findings reflect both strategic considerations and on-the-ground realities affecting rural housing outcomes.

Key stakeholder groups:

1. **HAI Members**
2. **Estate Agents & Auctioneers**
3. **Architects**
4. **County Councillors & TDs**
5. **Local government officials**

Sample

239 responses were received from a cross section of key stakeholder groups relevant to rural housing in Ireland.

Methodology

A structured questionnaire, agreed in advance, was issued via email. The research combines quantitative data with qualitative stakeholder commentary for context and corroboration.

Timeframe

Fieldwork was conducted between late January and mid February 2026.

Hardware Association Ireland (HAI) would like to thank the Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers (IPAV) for allowing access to their members and encouraging participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research identifies two interrelated structural issues that are materially undermining the delivery of rural housing in Ireland. Addressing these issues would ease supply constraints, support sustainable rural communities, and help relieve pressure across the wider housing system. Based on stakeholder evidence, HAI makes the following recommendations:

1

Reform or Abolish the Housing Need Regulation

The research strongly supports urgent reform or abolition of the Housing Need Regulation in its current application. Respondents consistently identified the regulation as a significant constraint on the construction of much needed rural housing, directly contributing to the wider housing shortage. Furthermore, its operation is causing ongoing frustration and conflict between citizens, local authorities, and national government. The evidence suggests that the regulation, while originally introduced with valid safeguards, is now acting as a barrier to appropriate rural housing delivery and is no longer aligned with current demographic and housing realities.

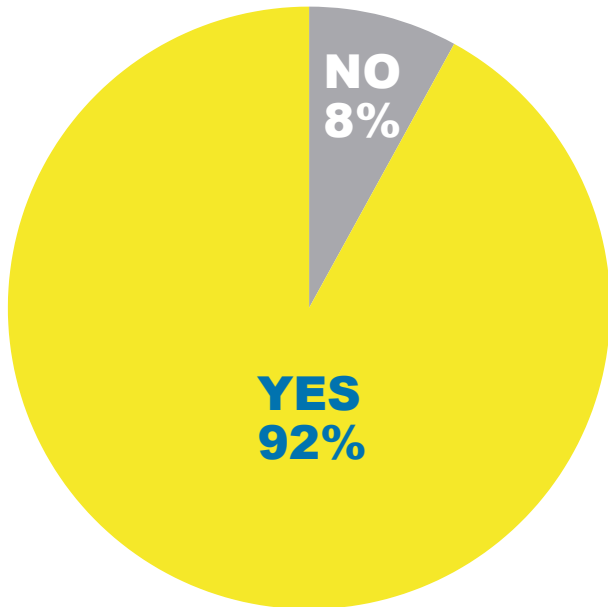
2

Planning System Reform to Support Rural Housing

The research reveals an overwhelming perception among stakeholders of a systemic bias against rural housing within the planning process. Planning is widely experienced as adversarial, opaque, and heavily procedural, rather than enabling or supportive. While the root causes, whether cultural, resourcing related, or structural, are beyond the scope of this research, there is clear evidence of a disconnect between the stated strategic objectives of planning and its practical application to rural family homes. The findings indicate an urgent need for a step change in planning approach to deliver a genuine breakthrough in rural housing and to ensure planning actively supports the viability and sustainability of rural communities.

FINDINGS

CHART 2

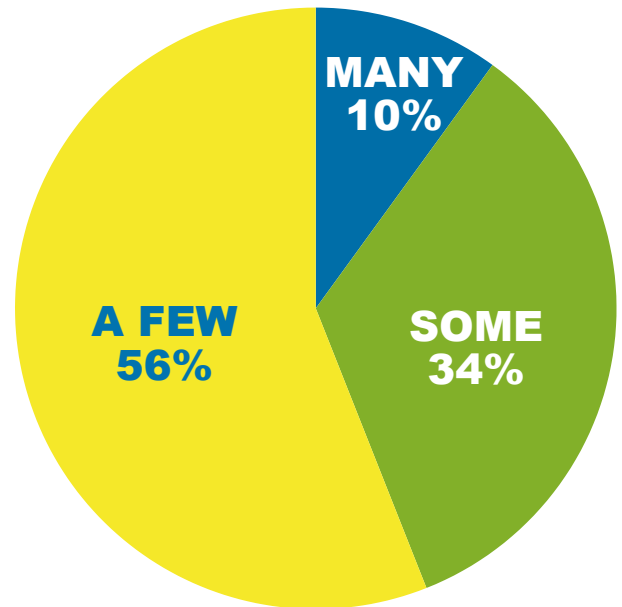


Is there a shortfall between demand for one-off houses and the completion of one-off houses in your area?

