



# Edinburgh Building Retrofit and Improvement Collective: Homeowners Questionnaire (Summer 2023): Report

At present, official support for homeowner retrofit focuses only on working as individuals, an approach widely seen as insufficient and failing to meet the scale of the challenge. The Collective believes in the benefits of communities working collaboratively to realise advantages including in cost, quality of work, involvement of the best contractors and the improvement of community resilience (which will be beneficial in meeting the wider challenges of adapting to a changing world and making a just and equitable transition).

## What we did

Prepared, and promoted as widely as possible across Edinburgh, a: [Homeowners Questionnaire](#) (HoQ). It contained seven questions: three requiring ranking of a set of given options and four requesting free text responses to give us suggestions of other options for the same topics. As part of the questionnaire the collaborative approach was introduced and respondents' opinions related to it were sought. The questionnaire's topics were:

- Obstacles to individual building retrofit and improvement (BRI) - Q1,2
- Things that might help overcome these BRI obstacles - Q3,4
- An introduction to the potential advantages of collaborative community-led BRI
- Obstacles to collaborative community-led BRI (CCBRI) - Q5,6
- Things that might help overcome these CCBRI obstacles - Q7

The official period for submission of responses was from 01/06/23 to 16/07/23. This report covers the responses from that period. (The questionnaire remains open, as a useful ongoing source of data).

## What we got back



143 usable responses from across the city, covering 54 of the [Natural Neighbourhoods](#) defined by the City of Edinburgh Council. (See 'Where respondents are located' below)

## What the questionnaire tells us - summarised

### **75% of respondents live in shared ownership buildings**

Do you have shared responsibility for maintenance?



Analysis note: Ranking questions (1,3,5) vs free text questions (2,4,6,7)

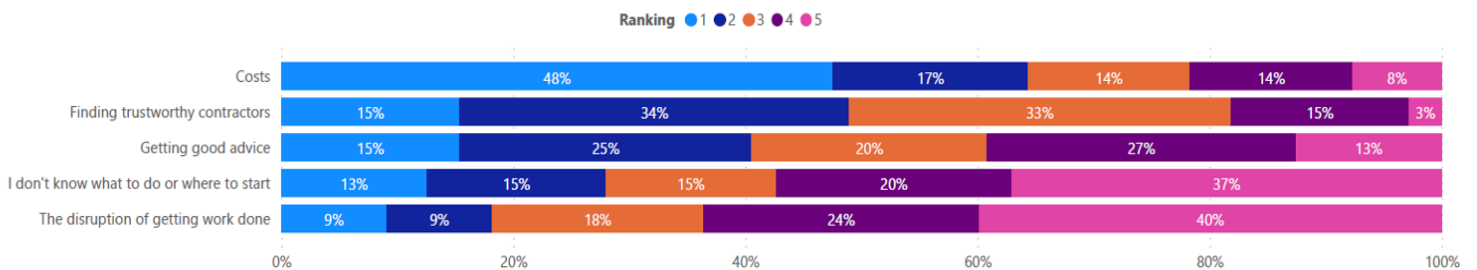
In the ranking questions (which *had* to be answered), respondents were given a list of five items and asked to rank them from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important). The answers are presented as horizontal stacked bar graphs, showing the percentage of respondents who gave each item each rank.

In the free text questions (which were optional, except for 7), the respondents' answers were post-analysed by the Collective team in order to identify the various (often common) themes, and then each theme(s) touched on in each response was recorded, *without ranking*. The counts of responses for the most commonly referenced themes in answers to each question are presented as bar graphs.

