

Housing: the national local crisis

Ben Page, *Evening Standard*

No surprise that the British think there is a housing crisis. More surprising perhaps is the strength of that feeling across all groups of society, young or old, rich or poor, north or south, owners or renters.

Housing is an interesting issue for pollsters. Our regular polls find few people mention it spontaneously and it tends to be, at most, a second order issue in local and national elections. It can be seen as something like the weather, that no one is responsible for.

Ask people about a list of issues though, and it hurtles upwards as a problem. And when people start thinking about the future, it has even stronger traction. Overlay on that our steadfast aspirations to own our own homes and it is a politically important issue too.

Yet while there is stronger public backing for building new housing than any other type of infrastructure project including roads and rail, all the evidence is of continued sluggish progress in increasing housing supply to meet rising demand.

Today's poll gives extra conviction to those saying 'something must be done', while highlighting the challenges. In particular, the crisis plays out differently by tenure, by age and by area. For example, outside London and the South East most disagree that there is a housing crisis in their local area - the opposite is true in southern England and London.

And while most think there isn't enough affordable housing available to buy or rent, there is plenty of resistance to new homes being built locally. Councils report public opposition to be the biggest block to building new homes.

This means that the case for doing things differently and faster needs to be made compellingly, frequently, and locally. While the government can pull some levers, a real step-change in construction (and housing choices) needs house building to be given greater attention by politicians, communities and business.

Leaving this solely to market forces and hoping that nimbyism won't prevail is unlikely to be enough to take us beyond crisis talk.