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Homes & Property

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got cool in lockdown:
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London's still the place to be

Meghann Murdock pinpoints where pandemic buyers are flocking in the capital this year

Hilltop haven: Highgate was top of the list of areas seeing renewed popularity for buyers, with Rightmove searches up 97% compared with last year. Below, Nicola Watkins and her husband, Brett

The coronavirus pandemic may have changed what buyers look for in a property, with gardens and space to work from home now a priority, yet not everyone is leaving London to find it.

That said, they are seeking that dream home in different parts of the capital, with central London prices falling and leafy suburbs recording staggering price growth.

Top of the list of areas seeing renewed popularity in 2021 is Highgate, where searches on Rightmove for homes to buy soared 97 per cent at the beginning of this year compared with the same time in 2020.

Asking prices in the hilltop village — home to Kate Moss, Jude Law and Jamie Oliver, among others — are now £1.17 million on average.



Interior designer Nicola Watkins and her husband Brett, who is an architect, moved just under a mile from Archway to Highgate in north London, swapping their flat by Archway Tube station for a two-bedroom home in Pond Square.

"We're in the middle of the triangle — Highgate Wood, Hampstead Heath and Waterlow Park. We basically went to one of those every day during the first lockdown," says Nicola.

The couple had lived in Archway since 2017, in a 485sq ft property they transformed from a one- to a two-bedroom flat, so, with their now two-year-old son on the scene they decided to rent it out. In October last year

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they bought a 1,000sq ft apartment in Highgate — paying £940,000 after negotiating a £45,000 reduction from an older couple now based in Yorkshire.

“It’s got a huge communal garden which we were hesitant about at first but it’s been fantastic, particularly now, you can talk to people and there are other children here,” says Nicola who left her job just before Covid struck to set up an architecture and interior design firm byWatkins.com.

Towards Highgate Tube station are three “Milton” roads which are well-located for the Parkland Walk conservation trail that runs from Alexandra Palace to Finsbury Park. “You can walk for miles and not see a car, perfect for taking the dog out,” says Mark Sumray of Dexters Highgate branch.

What can you buy?

The Holly Lodge Estate has houses and some small flats — a four-and-a-half minute walk to the heath. “One-beds tend to be £350,000 to £500,000 — they’re not big but it’s quiet and peaceful,” says Sumray. For £2million-plus there’s Cholmeley Park for Channing School and Waterlow Park, while for £5million there’s Sheldon Avenue, Stormont, Broadlands and Grange Roads.

Schools:

St Joseph’s Catholic primary school is rated outstanding. St Michael’s and Highgate primary schools and Highgate Wood and Parliament Hill secondary schools are rated good.

Other London pockets to have seen huge annual increases in buyer searches are East Sheen near Richmond Park, Belvedere near the forthcoming Crossrail links at Abbey Wood, Feltham near Heathrow airport and London Fields in Hackney.

BELVEDERE, SOUTH-EAST LONDON

Between Abbey Wood in Bexley and Erith in Kent, Belvedere is popular with first-time buyers, families and buy-to-let investors.

Teacher Jenna Stonebanks is

looking to buy in the area with her husband Dean and says the green outdoor spaces are a big draw.

Having lived with family for around two years to save, the couple are ready to start their property search. “There are huge parks for the kids — I take my niece and nephew there quite a lot,” says Jenna.

“It’s got good transport links but is far enough out that you don’t feel the hustle and bustle, there are little villages in it like Upper Nuxley which is lovely.”

“People buying in Belvedere are not necessarily starting their search here, they might search south Bexleyheath or Welling with a mile radius then see the price difference,” says Jack Clyde of Robinson Jackson.

Popular roads in the area include Bedonwell Road which has Thirties semi-detached houses a quick walk from the nursery on the same road. “It’s a spine road, so really any road off that one is a good choice,” says Clyde.

What can you buy?

Two-bedroom Victorian terraces in Alfred Road for around £310,000 or three-bedroom semi-detached houses from £380,000 to £400,000.

Schools:

Bedonwell Infant and Nursery School is rated outstanding by Ofsted. There are well-rated Grammar schools in Welling, Bexleyheath and Dartford.



DANIEL LYNCH



ADRIAN LOUIRE



House hunting: Jenna Stonebanks and right, houses on Cromwell Avenue, Highgate



Community feel:

PR consultant Deborah Battsek and daughter Eliza. Deborah moved to East Sheen, pictured top and above, 25 years ago and sold her house, left, last summer for a garden flat nearby

outside space, they were so happy.”

What can you buy?

Cottages on the roads around North Worple Way, towards the riverside, says Westwood. Exclusive streets are near Richmond Park, the bottom end of Sheen Lane, Stonehill Road and Parkgate Gardens. Richmond Park Road is in

the middle, with semi-detached houses a five-minute walk to the park or high street.

Schools:

There are five outstanding primary schools, most of the secondary state schools are rated good. Among independent schools is Ibstock Place, a mixed school for ages four to 18, which ranks in the top 10 per cent for A-level results.

● Schools information from *Locrating.com*, which costs £6.99 a month for full access to popularity ratings, inspections and admission data.

EAST SHEEN, SOUTH-WEST LONDON

Sandwiched between Barnes and Richmond, the leafy well-heeled suburb is popular with young couples and families on the hunt for good schools.

“Some people have moved south of the river because of Hammersmith bridge [closing],” says Paul Westwood of Knight Frank.

“If they’ve got children at St Paul’s or The Harrodian, coming from Hammersmith, Fulham and Chelsea, it’s a long journey.”

PR consultant Deborah Battsek moved to East Sheen 25 years ago then, last summer, sold her house in Temple Sheen Road to buy a garden flat about five minutes away.

“There’s a wonderful local community,” says Deborah. “Friends of mine living in the country just became glorified taxi drivers, while everything my children did was within walking distance and, working full-time, I needed that.”

“The closure of Hammersmith bridge is a complete nightmare for homeowners but even with that, I still

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STATS CHECK
What homes cost

Area	(Average prices)
Highgate	£1,174,268
East Sheen	£1,002,279
Feltham	£362,571
Belvedere	£297,500
London Fields	£623,454

Source: Rightmove

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