

# A DREAM HOME: AN EXPLORATION OF ASPIRATIONS

FINDINGS OF A ONE POLL SURVEY, COMMISSIONED BY MODERN MASONRY,  
OF 2,000 HOMEOWNERS AND TENANTS

The Big Picture

The Front Doors of  
Perception

Living Next Door  
to Malice

Crisis, What Crisis?



Image courtesy of the Precast Flooring Federation.

Findings of the survey showed that people aspire to a detached family home. Whatever the budget for the dream home, masonry walls and concrete ground and first floors will deliver the performance benefits that homeowners aspire to.

# An Introduction

To understand your customer is obviously a sensible thing. Yet in the housing sector, there is some distance between occupants and the construction industry. In an industry where the consumer's voice is not often heard and which is in a state of unrest, we conducted a survey of 2,000 UK adults that gets under the surface of what buyers and renters really think.

With home-owning at its lowest level in 30 years and UK housebuilding levels still below government targets, as well as high prices for both buying and renting, housing is an issue at the top of most people's agendas.

Added to this, particularly at the top end of the market, stamp duty is a disincentive for many, leaving people to put house buying decisions on hold and stagnating the property market. This has the knock-on effect of limiting social mobility.

**Shelter is a basic human need and because of this, housing is a highly emotive issue.**

Equally, people are paying far higher rents than their parents did. Furthermore, research conducted by the Resolution Foundation shows private rent accounts for a third of income expenditure amongst Generation Xers and Millennials.

We have now reached a state of affairs which can be described as a 'crisis', the government using the term 'broken'. 63% of all UK homes are owned either outright or with a mortgage, leaving a sizeable minority of renters. With affordability of city homes at a ten year low, a landscape has developed

where homeowners are reluctant to move and potential buyers cannot get a foothold on the property ladder. The Financial Times's Chris Giles puts it well: "However you analyse it, housing in Britain is a mess".

It's an acknowledged fact that we need to build new homes and soon, a clear message sent by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his 2017 Autumn Budget Statement. He pledged an ambitious but deliverable growth of 300,000

new homes per annum by 2025. This increase in stock is to be welcomed, but does it address the needs of the nation?

The answer is that there's no quick-fix, and underlying challenges are numerous. One can build new houses, but they need to offer the quality that people rightly expect. Balancing safety, comfort, functionality and aesthetics is essential, and housebuilders and developers need to both guarantee and deliver this if a satisfactory conclusion is to be reached. Furthermore, they need to use robust and durable materials that will last well into the next century if total housing stock is to increase in the long term.

To understand opinions on this and other related issues and to uncover what people think about housing, we conducted our own research. We asked people about their views on housing in the UK, from what constitutes their dream home to what influences their buying decisions and the challenges they face around finding an adequate abode.

# The Big Picture

## The bricks and mortar of what the nation thinks about housing

First off, it's important to establish who we are dealing with, the British public. Three-quarters of those polled live in houses, and two-thirds classify themselves as homeowners, mirroring the national percentage. Of these adults, nearly half (45%) live in a home which is over 40 years old.

Dig a little further into the results and you find that less than 10% live in a house under a decade old and only a fifth live in a house under 20 years old.

These statistics speak volumes about the UK housing market and hints at why there is a deep public concern as regards levels of housebuilding.

Most people surveyed said new builds offer the very best in quality and the latest fixtures and fittings (71%), however they were perceived as not offering the best value for money (85%).

### High hopes

The findings paint a picture of an aspirational nation. When asked about their dream homes, one in three respondents said they want to live in a detached house, 15% a cottage and only 3% desire an apartment. Despite the positive media hype around tiny homes, under 1% want to live in one.

People want to live in suburban or semi-rural places (64%), with just under one in five (17%) looking to escape to the country and only one in ten wanting the buzz of the city.

Currently, one in five live in a detached house, a third live in a semi and a further quarter in terrace houses. 17% live in flats. Interestingly, despite the high levels of occupancy in semis and terraced houses, only 7% aspire to the former and 4% to the latter.

People were asked why they chose their current house and what they look for when moving. Size matters to nine out of ten of us (92%), supported by a similar number of respondents citing bedroom numbers (92%). Utility costs (90%), good central heating (92%) and energy efficiency (89%) also polled higher, indicating that staying warm without the worry of high bills is a priority. 91% also highlighted that tranquility is a virtue of a desirable home.