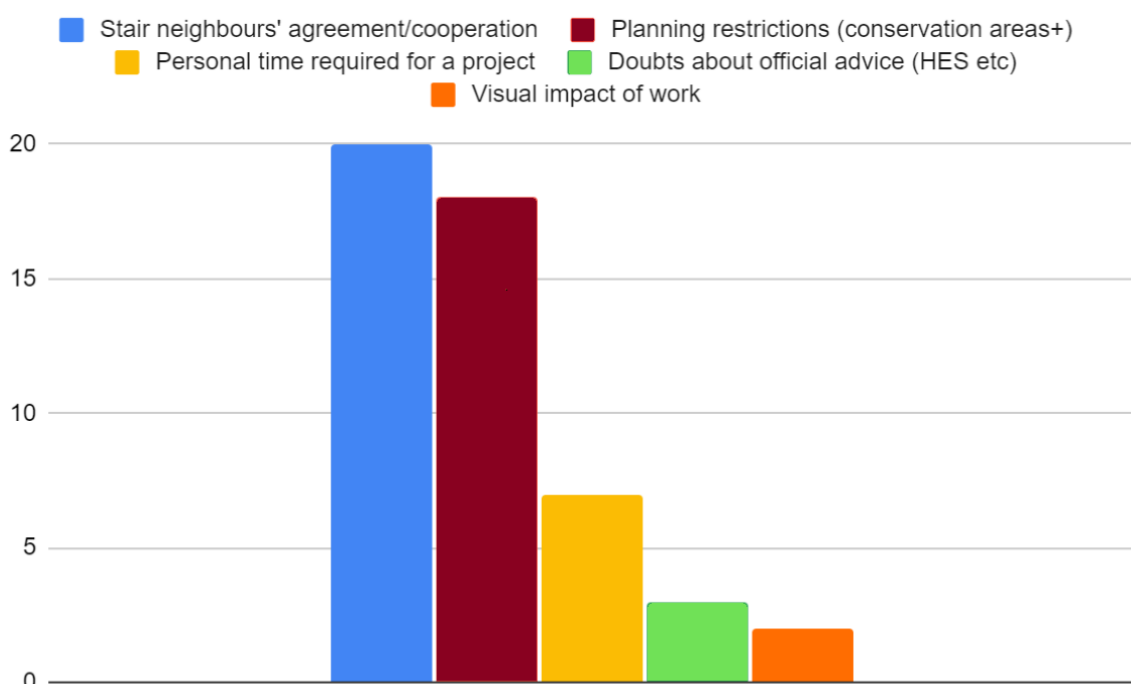
(Individual) BRI: Obstacles (Q1,2)

- **COST CONCERNS!**
- Finding **trustworthy** contractors
- Agreement / **cooperation** with neighbours
- Planning restrictions (particularly in conservation areas etc)
- Some concern over trustworthiness of advice and time required to have a project.

Question 1: Obstacles to improving your home's performance, particularly around energy efficiency / warmth / occupants' health



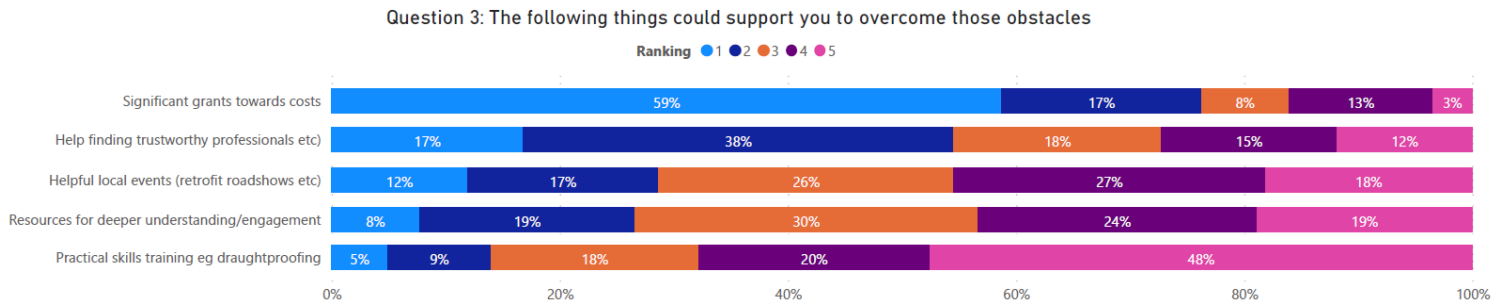
**Question 2: Possible obstacles seen by respondents (other than those in Q1) to getting building improvement and retrofit done (Most common themes and number of respondents identifying each)**



**(Individual) BRI: Ideas for things to help overcome these obstacles (Q3.4)**

- **(BIGGER) GRANTS!**
- Support finding **trustworthy** contractors
- Something like a ‘Building Passport’ for a **trustworthy** assessment for retrofit
- **Legal changes** to support / require retrofit action and reduce **planning** constraints.

