Climate resilience: scaling behaviour change at a local level

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We must deliver Net Zero…

It's a moral and legal imperative

It's the growth opportunity of the 21st century

And the public want it:

- 83% concerned about climate change[1]

- 64% support NZ by 2050, only 9% oppose[2]
- > 50% think 2050 is too late[3]

The Climate Change Committee estimates that **62% of the necessary emissions reductions** in the UK **depend on behaviour**.[4]
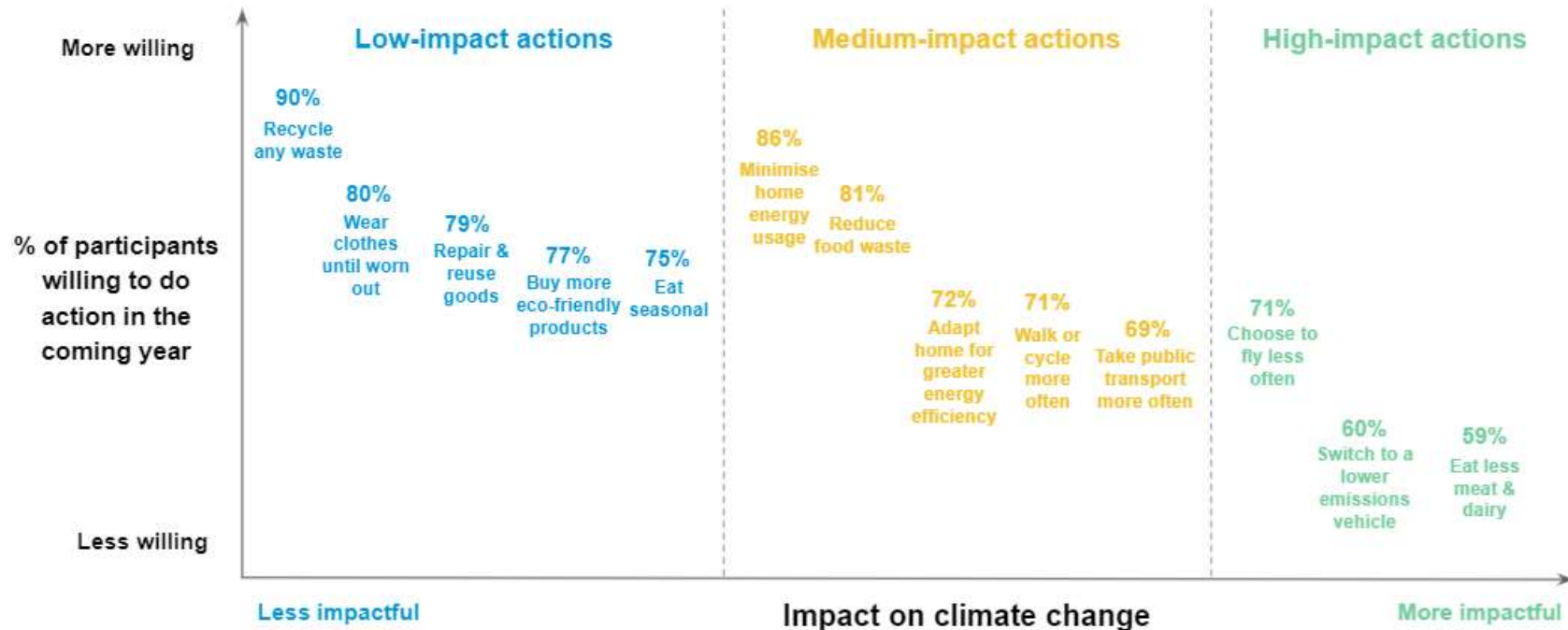
1. BEIS public attitudes tracker, 2023
2. Ipsos MORI, 2021
3. UK Onward polling data, April 2022
4. CCC, 2019