While the term one-off house has a number of applications and meanings in this survey by far the predominant meaning was that of a **rural family home**.

Over 90% of those surveyed say that there is a **shortfall between demand for rural family homes and the building of rural family homes** in their area. (See Chart 2)

CHART 3



Would you say that there are many / some / a few opportunities for people to build one-off-houses in your area?

When asked about the opportunity to build one off houses only 10% of respondents said that there were many opportunities for people to build them in their area.

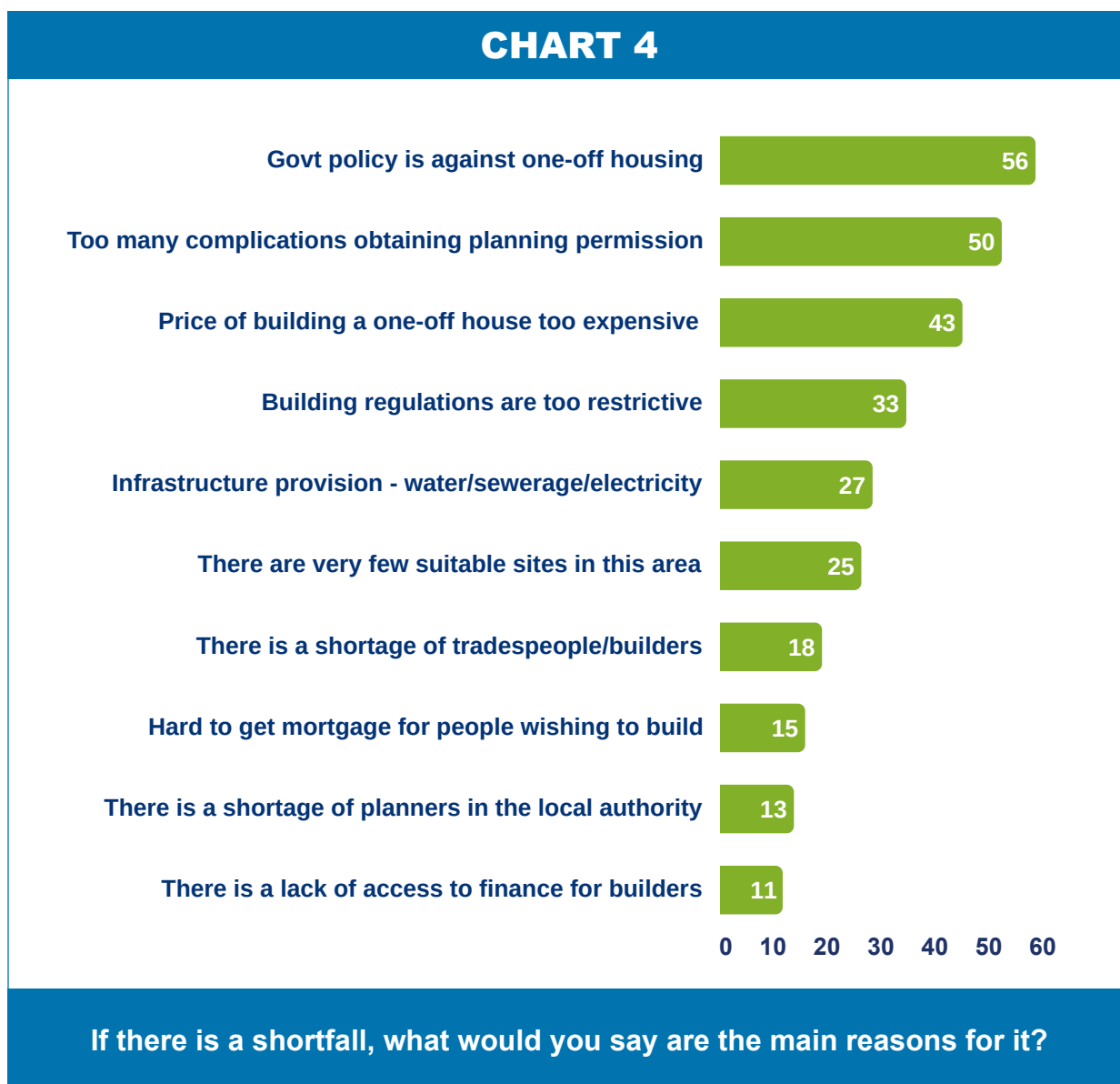
(See Chart 3)



