

Country living

Young city-based families are looking to move to Hampshire and Berkshire to improve their quality of life. Words: Sue Chester



IMAGE: THE CHASE, NEWBURY, DWH, BARRATT DAVID WILSON HOMES SOUTHERN

Newbury, Andover and Basingstoke form a little-known commuter belt gem to the west and south west of London. With countryside that inspired *Watership Down*, the location along the M3 and M4 corridor also offers plenty of employment opportunities.

The three towns are roughly 20 miles equidistant, sharing in common the southern tail of the North Wessex Downs, while offering different lifestyles; Newbury's market town character is preserved by new-builds mostly around Thatcham, in the Kennet Valley close to pretty Hungerford and Marlborough, and there's a good rail link to Paddington. Andover has a down-to-earth affordability, decent rail services to Waterloo and is renowned for its proximity to the Test Valley, the latter so often included in most 'best places to live' surveys. Last but not least, Basingstoke has excellent amenities and frequent rail links into London Waterloo through its location at the junction of the Bournemouth and Exeter lines.

Garrington search consultant Samantha Williams sees this location as ideal for young families moving out of London: "They want good schools, a reasonable commute, but more work-life balance so they can get out at the weekend and enjoy the countryside. This region isn't as intimidating as the other home counties either; it's more relaxed."

And it's affordable. Sulaimon and Natalia Awodeji, both 35, moved out of the capital with their daughters, aged six and 10, for more space. They bought their first home at Basingstoke's Park Prewett Road in the Gillies Meadow development; a three-storey, four-bed, two-bath house with a garden for £350k using Help to Buy: "Without this scheme, we wouldn't have been able to buy a house big enough for the whole family. Basingstoke is an easy commute to London for work and just that much closer to the seaside we love to visit in summer."

According to Rightmove, where one-bed flats sell from around £105k, Help to Buy makes sense for those with limited budgets. Persimmon Homes has one-beds at its Riverbourne Fields Tidworth development for £154,995, available with Help to Buy.

David Smith is a chartered surveyor and partner in charge of Myddelton & Major's Andover office: "Housing stock in Andover is plentiful and therefore cheaper, but in

outlying villages where there's high demand, property could be more expensive than Newbury and Basingstoke. You can find some lovely houses. I sold an estate on the River Test last year for over £6m."

Hart Hill is one of those grand piles nine miles north of Andover, a Georgian-style property remodelled from an existing modern luxury home; the guide price is £4.45m. Retaining the roof and facades, Sherbourne Developments more than doubled the size from 3,000sq ft, adding another 4,000sq ft as well as a large annex and garage. Set in eight acres, the property is unique because of its uninterrupted views across the Downs.

Half a mile from Linkenholt — the village that's famous for being purchased in its entirety by H&M owner Stefan Persson for a mere £25m — Hart Hill is the type of area that proves popular with young families due to its schools. Andover's secondary state schools are some of the best in the country, and the local prep schools are excellent, too. The country house market really benefits from the quality of the nearby schools."

Smith cites village hotspots, where prices can reach Winchester levels, such as Chilbolton, Longparish and, just south of Andover, Stockbridge. He adds one more: "Odiham, a village just off junction five of the M3, is very popular. And although Kingsclere isn't a 'hotspot', it's well placed due to its location between Basingstoke and Newbury."

Newbury Racecourse, a David Wilson development, offers the ideal outlook for fans of the equestrian sport with 66 apartments track-side. Prices start at £228k for a one-bed and go up to £930k for a three-bed penthouse. At the other end of the racecourse, The Chase development offers both apartments (from £185k for a one-bed) and houses (from £409k for a three-bed, three-storey mid-terrace). Residents can enjoy the action from their balcony or terrace.

Newbury local Edward Heaton, founder and managing partner of nationwide buying agents Heaton & Partners, says his Newbury-Andover clients tend to buy houses in 'The Chutes', five miles north of Andover where houses are mostly 'price on asking'.



IMAGE: NEWBURY RACECOURSE, NEWBURY, DAVID WILSON HOMES SOUTHERN



IMAGE: GILLIES MEADOW DEVELOPMENT IN BASINGSTOKE

MORE INFORMATION

Newbury's average house price currently stands at £347,744, a fair bit higher than average prices in Basingstoke (£321,241) and Andover (£276,747).

Other more affordable popular villages include Kintbury (average house price is £485,894) seven miles east of Newbury: "It actually has a village shop and a pub, which is unusual for this area. It's also on the train line into London," says Edward Heaton. He also mentions Whitchurch as being increasingly sought after, "One of our assistants is looking for a house there. You can buy a lovely two-bed cottage starting from around £250k." Bewley Homes has a development in the town with a four-bed family house available for £355k — with 10 further properties to be released for sale off-plan soon.

While Basingstoke isn't exactly famous for its rustic charm, amenities ranging from skydiving, to an ice rink, ski centre, go-karting, trampoline centres, shopping and cinema, have increased its pulling power. "Basingstoke has sufficient land, but developers are pressing for more land because if it's not a 'hotspot', it's certainly warming up," says David Smith.