But success requires new behaviours

Curtailment behaviours
9.0%

Supply-side changes
38.0%

Low-carbon tech adoption
53.0%
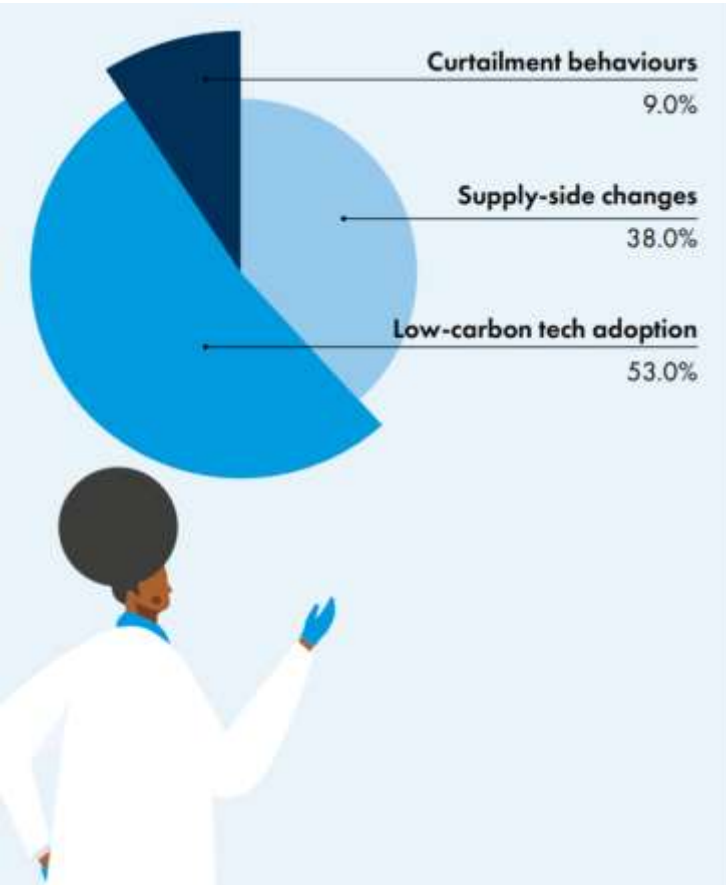
The public are willing to make many specific changes…

…but favour low-impact actions which tend to be easier, cheaper, or bring more obvious co-benefits (e.g. financial savings)

