

# Building tomorrow





Is the British love affair with period homes fizzling out? One of the most striking results of this year's survey was a surge in demand for new build homes. Out go cornices, shabby-chic floorboards and draughty fireplaces, in come panelling, insulation and, if you can afford it, maybe even a concierge. Almost half the people we surveyed said they would rather move into a new build house than an existing home.

It's a change that seems to be driven by younger, metropolitan movers: 72% of 30-34-year-olds said they wanted to live in a new build, compared with just 19% of those aged over 66. And 69% of Londoners of all ages expressed a preference for a new home, much higher than the national average of 48%.

Charlotte Moxon, head of regional new homes at Strutt & Parker, thinks our newfound love of a new build is down to the confidence that comes from moving into a brand-new, clean, low-maintenance home, especially if it comes with a 10-year guarantee.

Increasingly important, too, is the perception that a new build will be cheaper to run – especially when so many people have been working from home as a result of the pandemic. One estimate suggests that working from home over winter could increase energy bills by over £100<sup>5</sup>.

Charlotte Moxon also says that eye-catching incentives from developers, the option to choose kitchen and bathroom fittings and create your own “dream home” are other factors in the growing attraction of new homes.

But are the mass-market houses being built by the big house builders fit to be anyone's dream home?

“What people want are houses with no secret small print that have been designed rather than thrown up by developers, box after box. We need homes that they want because they are desirable rather than just affordable or practical. We'd love to see the Grand-Designs style features that attract people to new builds trickle down into the mass market,” she says.

“But these things cost money, and when there's no incentive for the big developers to do anything different or interesting, why would they bother?”

Strutt & Parker's new homes team is already working with developers at an early stage in the building process to find ways to improve the quality and design of new homes, without incurring a huge cost.

But do we also need government to play a stronger role? Charlotte Moxon thinks so. “We need more planning regulations covering areas such as sustainability and guides to best practice. But we also need to educate the public to increase demand for features such as ground- and air-source heat pumps. These will be a cornerstone of our housing in future, but at the moment, people just don't understand the benefits,” she says.

Happily, James Firth, head of national planning at Strutt & Parker, thinks the Covid-19 crisis has provided an opportunity for a reset of the planning system that could help us produce more and better examples of the type of housing we need.

**“ THE LAST YEAR HAS BROUGHT TO THE FOREFRONT JUST HOW IMPORTANT IT IS THAT EVERYONE HAS A HOME THAT WORKS FOR THEM, AND THIS IS BEING RECOGNISED IN THE PLANNING SYSTEM ”**

“Changes in the role of high streets and city centres will allow us to think about how residential development works best in those areas. We're working with council leaders who are keen to recognise the renewed focus on working from home and the importance of sustainability,” he says.

The provision of digital alternatives to the traditional “village hall” planning consultation has also widened participation in the process, which, he says, will help potential homeowners exert more influence on the design and quality of what actually gets built.

“A large part of this will be consumer driven,” says James Firth. “There's much better recognition of the type of homes that people want, and I think the industry will respond to that,” he says.