When asked about how their current homes could be improved, one in three indicated that cheaper heating in winter was a priority and a similar number (34%) highlighted increased space, broadly correlating with the results of the desired attributes above.

When asked about what worries them about their homes, an overwhelming number of people singled out human factors as being most concerning. A quarter identified bad neighbours as a concern and 12% highlighted potential burglaries and break-ins.

In terms of non-human fears, renters on the whole were particularly worried about damp with almost half (44%) indicating it as a primary worry when looking for their next home.

### Materially minded

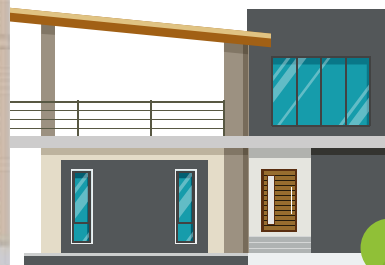
When asked to consider the performance of materials within the design of a property, an overwhelming majority highlighted energy efficiency and cost of energy bills (92%), with two thirds indicating durability and lifespan (67%) and a further half identifying running costs (48%) as the most important factors behind material decisions.

Building a house made of alternative materials like hemp or futuristic glass might make for compulsive viewing of TV programmes like Grand Designs and Amazing Spaces. Most Brits, however, prefer their homes made of masonry (89%) according to our data. Only one in ten (11%) want a timber home.

3% Aspire to live in an Apartment



1% Aspire to live in a Tiny home



64%



15% Aspire to live in a Cottage



Those who prefer homes constructed from brick and blocks consider masonry to be more secure, resilient, comfortable and energy efficient.

## Ain't nothing going on but the rent

The challenges faced by 'Generation Rent' have been well documented. Our data shows that renters are still keen to get on the property ladder.

75% of renters polled are keen to buy, but 26% of this figure cannot envisage themselves ever buying their own home. A further 18% consider it to be a long-term aspiration, and only 12% prefer to rent over buying. This implies a whole host of reasons such as lack of immediate funds, poor mortgage prospects, low affordable supply or all of the above, combining to create an insurmountable barrier.

With one in four (24%) feeling that rental properties are inadequate and not fit-for-purpose, it is not surprising that feelings run high.

To compound this, a lack of clarity over government housing policy in almost half the respondents (48%) as well as a similar amount of ignorance about flagship schemes such as Help to Buy (44%) all indicates a scandalous lack of public awareness. This is emphasised by a quarter (27%) who highlight that current initiatives have not met their housing needs, leaving them powerless to get a foothold on the property ladder.

## The housing hopes of the nation deconstructed

Brits are a nation of home lovers, with two-thirds of respondents choosing rest and relaxation (68%), security (66%) and family (66%) as their top choices when asked what they most associate with the concept of the home.

In addition to family, other social activities polled highly with roughly a quarter of people highlighting hospitality (23%), nurturing (23%) and sharing (21%) as being synonymous with the idea of the home. This shows that where we live is much more than just a roof over our heads; it's where we raise our children and entertain our friends.

Following on, one in three indicated that they associate duty and necessity (29%) with the home and a further one in five think chores (22%) are synonymous with the home concept.

We are a nation which wants its homes to be as comfortable (52%) and as functional as possible (33%), the two categories convincingly polled the highest. People want both adequate space and high-quality, low-maintenance properties that last.

Aesthetics were less of a concern with only 15% overall indicating attributes such as curb appeal and period features as either important or very important attributes looked for. While this does not mean that people are happy to live in a characterless block, it does suggest that despite the best efforts of the estate agency profession, few actively aspire to live in a period property.

Only a third said they would aspire to live in a new build home (34%), but 60% would consider it if the opportunity arose, with 9% already living in one.

For some, there is an appetite to bring in the builders for home improvements. This is mainly confined to the 35 and above age ranges (28%). Almost half of the people polled indicate they are looking to move in the next five years (49%), but only 14% in the next year.