More willing

Low-impact actions   **Medium-impact actions**   **High-impact actions**

90%
Recycle any waste

86%
Minimise home energy usage

% of participants willing to do action in the coming year

80%
Wear clothes until worn out

79%
Repair & reuse goods

77%
Buy more eco-friendly products

75%
Eat seasonal

81%
Reduce food waste

72%
Adapt home for greater energy efficiency

71%
Walk or cycle more often

69%
Take public transport more often

71%
Choose to fly less often

60%
Switch to a lower emissions vehicle

59%
Eat less meat & dairy

Less willing

Less impactful   **Impact on climate change**   **More impactful**

While people agree in aggregate, there are regional variations

% that said they have made changes to their lifestyle to help tackle climate change
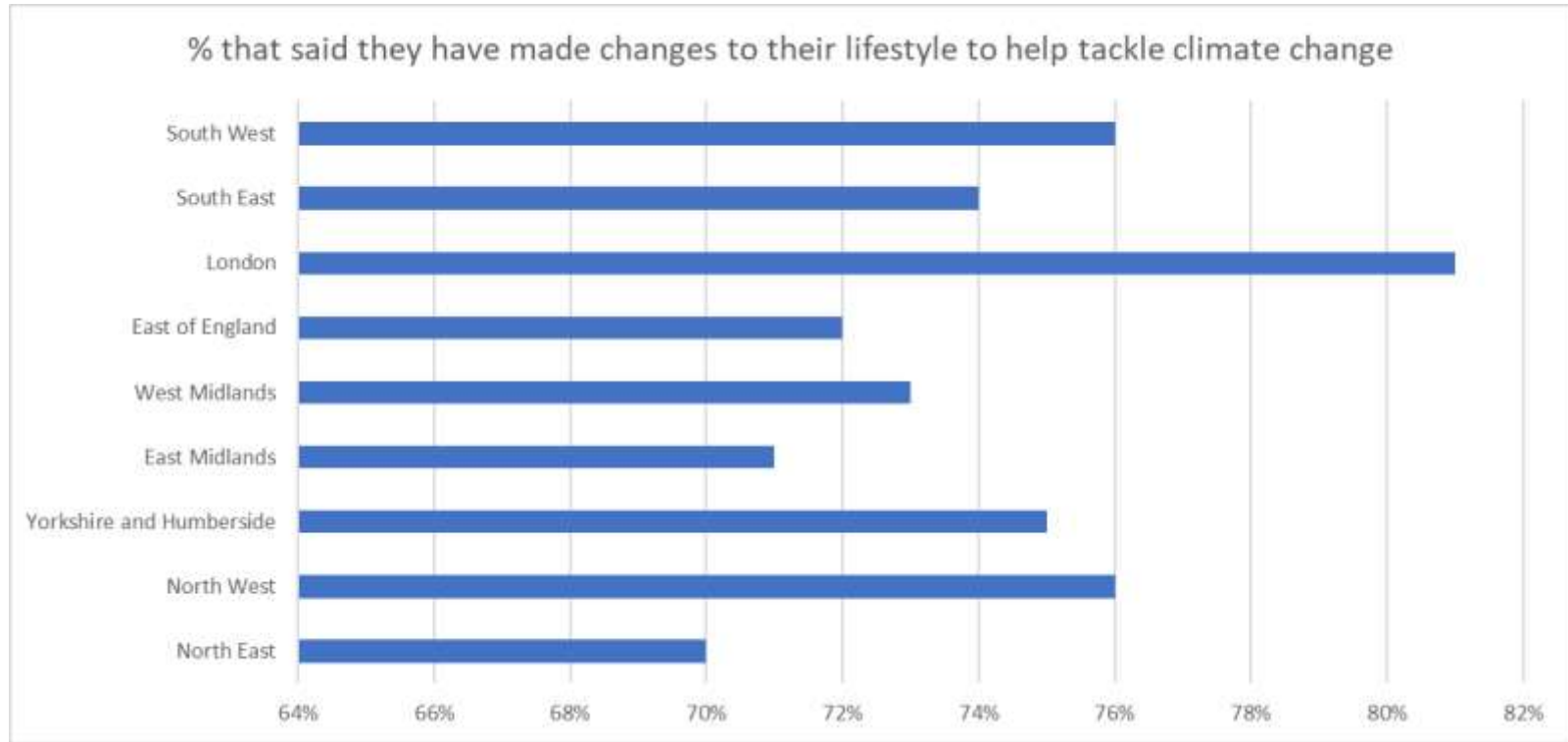
Chart created using ONS data: Worries about climate change (2022). ONS.

What can be done at the local level?

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Back to first principles… how does behaviour change 'happen'?

"*Individuals* *make choices* as a function of their preferences, knowledge, values, habits and biases, *within* choice environments *that exert profound influence* due to the proximate effects of pricing, convenience, salience, defaults, and social pressures*, which exist as they do largely because of a* system of commercial incentives, competitive markets, regulation, cultural norms, investment & infrastructure decisions and institutional leadership."
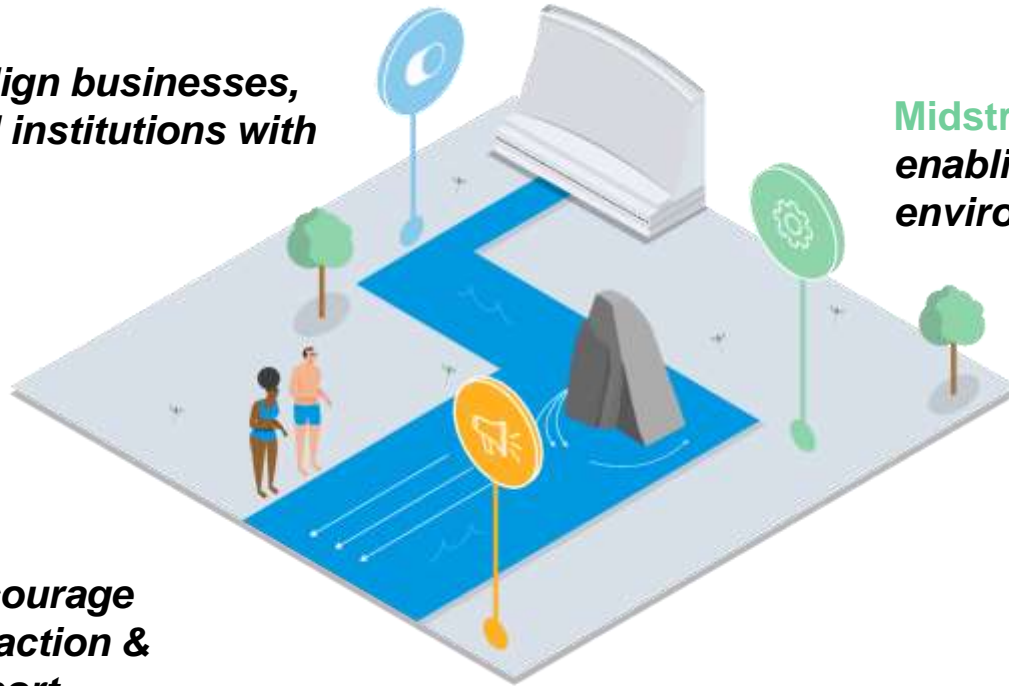
Micro