FINDINGS

This lack of opportunity is not reflective of demand - demand is strong. 29% of respondents said that less than one third of what could be built is built, 21% said that around a third is built, 35% say that about a half is built, and only 15% agree that three quarters or more are built.

(See Chart B in the Appendices)



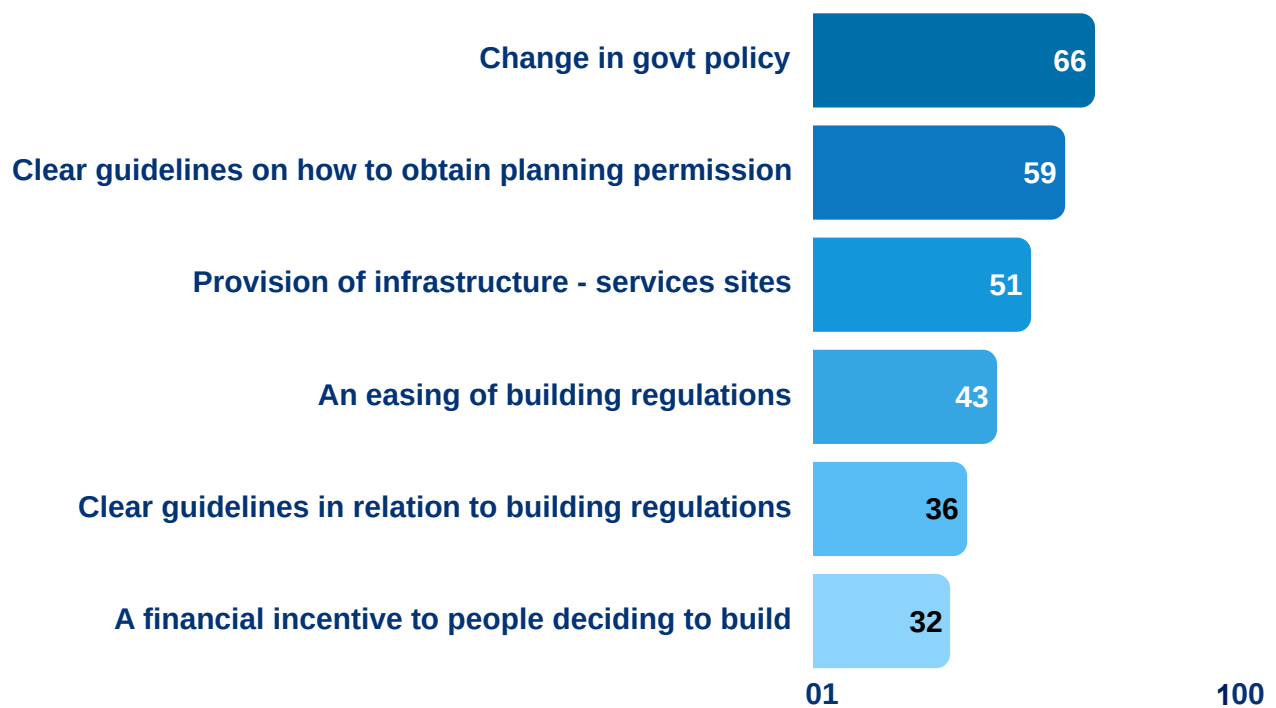
Government policy is cited as the main reason for the shortfall (56%), followed by too many complications in obtaining planning permission (50%), the price of building (43%), building regulations (33%) and inadequate infrastructure at (27%).