NB: There was *relatively* less interest in (skills training for) DIY, local events, info and educational resources.



**Question 4: Suggested supports (other than those in Q3) to help overcome Q1-2 obstacles**

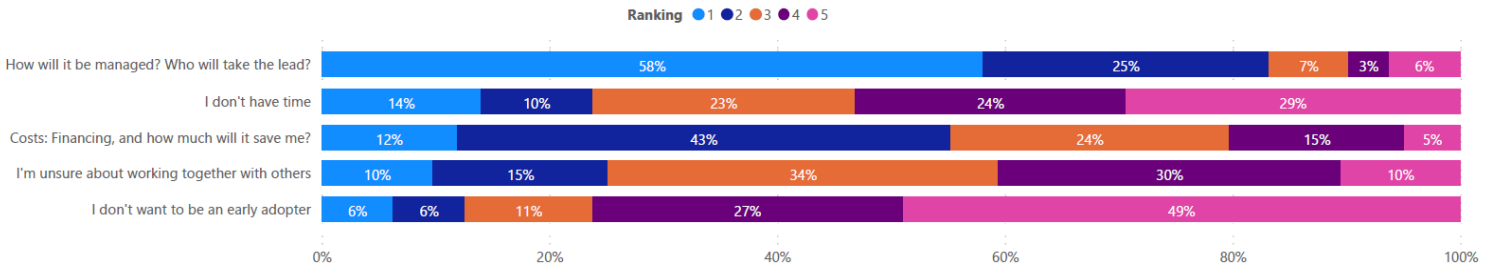
(Most common themes and number of respondents identifying each)



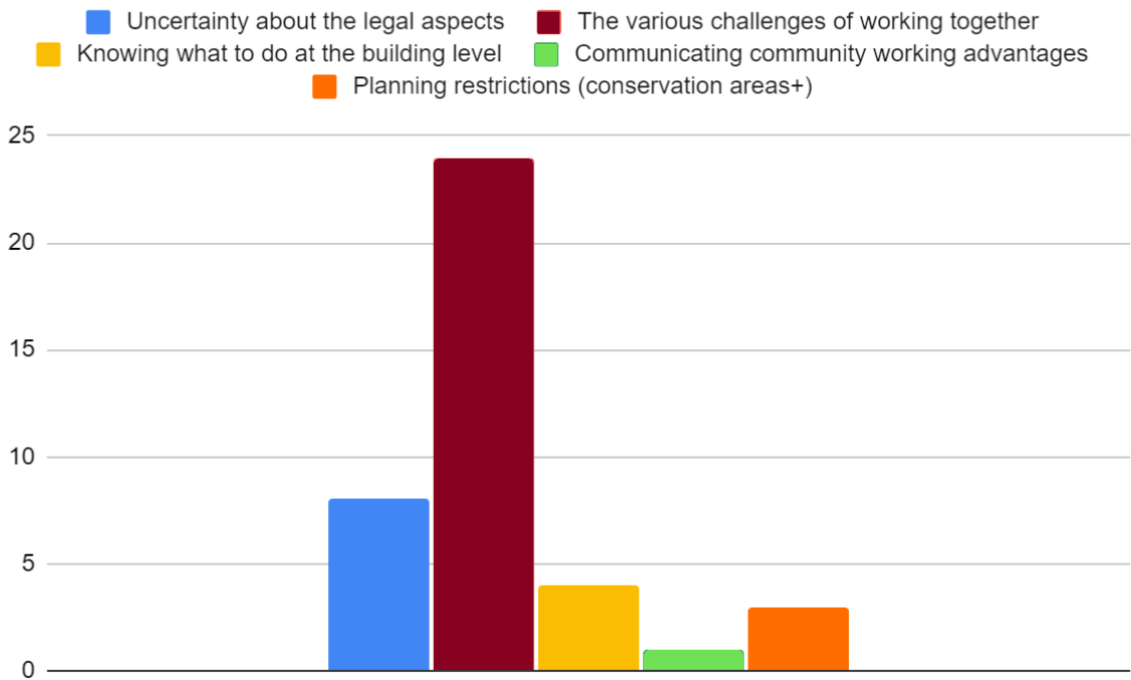
**(Community-led) BRI: Obstacles (Q5-6)**

