

MARKET INTELLIGENCE

How to sell your home by Christmas

Choose the right agent, buy new cushions and be available for viewings

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Real Estate

London

Home interiors

Housing market



In Brook Green, west London, this two-bedroom house has the potential to undergo a loft conversion and is on sale for £1.2 million with Marsh & Parsons

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It's only 81 days until we crack open the mince pies and mulled wine, yet it takes an average of 60 days to agree a sale on a property, from the moment it is listed. So if you are you looking to sell your home before Christmas, you better get a move on.

The British property market hardly looks encouraging for people trying to buy or sell. This week's Nationwide index shows the average British house price rose by a sluggish 2 per cent over the past year to reach an average of £214,922. Yet the market remains full of nuances. Yorkshire and the Humber's market, for example, rose 5.8 per cent in the third quarter of this year, while the average price in the East Midlands rose 4.8 per cent.

Even those in London, where average house prices dropped 0.7 per cent in the third quarter of 2018 — the fifth consecutive quarterly dip — have reasons to be cheerful.

According to a breakdown in property prices by postcode by Propdex, an analytics company, London's dip is only affecting a minority of areas — 74 out of 231, mostly in west London — where prices have become too inflated and are undergoing a correction. Meanwhile, the postcode in Britain in which the most homes were sold, is in Croydon (there were 833 sales in six months), proving

London's affordable outer zones are doing fine.

However, according to research by Rightmove, a property portal, you'll sell faster if your home is in Scotland, with Edinburgh and Glasgow experiencing an unprecedented boom. You can achieve the quickest sale anywhere in Britain in the commuter town of Livingston in west Lothian, which is a magnet for workers; it's 40 minutes by train to both cities. Here it takes an average of 26 days for a property to be sold after appearing on Rightmove. "We're in the centre of Scotland, with good commuter links to Edinburgh and Glasgow and we're very affordable – you can buy an ex-local authority three-bedroom terraced house from £100,000 and a four-bedroom detached house for £300,000," says Simon Thomas, the owner of Remax, an estate agency in Livingston. This compares favourably with Edinburgh, where flats start at £200,000.

Scottish authorities make up six of the seven fastest-selling areas, and include Glasgow (31 days) and Edinburgh (28). Other notable areas in the top 20 include booming areas of the West and East Midlands, where property prices are rising rapidly. Among these are Coventry (36 days), Rugby (36), Corby (37), Kettering (37), Redditch (38) and Bromsgrove (39). In London the fastest-moving areas are the most affordable – sales in Forest Gate in Newham, east London, are agreed after an average of 43 days – and those where middle-class families snap up properties nearest the best schools, such as Whetstone in the borough of Barnet (58 days' selling time).

If you are struggling to sell your home, we have asked the experts for their tips on how to get your place sold.

This six-bedroom house in Buckland Newton, Dorchester, is on sale for £2.25 million with Knight Frank

Price

Caspar Harvard-Walls, a partner at Black Brick, a buying agency, says sellers need to be “extremely realistic” about the price their property will fetch. “It’s a buyer’s market,” he says. “The most important thing you can do is ensure it is priced sensibly, otherwise you are just wasting time.” He advises sellers avoid relying on estate agent estimates — after all, they are trying to win your instruction. Think about whether your asking price reflects the market conditions. Look at sales of comparable properties online, and if those sales were a while ago, consider deducting something from the price.

Prepare for a quick sale

Thea Carroll, a senior buying consultant at the Buying Solution, a buying agency, says sellers who are serious about shifting their property before the end of the year should make arrangements to rent somewhere. Be clear

with buyers that you're prepared to move.

“The worst thing you can do is be ambivalent with buyers. Give the buyer an element of security about how you will move your family out of your home, and tell them you are keen to exchange and complete before Christmas.”

Carroll says that this could also be a good bargaining chip when it comes to your property's sale price. “Tell buyers the reason you are not being weak on pricing is because you are being flexible with your moving date,” she says.

Mark Hayward of NAEA Propertymark, a professional body for estate agents, says: “Instruct your solicitor to prepare contracts and seek answers to preliminary inquiries, so when a buyer is found there won't be any delays. If your house has been extended, obtain copies of planning consents and building regulations.”

Choose your agent carefully

How did you choose your agent? Was it based on its fee, because it is the best-known in the area, or its expertise in selling homes like yours? “We see people who are selling with completely the wrong agency. The days have gone when you could instruct an agency and wait. The seller has to become far more involved in the process,” says Harvard-Walls.

Carroll says the autumn may be time to appoint another agency. “Properties go stale in the run-up to Christmas. If an agency has had your property all summer I would ask to see their viewing numbers, and if you are only getting one or two a week, appoint another agency and negotiate a lower fee.”

Harvard-Walls advises people to ask prospective agencies to show them examples of similar homes that have been sold and choose an agency that frequently sells properties in your segment of the market.

Look at the agency’s marketing material for your property. If the photos of your home show spring flowers and sunny skies, have some autumnal photos taken.

This house in Holland Park, west London, has five bedrooms and is on sale for £8.25 million through Marsh & Parsons

Presentation

“Towards the end of the year, with Hallowe’en and bonfire night, the chintz and decorations start to appear. Try to keep the family home neutral and clear of tatt,” Carroll says.

Regularly ask your agency for feedback from viewings and act on what prospective buyers are saying. Harvard-Walls says he knew of one seller who was told by prospective buyers that the garden was a selling point, but not in its present state. The seller spent £5,000 doing up the garden and shortly afterwards secured a sale.

Mhairi Coyle, a designer at Mhairi Coyle Interiors, says that sellers should wash windows, internal and external paintwork, and touch up any nicks on skirting boards and walls. Consider refreshing your interiors with modern bedspreads, curtains and hide old-fashioned sofas with throws.

Coyle says: “There are inexpensive things to choose from everywhere now. The market has changed drastically, you never used to be able to get anything stylish in cheaper shops.” She recommends people look at H&M, French Connection and Habitat for affordable furnishings.

Consider moving some furniture into storage. Coyle says: “More houses would sell if they had a couple of pieces of furniture in each room. The less stuff you have, the easier it is for people to see themselves in the space.”

Coyle also worked with a couple who bought new cupboard doors for their kitchen in a makeover aimed at selling their home. “They didn’t want to redo the kitchen, but they needed to refresh it.” She recommends companies such as Naked Doors, or Superfront if you have Ikea furniture that needs a stylish overhaul.

Be available

Harvard-Walls says he has had sellers make things tricky for people to view their home. Even if you have endured many months of viewings, try to be flexible. “You have to work with your agent to make your home available at short notice and outside working hours,” he says.