Meso

Macro

A Net Zero strategy requires action **Upstream**, **Midstream** and **Downstream**

Upstream *Align businesses, markets and institutions with Net Zero*

Midstream *Create an enabling choice environment*

Downstream *Encourage direct individual action & build public support*

Local authorities and businesses primarily act at the midstream, altering the choice architecture for citizens and consumers.


➔ Encourage recipients of the Winter Fuel Payment to opt for retrofits instead.

➔ Reduce the cost of EVs relative to ICEVs

➔ Normalise and address uncertainty across the public charging network

➔ Focus on measures to support later-adopters of EVs

➔ Adopt and expand more pedestrianised city centres and low-traffic and low-emission zones

➔ Consider heavily subsidised public transport

➔ Greatly simplify recycling standards and labels
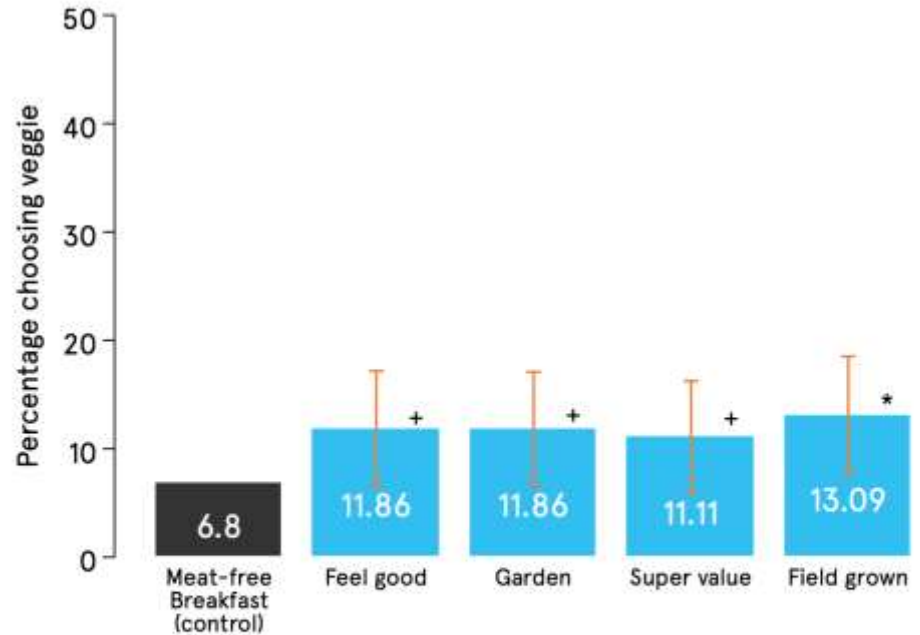
Reducing food waste in cafeterias