- Most importantly: Management and leadership of joint projects, including the **challenges of working with others (particularly on Stairs)**
- **Financing** such work vs. the individual **savings** in project cost it would result in.
- **The legal aspects** (including what happens when people move)
- **Planning** constraints.

Question 5: Which of the following do you see as obstacles to you considering community-led retrofit



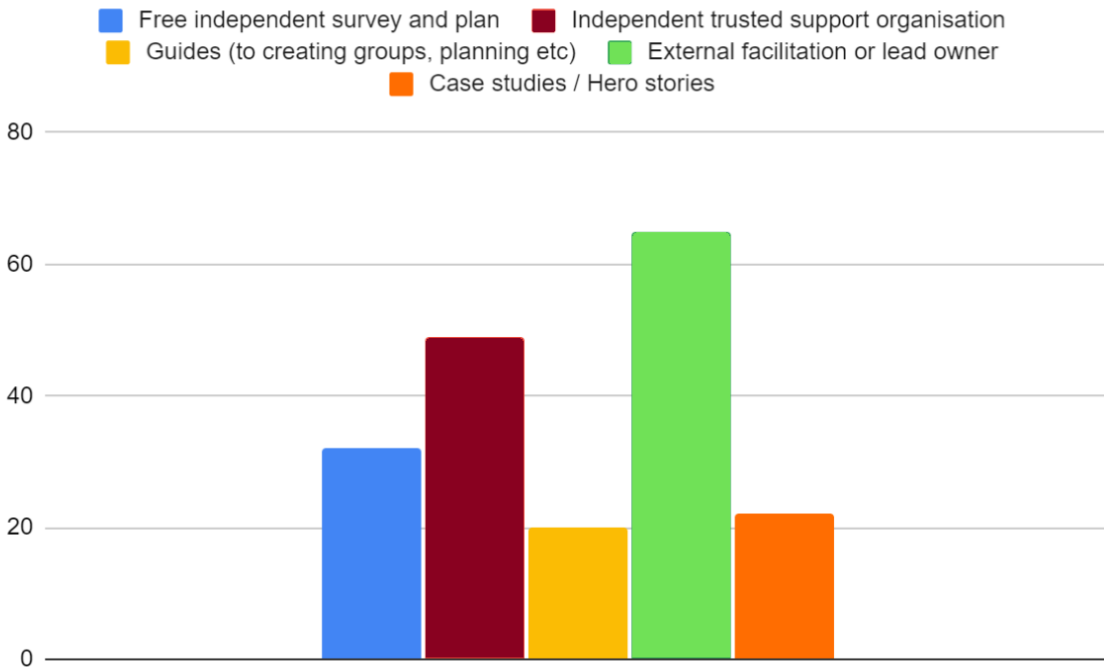
**Question 6: Possible obstacles seen by respondents (other than those in Q5) to considering community-led retrofit**  
**(Most common themes and number of respondents identifying each)**



**(Community-led) BRI: Ideas for things to help overcome these obstacles (Q7)**

- External **independent** facilitation (or trusted lead owner)
- **Independent trusted** support organisation
- **Free, independent** survey and plan
- **Case studies** / ‘hero stories’
- **Guides** (eg to planning consent, Owners Association creation, working in conservation areas etc)