10% Aspire to live in an urban setting

7% Aspire to live in a Semi-detached home

17% Aspire to escape to the country

Aspire to live in a Semi-rural location



# The Front Doors of Perception

## Mover, shakers and homemakers

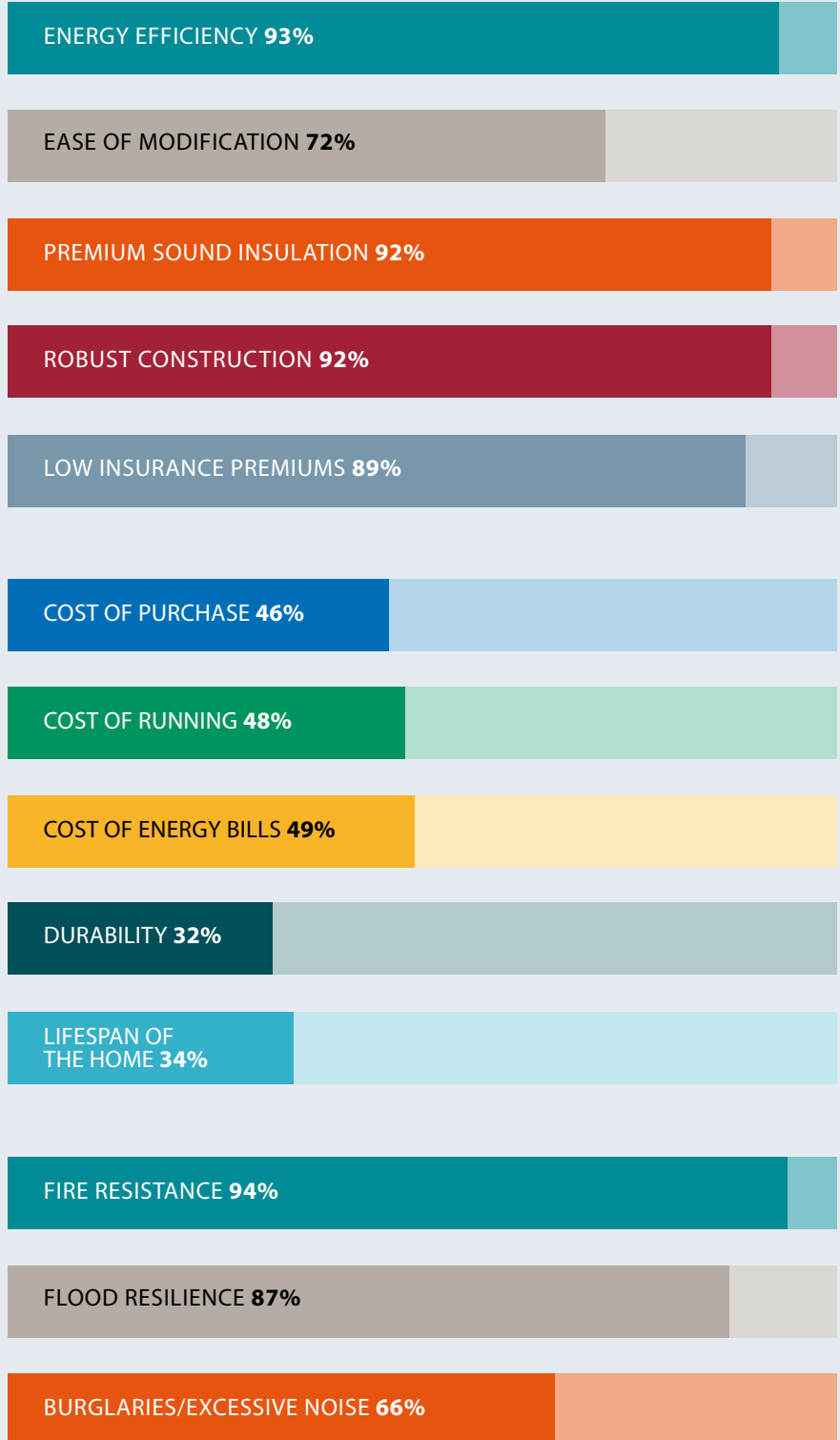
While aspiration is all very well, it needs to be balanced with a degree of realism. However, do we have the appetite or the inclination to look beyond our ideals when necessity knocks at the door?