Weekly food waste by trial group
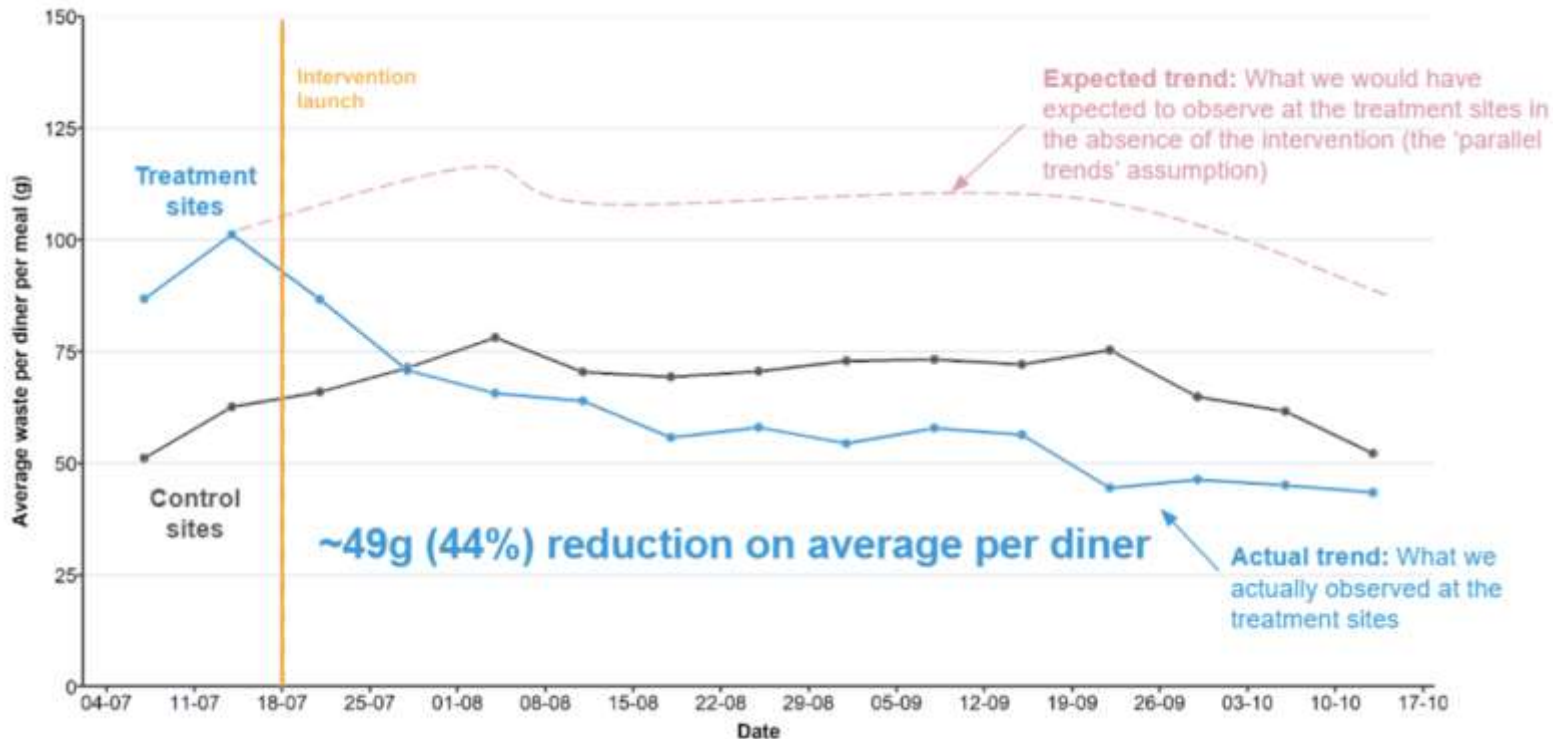
Encouraging sustainable food choices

We found that describing food as 'field-grown' rather than 'meat-free' roughly **doubled** self-reported ordering rates of vegetarian items.
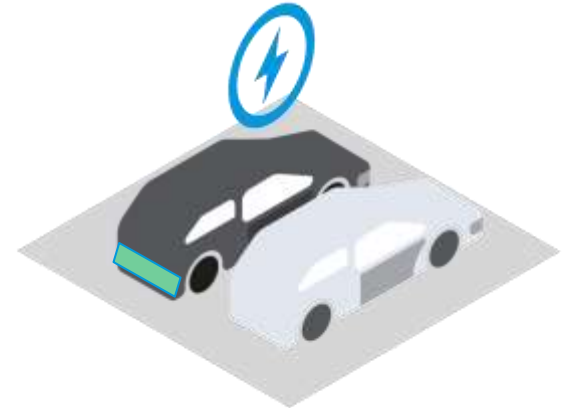