**Question 7: Suggested supports to help overcome Q5-6 obstacles**  
(Most common themes and number of respondents identifying each)



**(Community-led) BRI: Obstacles, desired help & potential outputs for the Collective**

**Collaborative Retrofit - Obstacles and Potential EdinBRIC Supports**

**55.8%** Dealing with challenges of practical/organisational/non-cooperative aspects of working with others

**35%** wanted an intermediary / **Lead Owner**  
**27.5%** looking for an **Independent Trusted Organisation**

**16.7%** sought a free **Independent Survey and Plan**

2.3% Communicating the advantages of working as a community  
Events: Social Events/Community Events/Connect to MSP Events

18.5% are uncertain about legal aspects

Workshops/Toolkits - Sinking Funds to Grants 101/Risk Advice 101

13.9% want to know what to do at the building level  
Workshops/Toolkits - Windows 101/Building Pathology 101

9.3% sought considerations re Planning/Listed Building Consent/Conservation Area restrictions and costs

9.7% looked for **Guides**:

Planning Consent - ECC

Conservation Area/Listed Building Consent - ECC

Set up Residents Association – U1R

Define Shared Repairs Responsibilities – U1R

Can Do DIY tasks - Retrofixers

10% asked for case Studies / Hero Stories

## Obstacles and ways to overcome them: Overall conclusions at city level

**Trustworthiness** (of multiple aspects) is the biggest issue alongside **costs** and concerns about **working with neighbours**. A good number of respondents commented to the effect that 'joint working is not going to happen on my stair' because of bad neighbours, landlords, personality clashes etc). **Taking responsibility for the collaborative facilitation, project planning and management process out to a trustworthy, independent external system is something that is seen as highly desirable.**

## Observations at different neighbourhood levels

The results of looking at the responses by neighbourhoods don't really generate any surprises. But, in as far as the analysis is meaningful (given the sample size):

### Portobello and surrounding area

- People are slightly *less* concerned about working collaboratively with neighbours.

### Leith, and other more deprived areas

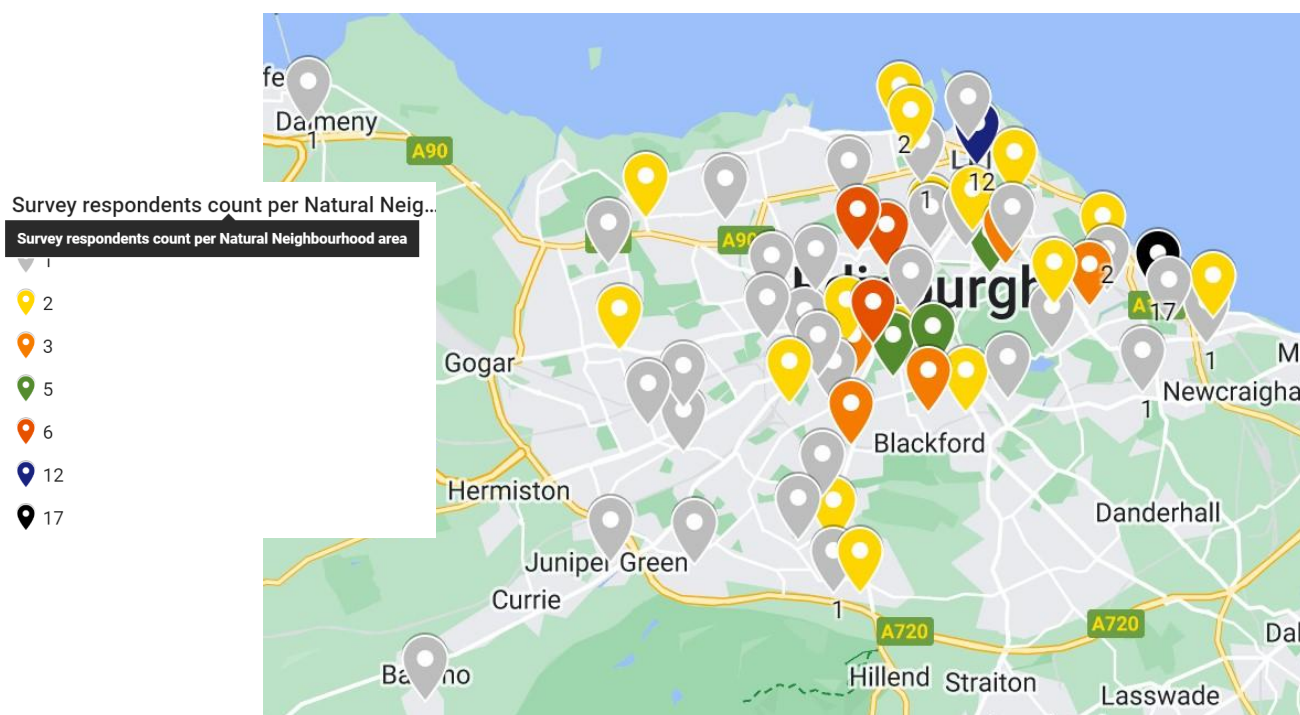
- People are relatively *more* worried about working collaboratively with neighbours.
- More concern about financing