(See Chart 4)

FINDINGS

There is little difference amongst the key stakeholder groups in the order of the reasons for the shortfall – **Government Policy** is seen by all as the main reason followed by complications in obtaining planning permissions as the second reason amongst all. Interestingly the politicians cite Government policy as the top reason for the shortfall. They also mention a lack of infrastructure provision, as do local government employees. Complications in obtaining planning permission is the foremost concern of architects. (See Chart D in Appendices)

CHART 5



In your experience what would have to change to encourage more people to build one-off houses?

Required changes – a **change in Government policy** is stated as the main need (66%), followed by **clearer guidelines in the planning permission process** (59%) and provision of infrastructure (51%). There was very little variation in these needs amongst the different stakeholder groups. (See Chart 5)

FINDINGS

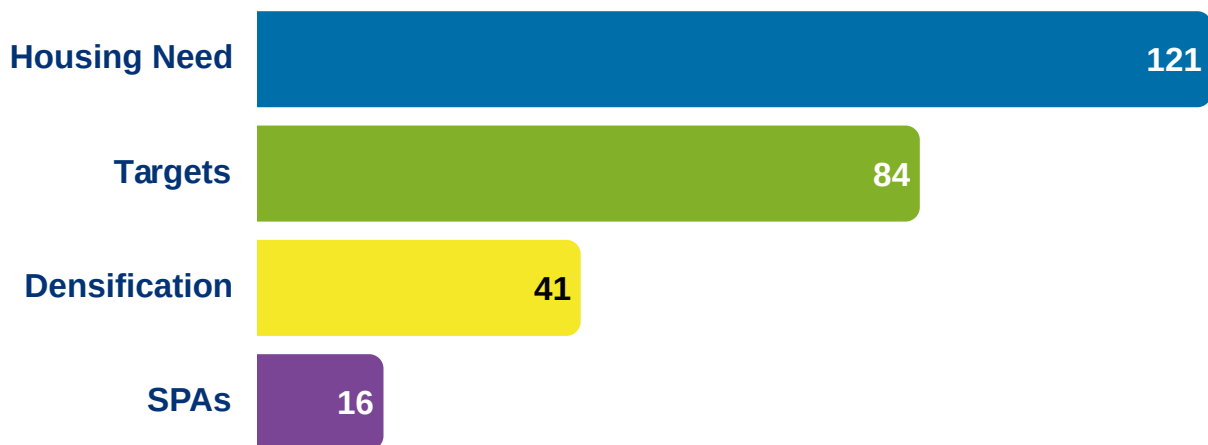
When financial incentives are mentioned a lower VAT rate (51%) and a waiver of development levies (32%) and both (17%) are the preference. **The housing need requirement is seen by most respondents as the largest blockage to building rural family homes**, cited by 46% overall (by 40% of politicians). Other factors are targets 32%, densification (16%) and SPAs (6%). (See Chart 6 and Chart 7)

CHART 6

	Est Agents	Politicians	HAI Members	Archs	Loc Govt	All
Housing Need	55%	40%	34%	29%	40%	46%
Targets for City/Urban/Rural	28%	35%	34%	43%	60%	32%
Densification	13%	15%	23%	29%	0%	16%
SPAs	4%	10%	9%	0%	0%	6%

If a change in Government Policy, is there a specific policy that would need to change?

CHART 7



If a change in Government Policy, is there a specific policy that would need to change?

FINDINGS

In direct feedback and quotes from respondents the issue of housing need dominates the conversation. Its application is almost universally seen as negative and an impediment to building. **The following are direct quotes received from survey respondents in open-ended questions.**

”

Housing needs to be declared as an emergency so that the government can ease up on the “local need” and other restrictions on rural housing especially where there are deficiencies in nearby towns and villages.

Councillor

”

The local area needs restriction is extremely prohibitive for people wishing to build in a rural setting. Back in the 90’s and early 2000’s planning was granted with a primary residence clause for between 5-7 years, this prevented speculative rural development. Why did this stop?

Estate Agent

”

Incentivise people to return home by easing the availability of one-off sites and the connection to the community regulation.

Councillor

”

Housing need has caused this housing shortage.