N = 1160

** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Note: Primary analysis – Menu 7 (Breakfast)

Make the green choice the socially normative choice

We're social creatures (social proof, reciprocity, conformity to norms), yet many green choices are invisible, unfamiliar, or not yet a majority norm.
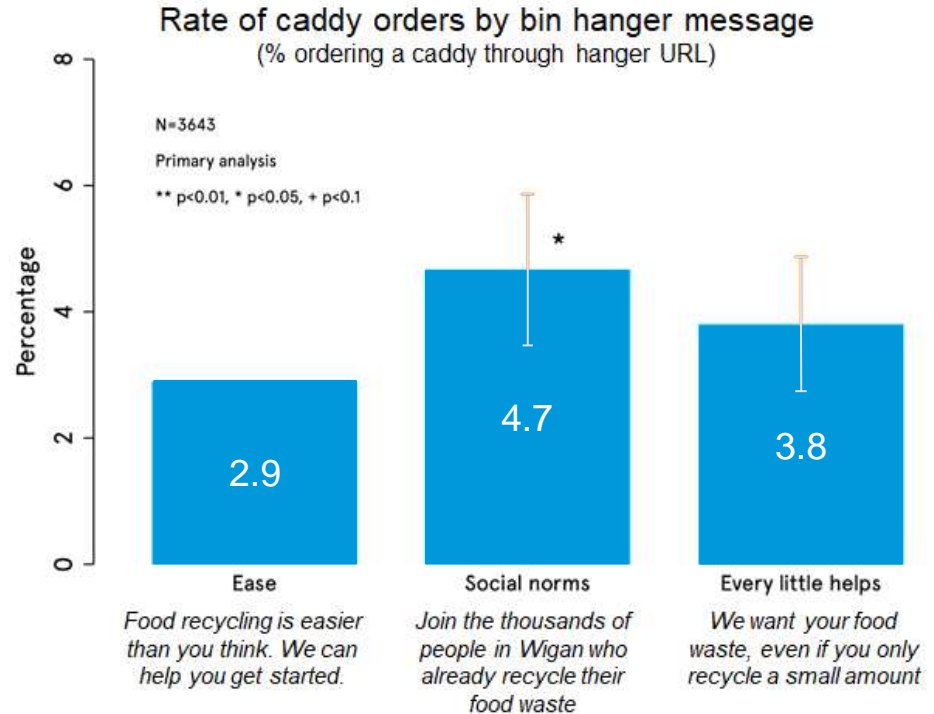

We can make green choices more socially desirable by making them more **visible** (home signage for retrofits, property listings, 'show-home' networks), driving **collective action** (e.g. postcode collective purchases), and converting the right **messengers** (e.g. subsidise plumbers first heat pump installation, use referral incentives)

Improving food recycling in Wigan

The intervention increased food caddy orders by **1500%**, and we found that the social norms hanger message worked 60% better than the ease message.

Rate of caddy orders by bin hanger message
(% ordering a caddy through hanger URL)

N=3643

Primary analysis

** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Percentage

8

6

4

2

0

Ease	Social norms	Every little helps
2.9	4.7 *	3.8
Food recycling is easier than you think. We can help you get started.	Join the thousands of people in Wigan who already recycle their food waste	We want your food waste, even if you only recycle a small amount

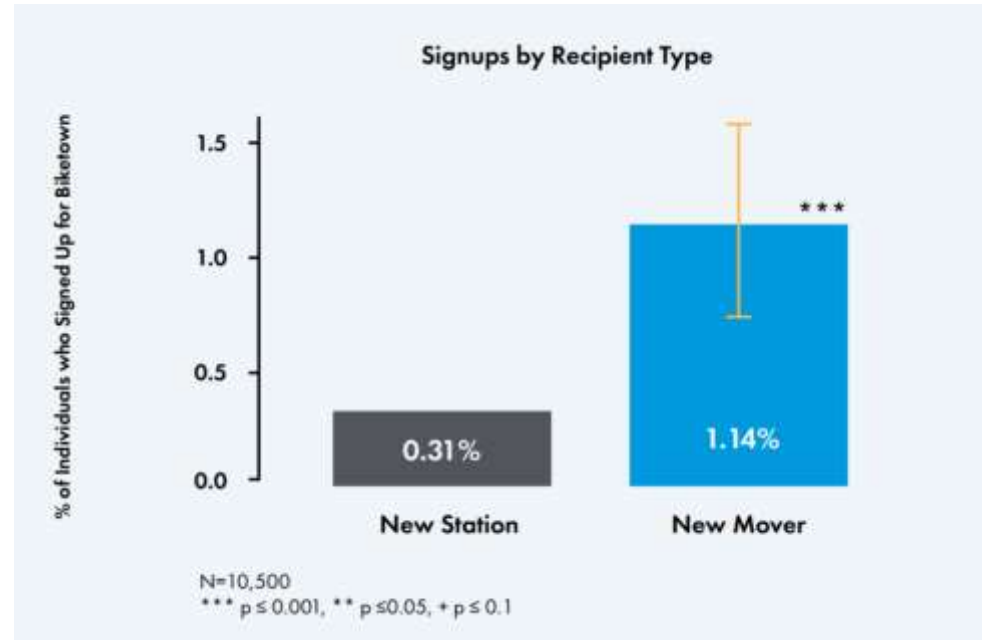# Local authorities can also act at the downstream, encouraging citizens to take direct action.