### More relatively affluent areas (Bruntsfield, Trinity, Stockbridge/New Town etc)

- People are more concerned about planning restrictions
- People are more concerned about the legal aspects of collaborative work.

## Where respondents are located

There were 143 usable responses from across the city, covering 54 of the [Natural Neighbourhoods](#) defined by the City of Edinburgh Council. The number of respondents from each of these neighbourhoods can be inspected on an [interactive map](#), with a screenshot below:



There was a definite focus of respondents in a number of areas, with large groups in each of the very broad areas covered by two member groups of the Collective. (This could simply reflect the organisations being part of EdinBRIC and therefore the questionnaire being made known to more people, or it might genuinely reflect the characteristics of the areas):

- 34: Bruntsfield Area Net Zero Action Initiative - BANZAI (roughly Bruntsfield to Sciennes to Blackford to Merchiston) and
- 34: Porty Community Energy - PCE (roughly Porty/Joppa/Craigentiny to Willowbrae/Meadowbank).

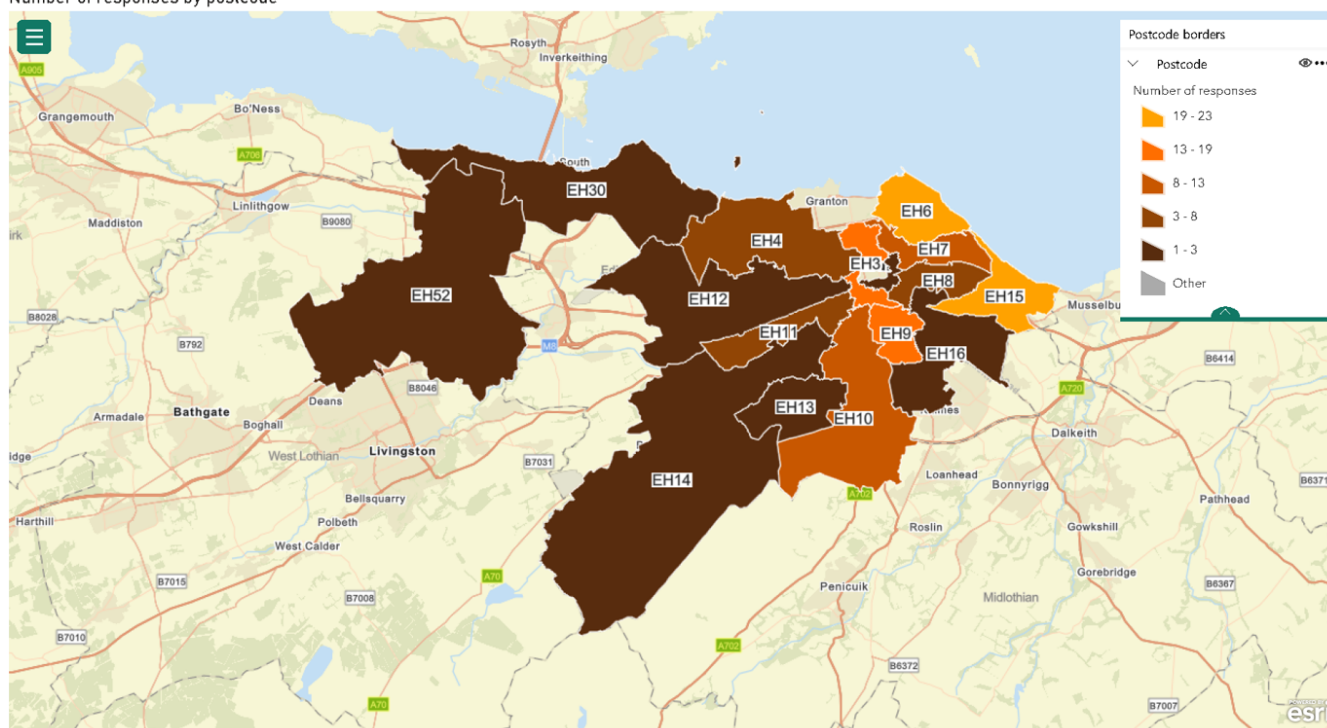
There were also significant focuses in some areas which do not have an established Collective presence:

