

# Three tests for the next Mayor of London

In 2016 London will elect a new Mayor and housing must be their top priority. Shelter will hold the candidates to account against three tests, which will show whether or not they are serious about solving the housing crisis in the capital.

## London's housing crisis

Businesses, public services and Londoners themselves are all suffering the consequences of a broken housing market. House prices have risen at a catastrophic rate and are now more than 12 times the average London wage, far out of reach of working families. Meanwhile, the number of genuinely affordable homes to rent has declined, pushing modest earners far out of the areas they grew up in.

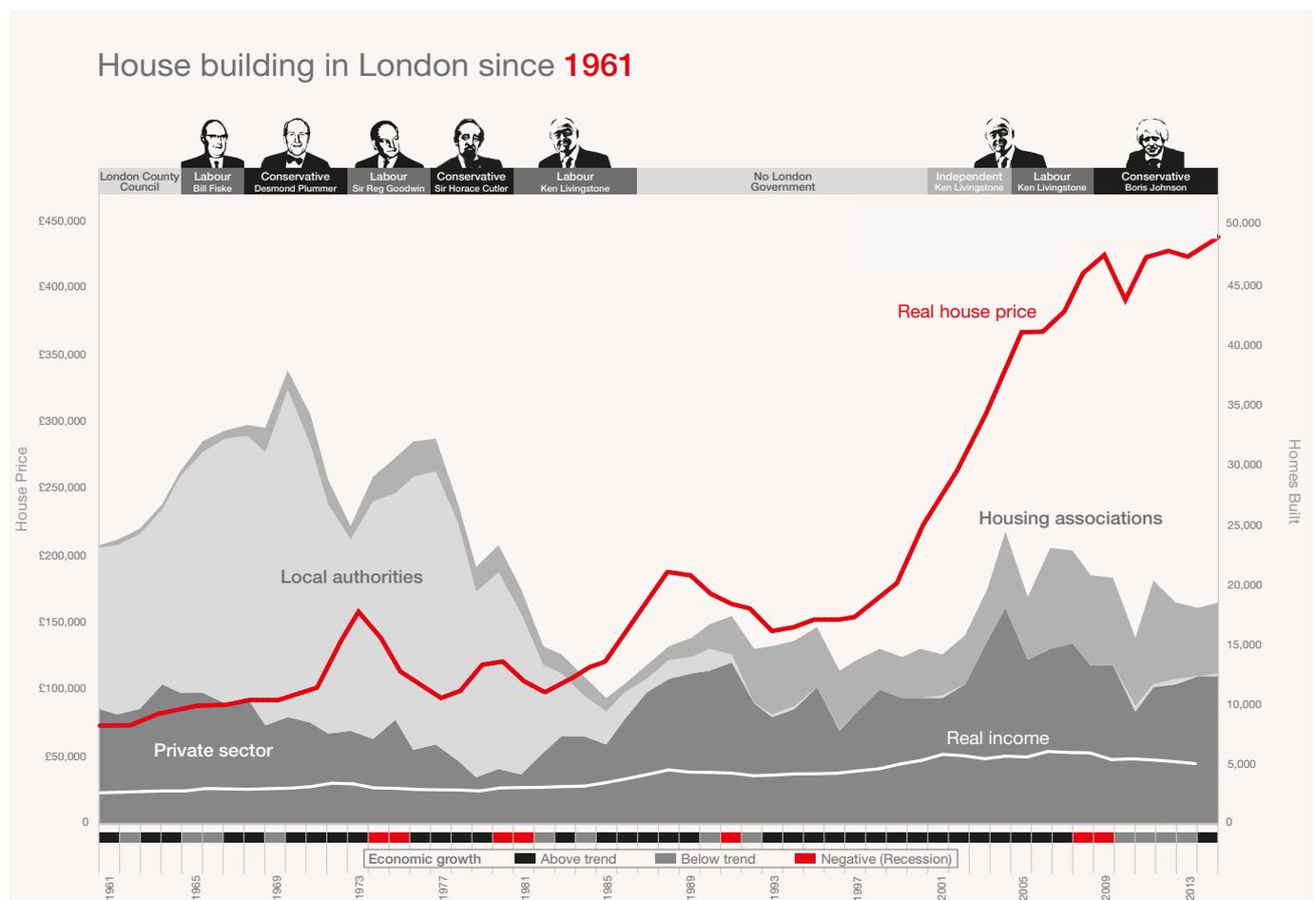
For Londoners in their thirties, owning a home used to be a realistic prospect if you worked hard and saved – for most it's now impossible without major help from the Bank of Mum and Dad.

Rents are also unsustainable, and now take up half of Londoners' take-home pay. More and more renting families are being forced to live in poor conditions, without long term security, and facing a

higher risk of homelessness. Tens of thousands of children and their families are stuck in temporary accommodation, waiting for a proper home. The burden of cuts to housing benefit have fallen disproportionately on poorer Londoners and are making it much harder for them to make ends meet.

Major changes to housing policy risk adding to these pressures. Plans to sell off affordable homes in expensive areas will hit London particularly hard. Without like-for-like replacement of the homes sold off, more families will find themselves without a realistic option to live in their city.

These problems are deep, but they are not unsolvable. The next Mayor really will have the power to turn the housing crisis around.



## What's gone wrong?

For too long, we haven't faced up to the major problems in London's housing market:

- We don't build enough new homes, we're currently building fewer than half as many as we need.
- On top of this, we haven't built nearly enough homes which are affordable to ordinary Londoners. We need to build a lot more homes at low rents and for shared ownership.
- We don't protect private renters sufficiently, which means too many have no choice but to accept unaffordable rents and unacceptably bad conditions.

Responsibility for these problems can't be pinned on one organisation or individual. Neither of the previous two London mayors managed to get us building enough homes, although house building has increased over the last year.

Major developers have strong pressures on them not to expand too fast, including maintaining their margins and industry-wide skills shortages.

National government policies have compounded these problems - with cuts to London's house building budget, little support for the boroughs to build and few reforms to help small and medium sized builders.

## What must be done?

Things could be so much better. Every Londoner should have the chance of a home that is safe,

affordable and gives them some long term security. But to achieve this, London needs to build homes at a scale we haven't seen for decades and improve its offer for renting families.

The Mayor's own assessment says London needs to build 50,000 - 60,000 homes per year to solve the shortage, more than double the current level. This is clearly tough, but it is possible – provided the next Mayor does everything in their power to make it happen, and successfully negotiates more help from the government.

The Mayor must also advocate for stronger powers to improve the private rented sector and to protect renting families from cuts to the support they rely on.

## Shelter's three tests for the next Mayor of London

To prove that they are serious about tackling London's housing crisis, Shelter is setting out three tests for the Mayoral candidates.

Our tests will prove whether or not the candidates are really facing up to the challenges of housing in London: or are just talking around the issue. As the campaign progresses we will suggest answers to these tests ourselves but we'll also keep an open mind when reviewing policies the candidates bring forward.

What matters most is that all the candidates are serious about the challenge and credible in their solutions: taking the tough decisions London needs to end the housing crisis.

