

Lockdown has made us move house and ditch the city

By Bethan Tolley, Communications Officer, Centre for Brexit Studies

When lockdown kicked off back in March, I thanked the 20 year old in me, who didn't want to move to London after University in order to get a 'good' job, to end up sharing a flat with several other people. I was somewhat smug that me, my partner and puppy had a lovely little house to 'stay home' in, a medium sized garden to relax in, and even a desk or two to work from home on.

But almost six months on, the home doesn't feel quite so quaint as it once did. The four walls that months ago were our safety net, I'm now wanting to take a hammer to. All the fun of early lockdown DIY has worn off. Oh and FYI – puppies grow! Suddenly, our lovely little house seems small, as well as just too far away from loved ones and not enough countryside on our doorstep.

It was this desire for space, and room to grow, that meant we finally decided to put our house on the market recently. And we're not the only ones. Because, perhaps unsurprisingly, after months of being stuck inside, and having holidays, weekends away and general fun events cancelled, there's so many people deciding that now is the time to move.

Research from Rightmove (1) found that it's more likely than last year that someone living in one of the UK's biggest cities are enquiring to move to a home outside the city than to move to a home within that city. Across June and July, the number of buyer enquiries from people living in ten cities increased by 78% overall compared to the same period last year as the market picked up, and the breakdown of where they are enquiring to shows village locations up by 126% compared to towns, up by 68%.

So, are we all looking for a piece of the good life, after spending months inside? Rightmove also found that the number of enquiries from Liverpool residents looking for a village lifestyle was up by 275% compared to last year, versus a 63% increase in enquiries to towns. This city is followed by Edinburgh where village enquiries are up 205%, and Birmingham, up 186%.

The Knight Frank Global Buyer Survey (2) found that after a period of confinement, the message from survey respondents is that buyers want space, with forty-five per cent of respondents saying they are more likely to buy a detached family home than they were prior to COVID-19, with waterfront homes (40 per cent) and rural homes (37 per cent) also in favour.

It is clear that the ongoing pandemic has fundamentally changed the way we live our everyday lives. Our homes are now much more than just somewhere to eat and sleep. They are a hub from which many of us now work, exercise, learn, socialise and of course, relax in. Making our homes more important than ever before, hence the sudden desire for so many people to move out of cramped apartments in city centres, with dreams of a village and a community lifestyle.

According to a report from Zoopla (3), three- and four-bedroom houses with space to work from home are proving particularly popular. Urban flats, typically aimed at first-time buyers, are the slowest on the market, compared to larger homes in the countryside shifting the quickest.

And they are selling fast – the report also said that the amount of time a home is put up for sale before it finds a buyer has fallen to just 27 days since lockdown restrictions were eased, compared to 39 days over the same period in 2019.

Most of the top village destinations that people in cities are moving to are still within a commutable distance to their city, but with the appeal of a quieter way of life (4), showing that not many of us want to completely change our lifestyles all together, but do have the desire for change. With so many of us working from home, and it looking somewhat unlikely if we will ever return to the 'normal' 9-5 five days a week in the office, it's understandable that so many aren't worried about moving further away from their workplace, but still want to be in distance of reaching it fairly easily if we did have to pop in one or two days a week. After all, if working from home is so easy and offers workers more flexibility, why stay in a city centre, if you are not in love with the lifestyle?

It's not just our new working from home, flexible lifestyles, that are the main factors in moving following lockdown. After months of doom and gloom on the news, many people are keen to look after their health and wellbeing, after swapping the gym for their living rooms earlier this year, showing a shift in the market in renters desires of having a garden and outdoor space. Rightmove (5) found that renters looking for a garden are the highest they've been this year, and are now almost double the level compared to the first week of lockdown, and there's also signs that more renters want to live near a river or the coast, with Southsea, Cambridge and Worthing seeing the biggest rise in searches. Suddenly, it feels more important than ever to look after yourself.

Of course, it's not just lockdown that has made many scroll down Rightmove for hours on end. With the stamp duty 'holiday' (6) taking place until March 2021, the appeal for both first time buyers and those looking for their next property to get moving will no doubt only increase.

But with such an increase in city dwellers keen to escape to the country, the future of our cities looks incredibly uncertain. With more working from home, and residents packing up and leaving, how could this end up impacting the businesses and livelihoods based in city centres? Could we expect to see the rent prices, for both residential and commercial, decrease, in a bid to keep their tenants? And for the businesses who rely solely on office worker trade, the likes of cafes and lunch spots, what could this mean for their future? Is now the time to adapt to the new normal?

After a long period of being separated from family and friends too, many of us are feeling the desire to live closer to loved ones. For me, that's the biggest reason why the 'For Sale' board is firmly up by the front door. Although I live a measly 12 miles away from my mum and sister, it often feels like hours, as I can't just walk over and pop in. With the dog only getting bigger, and plans to have a family of our own in the future, the thought of returning to the town I was so eager to get away from when I was 17, now fills me with joy.

If we were to ever have a pandemic on this scale again, even knowing that I'm just down the road from my loved ones, would definitely help to take the edge off. If there's anything we learned from lockdown, I think it's that we simply can't take each other for granted.

With one in four eyeing up a house move in the next 12 months (7), if your four walls are looking increasingly more grim by the day, it's probably time to get moving.

1. <https://www.rightmove.co.uk/press-centre/village-enquiries-double-as-city-dwellers-escape-to-the-country/>
2. <https://www.retalkasia.com/news/2020/08/14/covid-19-will-result-25-population-moving-house-knight-frank/1597364049>
3. <https://www.zoopla.co.uk/press/releases/home-buyers-shrug-off-recession-fears-as-time-to-sell-falls-by-almost-two-weeks/>
4. <https://www.rightmove.co.uk/press-centre/buyers-look-out-of-city-and-home-movers->

[determined-to-move-post-lockdown/](#)

5. <https://www.rightmove.co.uk/press-centre/rental-searches-for-homes-with-gardens-hit-record-high-for-the-year/>

6. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/stamp-duty-land-tax-temporary-reduced-rates>

7. <https://www.propertyreporter.co.uk/property/one-in-four-eyeing-up-a-house-move-in-the-next-12-months.html>