
The Telegraph

Swap Surrey for Cheshire: why the North West's property market is soaring

Lower house prices and easy commuting, plus more working from home, have made the North West's rural pockets a popular option with buyers

By [Arabella Youens](#) 3 May 2021 • 5:00am



This grand five-bedroom house in Clitheroe, Lancashire, has a separate annexe, plus four reception rooms, a large garden and views over Pendle Hill. It is £1.2m with Fine & Country

Often overlooked or stereotyped, the North West is now soaring in popularity with buyers looking for country homes, making it one of the hottest property markets in the country.

As more people are able to stretch their commutes by working from home for some or all of the week, many are now looking to the area to take advantage of significant house price differences.

These value gaps are stark: while the average price of a house in Surrey is £589,310, this drops to £263,765 in Cheshire and £199,797 in Cumbria, according to estate agency Savills.

In the year to February, house prices in the North West grew by 11.9pc, according to the Office for National Statistics, which was the highest rate in the country. At the same time, the North West is [one of the fastest moving markets](#) in the UK, with sales agreed on properties in an average of just 38 days from the point of listing, in analysis by website Zoopla.

It is also competitive: estate agency Hamptons found that 40pc of properties sold in the North West in the first three months of the year had [offers from three or more buyers](#).



Flavia Paterson with her children Arabella and Tilly, who moved from Edinburgh to Cheshire last year CREDIT: PAUL COOPER

The area is misunderstood by many who are outside it, said Crispin Harris of estate agency Jackson-Stops. “It’s very easy to sit in a flat in Fulham and assume it’s all whippets and flat caps in the North West but the reality is so different. Those who didn’t know it before are blown away by what’s on offer. Within an hour of my office, I can get to Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield and Birmingham.”

He has seen a significant shift of buyers as the economic make-up of Manchester has changed with the arrival of the BBC, Microsoft and Google – not to mention home-grown businesses such as The Hut Group and Boohoo.

“We’re always selling to footballers, and the fact that there are a number of big clubs around here is a factor,” said Mr Harris. “But the reality is that many of our clients for prime country houses are people who run successful local businesses.

“Working hard is cool here, and people are well-educated and very savvy. The area is also relatively compact, and people know each other, which makes for amazing networking.”



Near Knutsford in Cheshire is this six-bedroom house with a pool situated in over an acre of land. It is £1.75m with Savills

One of those entrepreneurs who has recently been pulled to the area is Stephen Price, who owns SP&Co Group, a health and fitness company. Originally from Herefordshire, he moved to London and built his business from scratch.

Having lived in various locations around south and west London Mr Price and his wife decided to relocate to a village between Knutsford and Alderley Edge in 2018. “It’s an expensive area, and yet a house costs about the same as a two-bedroom flat in central London,” he said.

Mr Price commutes on the 90-minute train to London from Crewe station, a 20-minute drive away. “Here, I have the best of both worlds. The community is great and I’m enjoying playing for the village cricket team.”

Demand from relocators in the North West has boomed recently. Buying agency Property Vision, which usually finds homes for its well-heeled clients in London, the Home Counties, Sussex and the Cotswolds, has opened up a new office in the North West this year, run by Ed Lucas.

“The country house market in the North West is hot, but it’s being hampered, like many others, by a shortage of stock,” said Mr Lucas. “Vendors are reluctant to sell because they can’t find a suitable house to buy.”

He added: “While many are already based here in the North West, or might be relocating here for work reasons, a number of my clients are moving up from the South in search of a better value home that’s still within an easy distance of London.



The high street in Alderley Edge CREDIT: Alamy

“I’m working with a young family at the moment who typify this: they’ve sold their London house and want to move back to the North West where one of them grew up.”

Cheshire is particularly popular with buyers because of its proximity to Manchester and good train links. The north of the county, which has easy access to Manchester, is glitzier, boasts more gated houses “and white Range Rovers”, added one agent. Wealth focuses on Knutsford, Wilmslow and Alderley Edge.

The latter has the highest property prices in the region, according to Savills. Here, the average house price is £1.265m, akin to properties in the most expensive areas of Surrey.

Further south is more rural, predominantly dairy farming country – and considerably cheaper. Much of it is owned by private estates and villages are scattered with stone cottages.

“Unlike the market in Hampshire and the Cotswolds, which is being fed largely by those moving out of London, buyers here are a real mix,” said Mr Lucas. “Those looking in north Cheshire are often schools-driven and will typically be wanting a bigger house with a garden and some kind of leisure facility, a gym or cinema.

“In South Cheshire, buyers tend to have more rural aspirations but want to be within easy distance of towns and villages such as Bunbury, Tarporley and Malpas.”



This converted school from 1830 sits to the south of Taporley in south Cheshire. It has five bedrooms, a big garden, soaring ceilings and is Grade II listed. It is £825,000 with Savills

Flavia Paterson, her husband Jamie and their two daughters moved from Edinburgh to South Cheshire just before the first lockdown in March 2020. “I’m from Cheshire originally but had been living in Edinburgh for 25 years,” said Mrs Paterson.

“We had a third floor flat in the city with no garden and had been thinking about making the move for some time. The prospect of juggling work and home schooling the girls in such a small space focused our minds.”

A public affairs communications specialist with her own agency, Mrs Paterson was in the process of establishing another start-up, Paterson & Hill, making workwear for women in outdoor and skilled trades, when the pandemic struck. “I can get to Holyrood or Westminster and back in a day. Plus, with so much going on locally thanks to the Northern Powerhouse, there are opportunities to grow.”



This house in Parbold, Lancashire, was built in 1968, and thought to have been designed by the late architect Anthony Grimshaw, this house has views over the treetops. It has three bedrooms and comes with retro interiors. It is £475,000 with The Modern House

Those looking for better value properties than in the south Manchester belt will typically search in Lancashire where you can “buy more bricks per pound,” said Mr Harris. Two of the most popular areas include Dalton and Parbold in West Lancashire, and Wiswell or Clitheroe in the Ribble Valley.

Cumbria, home to the Lake District, will draw those looking for remoteness over accessibility. “It’s a holiday destination and absolutely beautiful. Just bear in mind it’s very quiet in the winter,” added Mr Lucas. Jackson-Stops has just sold a farm to a buyer from the South who wanted a complete change of lifestyle. “Whenever we have something special, it’ll tend to attract people who are drawn to the wilderness,” said Mr Harris.

The most expensive properties are those in Cartmel, home to a 12th century priory. Further north, and the countryside around Keswick is another pricey hotspot, but anyone is hard pushed to find anything to buy as chimney pots are few and far between.