Estate Agent

”

Links to local community - hard to establish that if you have been living abroad for 10+ years. Plus does that really matter, when you are trying to breathe new life into declining areas?

Councillor

”

Common sense, how can a couple spend thousands on planning reports and then get refused because the gate that is already there is not suitable, then I as a public representative end up handing the couple a social housing form, its disgraceful.

Councillor

FINDINGS

”

Greater consistency and flexibility in the application of rural housing policy is required, particularly around local housing need criteria, wastewater servicing standards, development contributions and pre-commencement conditions. Current policy interpretation often prevents viable one-off homes in appropriate rural locations, especially for younger families and self-builders in regional areas, despite compliance with environmental and planning standards.

Councillor

”

One-off housing is looked upon as negative. This needs to change and building housing on available lands should be promoted.

Councillor

”

Restrictions to people building within 10km even when there are no restrictions on people from further away buying completed homes as holiday homes/Airbnb

Local Authority Employee



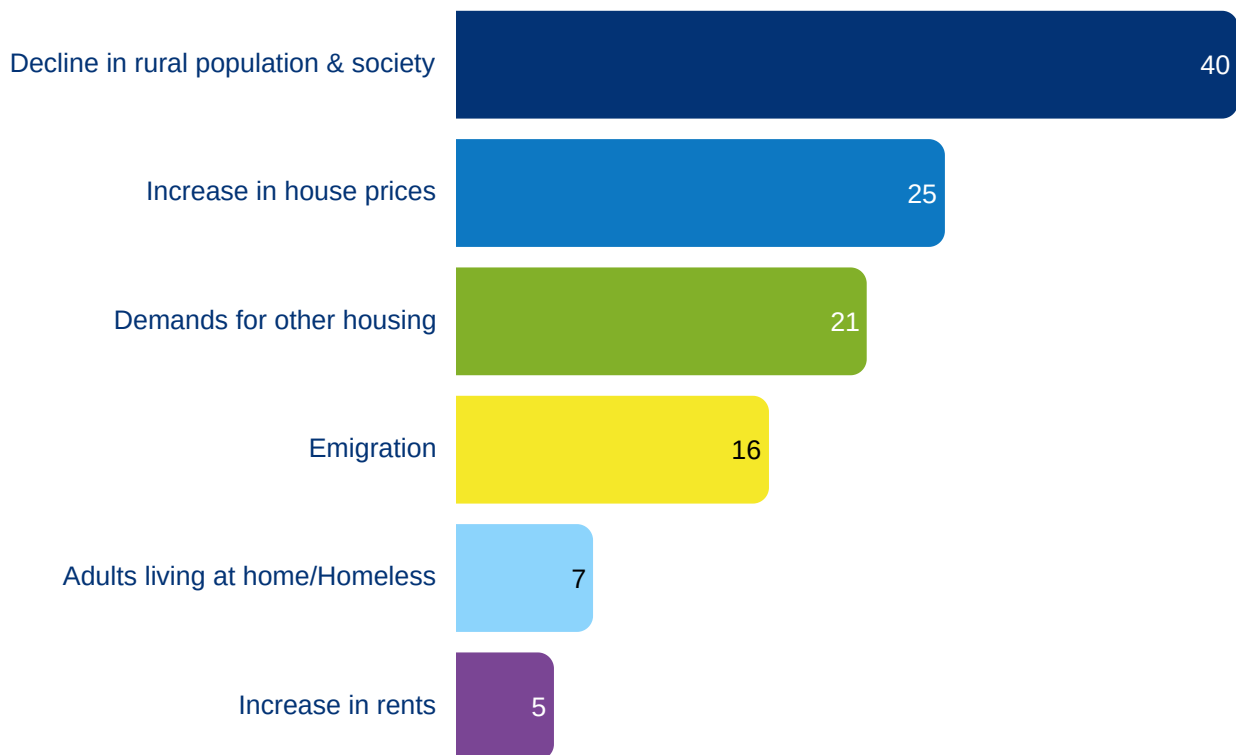
FINDINGS

Respondents are unequivocal about the consequences of maintaining current barriers to the construction of rural family homes. The evidence points to a clear and worsening outcome: declining rural populations, rising house prices and rents, increased emigration, and a growing number of working adults unable to leave the family home.