➜ **Provide simple, tailored guidance,** detailing what to do, how to do it and where to find support.

➜ **Communicate a positive, fair narrative**, e.g. using Citizen assemblies.

➜ **Provide information**, upon which people can make informed decisions, e.g. using ecolabels.

➜ **Use timely moments to communicate,** e.g. when people are moving home

Making use of timely moments to intervene

A bike-share promotion led to **4-times greater uptake** among home movers than among existing residents


Signups by Recipient Type

% of Individuals who Signed Up for Biketown

New Station: 0.31%
New Mover: 1.14% ***

N=10,500
*** p ≤ 0.001, ** p ≤0.05, + p ≤ 0.1

Increasing engagement with social media ads about flooding

We ran a field trial to test the impact on click-throughs on ads including either:
1) Location reciprocity (emphasising the government is working to protect homeowners so homeowners should do their bit too); or
2) Location risk (emphasising the risks of flooding)

Both adverts increased video play and click-through. The location reciprocity framing worked best: it **increased the number of click-throughs by 22.1%, and the number of video plays by 19.1%.**
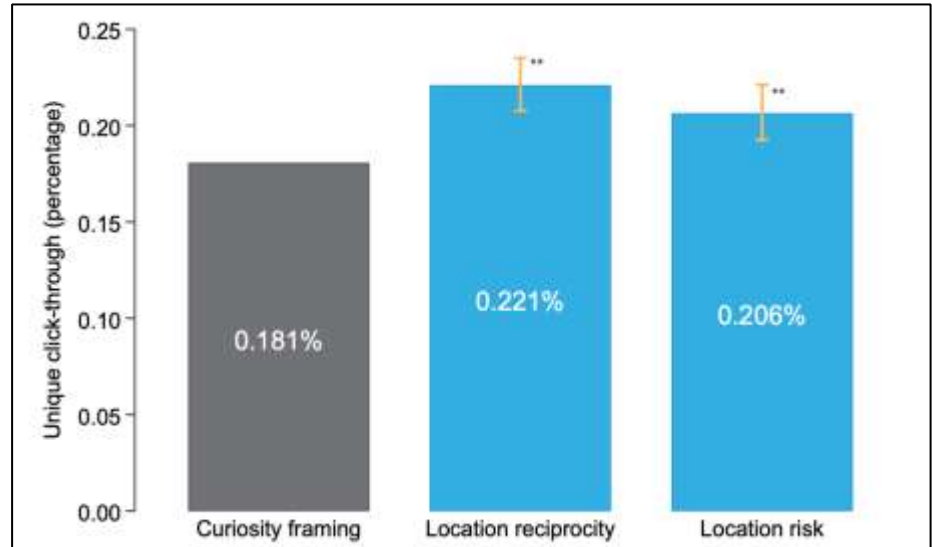
In an ideal state, local authorities could harness action at the upstream.

Ambitious action could seek to change the system of commercial incentives, investment and infrastructure:

→**Pooled funding** across LAs, to run multiple trials and build the evidence base.

→**Unlocking collective action**, e.g. street funding for retrofits

→**Unleashing competitive local markets**, e.g. through identifying and publishing a list of the best local suppliers / installers

→**Targeting incentives,** e.g. incentives for businesses for local businesses donating food or charges for those wasting food

→**Leading by example,** e.g. redesigning procurement processes as a signal to local businesses

How can local authorities make these changes?

The skills needed to facilitate, and scale, behaviour change at the local level.

Either **hiring** behavioural scientists directly or **partnering** with organisations who…

…understand human behaviour

…understand data

…have front-line experience, either directly or are able gather experience from service users

…can use well-rehearsed toolkits such as EAST

…are able to run quick, scrappy experiments

…are innovative and energetic

Thank you

Get in touch

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