What was made crystal clear is that any house needs to conform to a set of basic criteria. Asked to choose from multiple attributes from a large list, energy efficiency (93%), ease of modification (72%), premium sound insulation (92%), robust construction (92%) and low insurance premiums (89%) scored highly. To make a house a home, multiple requirements must be met.

Home buyers also need to see value for money: cost of purchase (46%), cost of running (48%), cost of energy bills (49%), durability (32%) and lifespan of the home (34%) are all significant concerns. After all, a house is the biggest investment most of us make in a lifetime so it's no wonder value for money is an important consideration.

It is important to highlight that, in addition to desiring comfortable, value-for-money homes, people expect their residences to be safe.

This includes high levels of fire resistance (94%) and flood resilience (87%) as well as the assurance that an abode is protected from negative human impacts such as burglaries or excessive noise (66%). It is essential that any home is both fit-for-purpose and secure.



## Living next door to malice

From break-ins and burglars to neighbours from hell, what scares you?

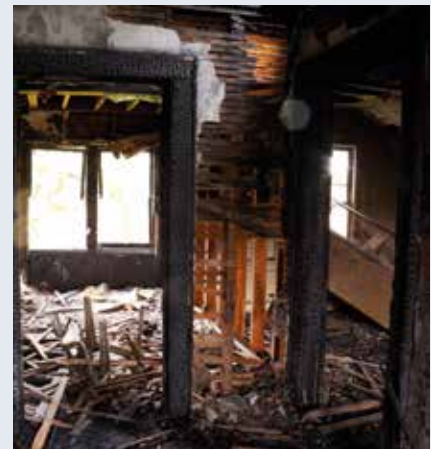
With most (66%) considering security a key attribute of a home, the survey underlines that we all want to live somewhere that feels safe and comfortable. People are anxious about what could go wrong, and these fears influence the homes we choose to buy or rent.

Bad neighbours were the clear frontrunner when we asked people about the negative factors which would cause the most distress (23%). With a consumer forum ([www.problemneighbours.co.uk](http://www.problemneighbours.co.uk)) dedicated to dealing with a potential menace lurking next door, the result comes as little surprise.

A fear of break-ins (12%) was registered. Although the Office of National Statistics indicates that domestic burglaries are on a steady decline, they remain a concern, especially for the emotional and financial stress they can cause.

Disasters were a concern for homeowners with almost a quarter (23%) indicating fire damage, flooding, subsidence and structural collapse as constant worries.

With renters in particular, damp markedly causes a degree of disquiet, with 44% indicating that it is a concern. A report commissioned in 2014 by charity Shelter indicated that 61% of renters lived in damp or mould-blighted accommodation, leading to questions about the ventilation and insulation of rental accommodation (especially in older, retrofitted accommodation), its ongoing maintenance and the professionalism of landlords.



Singled out masonry's fire resistant qualities

## Living in a Material World

Less than 1% consider prefabricated, modular homes to be built from the most robust building material and only 3% think timber is a strong solution, compared to 80% who feel masonry offers the most robust homes.

A lack of knowledge of what our homes are built from is registered. Only a quarter (24%) of us have ever asked what a home is made from when buying or renting a new home. However, the overwhelming majority (90%) think people should be told what building materials are being used in their homes.

When asked further about what they expect these materials to deliver, people highlighted both the short-term and the long-term value of masonry. Most people feel that these materials are of the highest standard (88%) and the most flexible when it comes to extensions or modifications (71%). A high proportion of people also singled out masonry's fire resistant qualities (71%), energy efficiency (62%) and thermal performance (88%).

There's no doubt, Brits consider masonry to be the highest quality method of construction with nine in ten (90%) considering these products to be the building materials of preference.

Of people think masonry offers the most robust homes

### **Five reasons why masonry is number one for homes**

Over 80% of new houses are built from brick and block masonry construction, and our survey found nine out of ten (93%) of us want to live in robust buildings that will be safe investments.

Here we explore what benefits masonry-built homes offer:

Singled out masonry's thermal performance



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**1. Most economical form of construction** - Masonry construction, particularly in the form of concrete blocks, leads to good value homes for both the private and social housing sectors. It creates homes that are both structurally

robust and affordable that can be built at speed and to high quality. The wide availability of skilled trades familiar with the materials and established local supply chains all contribute to keeping masonry construction a cost effective option.