These trends threaten the viability of rural communities and will place further strain on the wider housing system if left unaddressed. Rural Ireland has long been characterised by strong social capital and community cohesion, yet this research indicates that this fabric is now under pressure due to the lack of housing.

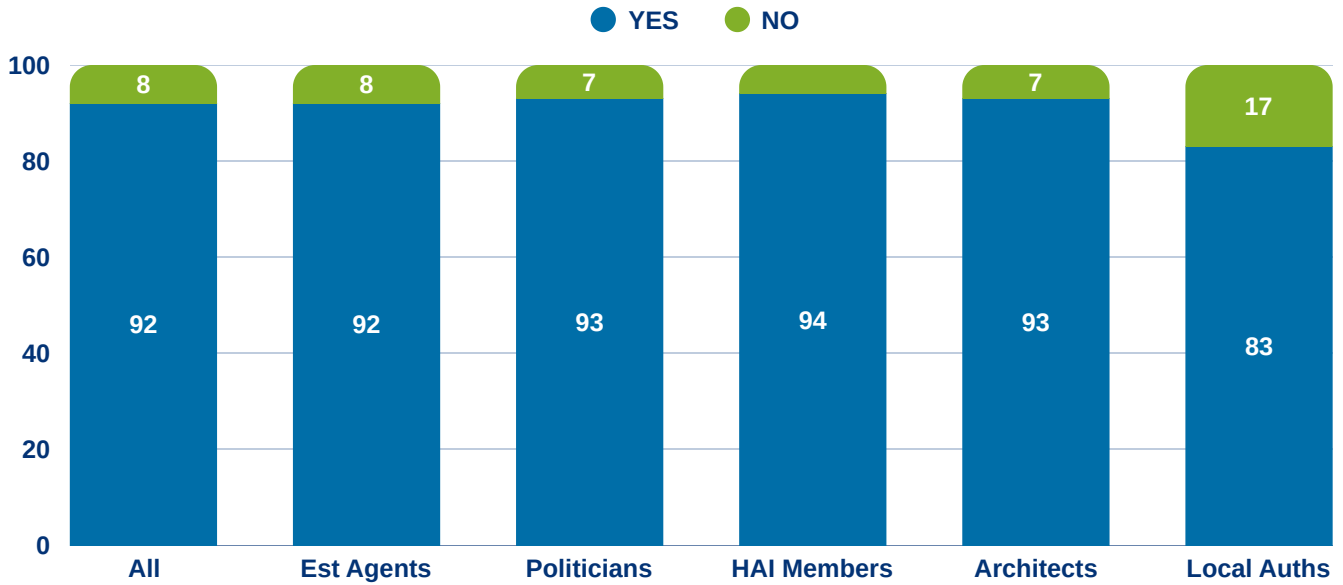
Crucially, stakeholders emphasise that this decline is neither inevitable nor necessary. With targeted regulatory and planning reform, the delivery of rural family homes can be restored—supporting community sustainability, easing housing pressures, and aligning policy outcomes with national social and economic objectives. (See Chart 8)

