

COUNTRYSCENE



Selecting which estate agent to use is a big decision – and so it should be, says Dominick Brown of Savills Sevenoaks

While cost is a consideration, other factors such as track record, advertising spend, reputation, personal recommendation, market knowledge, geographical coverage and experience are more important. In the property market it's about both what you know and who you know.

Look beyond the estate agent's window as these pretty pictures only tell part of the story. A significant number of houses sell discreetly; a lot of sellers don't want their personal affairs or their much loved house widely publicised.

This is old fashioned estate agency; taking an interest, really finding out what buyers want and when they want it, and keeping in regular contact with them. It is about helping people in almost every aspect of their move; schooling, recommending local tradesmen and removal companies, dog walkers or tree surgeons – we are asked anything and everything.

In this internet era it may be of some comfort to hear that we still believe in old fashioned estate agency; combining modern marketing methods with those personal contacts built over many years. It is incredibly satisfying and rewarding looking after buyers and helping them find their perfect house, and equally meeting our client's expectations – getting the job done in the way they feel comfortable with.

I have faced the argument that it doesn't really matter which estate agent one uses as "everybody just looks on the internet", but this is not the case.

Our message to serious buyers is to make themselves known and get to know your agent. Put yourself out there, rather than relying solely on internet searches. In our view this paints a distorted picture of the market, showing over-inflated asking prices rather than the prices which are actually being achieved.

Property is a people business. It pays to get to know your agent and for them to fully understand your needs – let them do the work.

Savills five-year forecasts predict two years of low growth as Brexit negotiations proceed, followed by some price growth thanks to greater economic clarity and therefore a boost in consumer confidence. Over the next five years until the end of 2021, UK mainstream house prices are expected to rise by 13 per cent. In the South East of England, house price growth until the end of 2021 is predicted to be up to 17 per cent. In terms of the prime market, the value gap between London and the rest of the UK suggests the commuter belt (+20%) and wider South of England (+17%) will outperform prime outer London.

For more information, including an up to date market appraisal of your property, contact Savills Sevenoaks on 01732 789700

COUNTRY VIEW

Will Peppitt, Savills Head of Residential in the South East, recommends keeping an open mind



If there's one thing working in property for the past 30 years has taught me it's the value of keeping an open mind.

With the help of Channel 4, we now all know that the three most important things about buying a house are Location, Location, Location. And there's a reason why this well-worn adage has stuck – it's true. Ask a buyer why they are moving and the chances are it will be to be close to good schools, to be in a handy position to get to work, or both.

What is interesting though is the key stipulations laid down to an agent at the beginning of the house hunting process often end up being far from the attributes of the house purchasers eventually buy.

A good example is that people frequently initiate a search by measuring distance in miles rather than time. Often, with local knowledge, there are places further away in distance but which through excellent commuting links are actually quicker to reach. This may open up an unexplored world of towns and villages, hitherto disregarded or unknown.

For example a family who are set on living in Guildford may extend their search further along the M25 and end up buying in Sevenoaks or Tunbridge Wells, where they have better value for money and can match, if not shorten, their commute time to London by train.

Schools, too, are crucially important and sometimes the only motivation for moving in the first place. Even so, it's not unheard of for buyers to base their search on a particular school only to be pleasantly surprised by the choice of private and state schools in other areas, swayed by anecdotal evidence.

Generally speaking, at the outset of their property search, buyers fall into two camps: those who want old and those who want new – be it a first home in London or a house in the country. As the search progresses those waters can become muddied. For some, period features will always trump the convenience of new build, but some may be persuaded by new as they start to engage with the practicalities of purchasing an older property.

Throughout this location remains key – but with some lateral thinking and a little compromise it just may not be in the place you expected to find it.