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**2. Energy efficiency** - Nine out of ten people consider the cost of utilities and energy efficiency to be top factors when choosing a home. Masonry-built homes are cheap to run as they offer excellent insulation and airtightness. If residents keep the heat

on at a low level in a new masonry home, concrete's thermal mass delivers one of the most energy-efficient heating strategies, keeping bills down.

Looking to the future and as average temperatures rise due to climate change, the desire for air-conditioning will increase too. This is something

people are aware of with 64% of British people wanting a home that's been built to be cool in summer. Substantial energy savings can be realised utilising the thermal mass of concrete to keep interiors cool, particularly when considered during the design phases of a building project.

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**3. Durability** - Masonry construction is a durable form of construction because the components themselves are inert, non-biodegradable and do not rot.

The majority of masonry is not reinforced with steel. In these cases, masonry construction is not subject to corrosion. Masonry is the simplest construction method to deliver long lasting buildings.

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**4. Fire and flood resistance** - Masonry materials do not burn, reducing the risk of fire during a building's life and also during construction. If the worst happens and a fire starts, masonry

has an excellent ability to continue load bearing, offer insulation against a fire's heat and as it does not catch light itself, to prevent spread.

Another way climate change is predicted to affect the UK is with

increased winter rainfall, with flooding becoming more likely. Masonry is flood resilient; it absorbs very little water and remains structurally sound with no warping or twisting.

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**5. Quiet** - Our data shows that half (48%) of Britons think their current home is too noisy. Masonry homes offer excellent acoustic properties with lower levels of sound transmission than other

building methods, so people won't hear their neighbours or be disturbed by what the rest of the family is getting up to in the next room.

Use of precast concrete for upper and separating floors can further enhance the acoustic performance.

# Crisis, What Crisis?

## What next for Generation Rent?

The 'Housing Crisis' is a term long used by the media to indicate a lack of government focus on housebuilding. Optimism is at an all-time low. This is especially the case amongst renters. Whilst the majority surveyed felt the standard of properties available to renters is good or at least adequate (60%), under a fifth seemed content to rent for the long term.

Over half (56%) indicated their next move would be to purchase (outright or with a mortgage) and, as we have established earlier, one-third would aspire to live in a self-build. One must ask whether current aspirations, however modest, need to be tempered?

Half identified the main barrier to moving as being high property prices and one fifth a lack of housing (21%), but the problem is more complex. Drilling down into the results, one trend that leaps out is the significant proportion (20%) of current homeowners who feel stamp duty is stopping them moving on.

This demonstrates how the problem is multi-layered; it's not merely a question of price and supply. Aside from a shortfall in new builds, if, as these results suggest, current homeowners are disincentivised or unwilling to move, how are renters ever able to get onto the property ladder?

Of course, there's the promise of more new homes in the pipeline (300,000 per year by 2025) and a number of schemes which look to break the deadlock. The government's Help



to Buy scheme is supposedly the most prominent, however half our respondents indicate that they are either unaware of the initiative or not sure whether they are eligible for it.

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that a sizeable minority (40%) don't feel the government policy meets housing needs and almost half feel they do not know enough about it to comment (48%).



## Conclusion

Our research found that people want to live in robust, quiet homes that are cheap to run, providing a sanctuary and a place to raise their families. In our idealistic, media-saturated world, people still aspire to a modest house, not a Grand Design.

People are surprisingly under-informed as to what their homes are made of. They are keen to live in highly-functional, fire-proof and low-maintenance residences. Their immediate concerns are around human factors such as bad neighbours and break-ins.

Particularly true for the younger generation, people are anxious about ever owning their own home and are largely uninformed about government policy or aid for buyers.

What's clear is that masonry products are the material of choice for housebuilding, with nine in ten people considering them to be the highest quality construction materials, out-performing other materials across the board from fire resistance to energy efficiency.

## Modern Masonry

Modern Masonry is a body that seeks to ensure developers and designers, customers and occupants understand the benefits of masonry solutions. It provides guidance on design of masonry and furnishes government and influencing organisations with the evidence of how masonry can contribute to a sustainable built environment. It is supported by the Aircrete Products Association, Concrete Block Association and Mortar Industry Association.

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