CHART 8



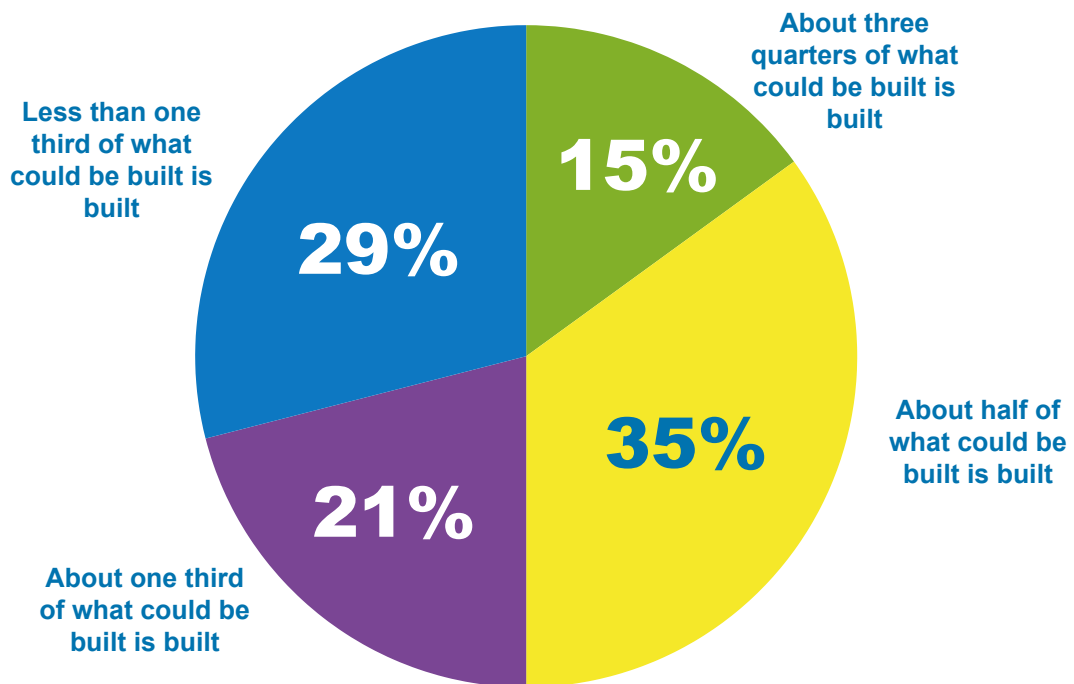
What will happen if these homes are not built?

CHART A



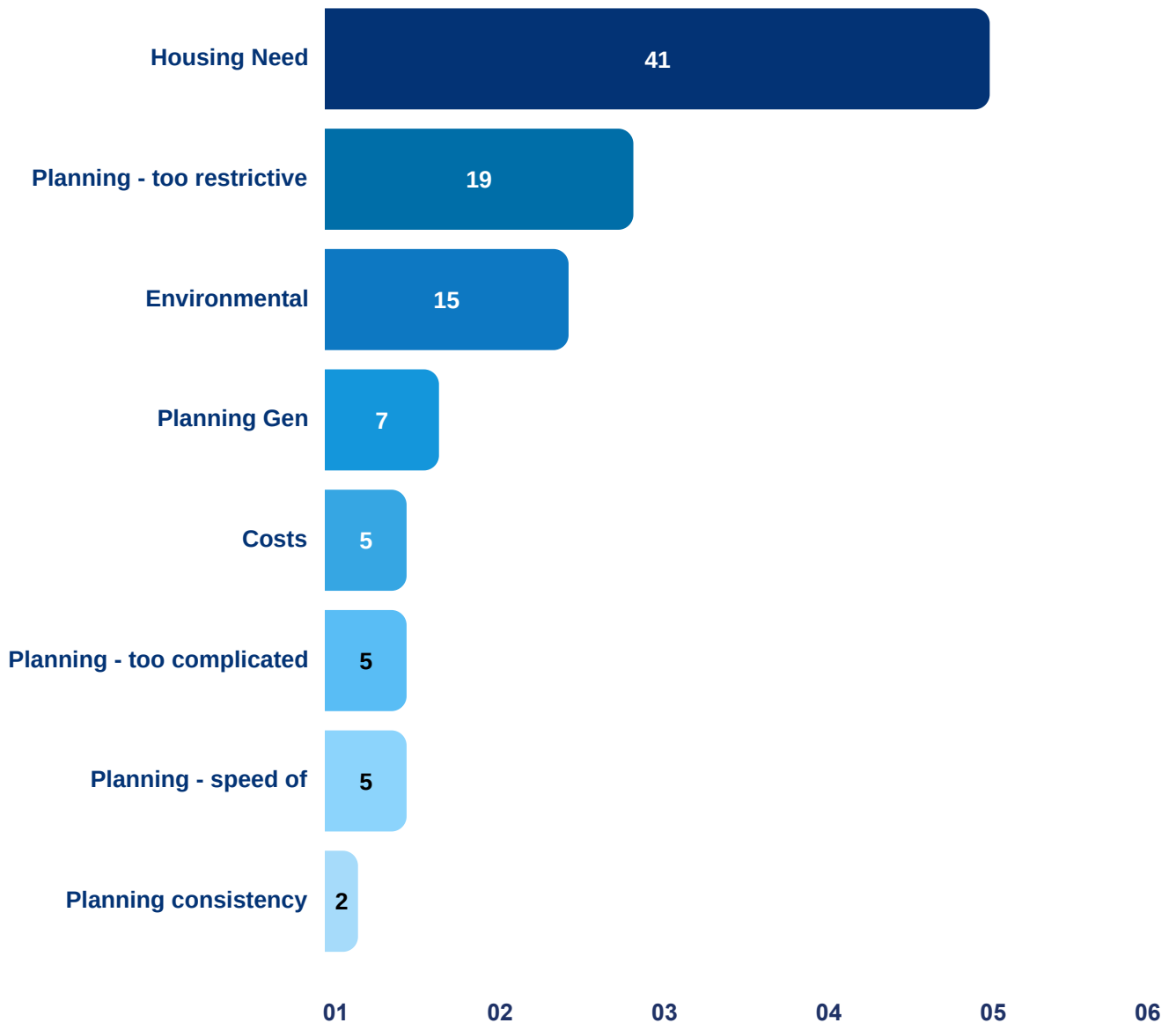
Is there a shortfall between demand and the completion of one-off houses in your area?