- 24: In the wider Leith area
- 19: In the city centre area (roughly Tollcross to Abbeyhill)
- 17: In the very broad Trinity to Stockbridge area.

Serious interpretation about relative interest by areas is undermined somewhat by not knowing how widely the questionnaire was seen and how often it was seen but ignored.

Another responses view, without revealing exact locations, is by the first part of respondents' postcodes:

Number of responses by postcode



## What we're going to do as a result

We will seek to host future events - where appropriate - in areas where there seems to be a focus of interest, and therefore potential for community groups for collective working to be encouraged.

Given the summary above (particularly in the 'Obstacles and ways to overcome them: Overall conclusions at city level' and 'Obstacles, desired help & potential outputs for the Collective' boxes) we will use the messages from the questionnaire responses to closely inform and guide our future work on:

- Events and workshops
- Creation of guides
- Encouraging the creation of real case studies
- Encouraging the creation of other local community groups, or communities of interest
- Becoming a trustworthy, independent community intermediary
- Considering ways of minimising costs and maximising financial support for collaborative BRI.



## **Further research?**

Some follow-ups present themselves to us from the questionnaire:

- One clear message from respondents, when considering community-led work, is that taking things like management of the collaborative facilitation, management and planning process and also the professional retrofit assessment of a property out to a trustworthy, independent external system is something that is seen as highly desirable. Respondents would ideally like such things for free (who wouldn't!); but how cheap would actually be cheap enough to attract people? Such work is valuable and is worth investing in.
- The existence of case studies / 'hero stories' about groups that managed things themselves successfully, and feel more empowered and resilient as a result, could change the natural uncertainty about collaborative working. We feel there is a lot of reticence about being an 'early adopter' here (perhaps particularly among those who've had a bad experience of common repairs at stair level). Is there more we can do in this area?
- Do a related survey of private rental sector tenants.

## **Acknowledgement**

Our grateful thanks are due to the volunteers of '[Data 4 Climate Action Edinburgh](#)' (in particular Giorgi Amirkhanashvili) for the generous donation of their time and expertise in providing advice and carrying out some of the analysis and preparation of graphics used in this report.

## **Document Versions**

- (v1.0) First published 12/09/23
- v1.1 18/09/23 - Updated images for Q3 and Q5 to put the bars in descending order. Updated images for Q2, Q6, Q7 to be higher contrast for colour-blind readers.