

THE  TIMES

Property hotspots: Amersham



Clare and Austin Collins have just had an offer accepted on a property in Amersham Times photographer, Ben Gurr

Abigail Butcher

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Looking for a house in Amersham close to the train station, the town centre and in the catchment area of local schools? Well, wait in line. Houses in the Buckinghamshire town are frequently going to sealed bids, selling for more than 10 per cent over the asking price, and some are not even hitting the market before they go under offer. Estate agents talk of a property bubble surrounding the area for the past few years, with no sign of change — not even the threat of the new HS2 line, due to pass just a few miles away, is stopping demand.

“People are falling over themselves to buy,” says Nival Bativia, director of Bairstow Eves Countrywide estate agency in Amersham. “Everything is selling at the right price, and the right property at the right price in the right location can sell in an hour.”

Why Amersham?

The town is within easy commuting distance of London, with good road and rail links, and surrounded by the rolling, chalky countryside of the Chiltern Hills. However, Ian Telford of John Nash & Co estate agency is unequivocal in his view that Amersham’s excellent schools are the biggest draw.

About the town

Amersham has an affluent population of 16,323, predominantly aged 30-59. More than half of its residents (55 per cent) are employed in higher and lower managerial occupations, and 37 per cent are educated to degree-level or higher — far above the rest of Buckinghamshire.

There are three main centres to the town — Old Amersham, with its Grade II listed cottages; the 1930s Amersham-on-the-Hill, and Little Chalfont — each appealing to a different demographic.

“Families tend to choose the hill, which has bigger houses with bigger gardens, as do younger couples, because it’s close to the station,” Telford says. “Older retired people, singles and professional couples choose the old town. They don’t want a big house but a little characterful cottage.”

Beyond the town, the outlying villages of Chalfont St Giles, Little Chalfont, Coleshill and Winchmore Hill are all in demand too, according to Nick Pounce, residential director of Savills estate agency in Amersham. “Every area is popular, depending on what kind of lifestyle a buyer wants,” he says.

Transport links

Amersham is on the London Underground (Metropolitan line) and the mainline rail system (Chiltern Railways). Journey time into Baker Street on the Tube is 55 minutes, to the City (Moorgate) one hour and seven minutes. Take the mainline and you arrive in London Marylebone in 23 minutes. The smaller village of Little Chalfont is served by its own Underground station,

Chalfont & Latimer.

Junction 2 of the M40 is six miles from Amersham; Junction 18 of the M25 is five miles away.

Schools

Amersham is home to two of the best grammar schools in the country. Dr Challoner's Grammar School for boys in Amersham-on-the-Hill consistently rates among Britain's top 50 state schools and Dr Challoner's High School for girls in Little Chalfont was graded Outstanding by Ofsted before converting to an academy in 2011.

There are good nursery and primary school options too, with Chestnut Lane School for children aged 4 to 7 graded Good by Ofsted and Elangeni School for 7 to 11-year-olds graded Outstanding.

"Because the schools are in the town centres, with small catchment areas, within walking distance of the stations and shops, house prices are under even more pressure," Batavia says.

Amenities

In the past ten years, Amersham-on-the-Hill has added a Waitrose, Pizza Express, W H Smith, Starbucks and Costa Coffee to its portfolio; Marks & Spencer has long been open. Old Amersham is known for its boutique shops and fine dining, with options including Artichoke and Gilbey's.

There is a state-of-the-art climbing centre, swimming pool complex, bowls, cricket and rugby pitches, as well as tennis courts.

House prices

All local agents report a desperate lack of properties on the market for less than £1 million. When they do come up, they are going for well over the asking price.

John Nash & Co has just sold a three-bedroom house in Orchard Lane within "skipping distance" of the station for 12 per cent over the asking price. The house, in need of complete modernisation, was marketed at a guide price of £425,000 and achieved nine sealed bids.

Bairstow Eves Countrywide has just sold a three-bedroom house in need of modernisation on Grimsdells Road, with a garage, for "significantly" over the £500,000 asking price.

"We had 20 people viewing it on the first Saturday it went on the market, and ten people made sealed bids," Batavia says. "It is now under offer for significantly over the asking price. We also just completed on Courtlands on North Road in Chesham Bois, which completed for £15,000 over the asking price because two people were bidding on it."

Although the top end of the market is a little slower, Nick Pounce of Savills recently sold Dragon House, on tree-lined Devonshire Avenue, one of the prime roads in Amersham, before it even went on to the market.

"We looked at it in December but the owners didn't want to sell until the New Year. We persuaded the vendors to allow us six viewings over one weekend at Christmas and it sold for £2.25 million without ever going on the market," he says.

The buyers' perspective

Marketing professionals Claire and Austin Collins are both in their thirties and work in Central London. After almost a year of near-misses they have just had an offer accepted on a property in Amersham.

"We were looking for three bedrooms, within walking distance of a station, with a garden, a bit of charm and hopefully a garage," Austin says.

Their budget was up to £500,000 and they were happy to take on basic renovations. However, with properties going to sealed bids, the couple frequently had to make snap decisions on putting in an offer after seeing a property only once.

"We've really had to re-evaluate what is absolutely essential in a house, as our initial 'dream' home was well out of our budget in Amersham. We've paid well over what people would probably consider to be the norm elsewhere in the country, but we are very happy. We've got a lovely house that ticks most of the boxes we were after and gets us into an area where we feel very much at home."

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