CHART B



If there is a shortfall, what would you estimate that shortfall to be?

CHART C



If 'easing of building regulations', are there any specific regulations that are stopping the building of one-off houses?

CHART D

(In order of importance by stakeholder group top 3 highlighted)

	Estate Agents	Politicians	HAI Members	Architects	Local Govt	All
Govt policy is against one-off houses.	20%	20%	23%	17%	8%	20%
There are too many complications in obtaining planning permission.	18%	18%	19%	26%	15%	18%
The price of building a one-off house has become too expensive	19%	11%	15%	13%	15%	16%
The building regulations are too restrictive.	13%	11%	11%	9%	8%	12%
Infrastructure provision (water/sewerage/electricity)	9%	12%	9%	4%	15%	10%
There are very few suitable sites	10%	9%	4%	22%	15%	9%
There is a shortage of planners in the local authority.	6%	4%	3%	9%	0%	5%
There is a lack of access to finance for builders.	4%	3%	4%	0%	8%	4%
There is a shortage of tradespeople/builders.	0%	5%	8%	0%	15%	3%
It is hard to get mortgage finance for people wishing to build.	0%	6%	6%	0%	0%	3%

If there is a shortfall what would you say are the main reasons for it?
(responses broken down by respondent)

If nothing happens with rural family homes?

”

Current houses will increase in price and local shops and pubs won't be supported

Builders Merchant

”

Ever-increasing property prices

Local Authority Employee

”

Depopulation - local people won't stay in Ireland or move back to their local area. It takes the heart out of the local community and the support for their families, young or old.

Estate Agent

”

Families move away, local support network breaks down, elderly family members with no family around them

Builders Merchant

”

*Young people will continue to emigrate.
There will be a hollowing out of rural
communities.*

Councillor

”

*Existing house prices will continue to rise, the
rural way of life and small local shops and schools
will cease to exist as existing rural.*

Local Authority Employee

”

*Emigration increases and we lose our valuable
young workforce, rural communities decline.*

Councillor

”

*Housing stock continues to be occupied
by older people.*

Estate Agent

ON BEHALF OF HAI'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



TARA BRENNAN
President, Chadwicks Group



MYLES CONLON
Formerra



NIALL FAY
Vice President, Grant Engineering



ANN MURRAY
Topline Tractamotors



EDDIE KELLY
Hon. Treasurer, Brooks Group



STEPHEN O'CONNOR
Barrett's of Maynooth Homevalue



MARTIN MARKEY
Secretary / CEO Hardware Association Ireland



MARYANNE QUIGLEY
Wallace's Homevalue Hardware



PAUL CANDON
Past President/United Hardware



MARK SHARKEY
Templecrone Co-Operative Society



129 Baggot Street Lower, Dublin 2

T: 01 2980969

W: www.hardwareassociation.ie

E: info@hardwareassociation.ie