

# The Telegraph

## The best small cities to live in – where house prices are rising fastest

Compact, liveable cities have bucked the pandemic-fuelled urban exodus

By [Ruth Bloomfield](#)  
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Salisbury is one of the most in demand small cities in Britain | CREDIT: Moment RF

Just as the pandemic was beginning, Abi Herbert did exactly the opposite of what most people were planning. She moved from an idyllic village near Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire, to the bright lights of central Birmingham – and she didn't regret it for a second.

"I was living with my parents post-uni," she said. "They live absolutely out in the sticks and I was itching to get back into the city."

Ms Herbert, 24, moved to Moseley, a busy neighbourhood just south of the city centre, in March 2020 and is renting a flat. Arriving just at the start of a series of lockdowns was not the best way to make the most of her new digs, but she was still happy to be central.

“After 18 months of doing nothing, the city is exactly where I want to be. I enjoyed exploring the area and looking forward to when all the shops, bars and restaurants would open. The countryside is so beautiful, but the ability to go out and do things is much, much more important.”

There are plenty of others who agree with Ms Herbert, who works in public relations. Because, despite acres of media coverage about the great pandemic urban exodus, some cities have quietly been proving rather popular.



Abi Herbert, who moved from the countryside to the city at the start of the pandemic | CREDIT: Andrew Fox

Those to buck the trend away from urban life are, almost without exception, [small, lively, historic cities](#) with great amenities – but also with easy access to countryside, coast or both.

Analysis by Halifax, the bank, found that the city to have seen the strongest price growth over the past year (to August 2021) was Truro in Cornwall, where sale prices soared by 19pc to an average of £370,581.

Elsewhere, there was a wide geographical spread. In Swansea prices increased by 18pc to £215,131, while in Hereford values grew by 17pc to an average of £309,969.

Salisbury also recorded strong growth of 15pc to an average of £388,951. Other cities to perform well included Wolverhampton and Norwich.

Southend in Essex will become Britain's newest city after the tragic death of its MP, Sir David Amess, who campaigned for years for it to be awarded the status. Its location by the sea, proximity to London and community feel make it very popular with buyers, and house prices in the newly minted city have risen by 14pc in the year to August.

<b>House prices soared in Britain's small cities</b>		
<b>City</b>	<b>House price, Aug 2021</b>	<b>Annual growth rate</b>
Truro	£370,581	19%
Swansea	£215,131	18%
Hereford	£309,969	17%
Wolverhampton	£243,088	15%
Salisbury	£388,951	15%
Southend On Sea	£338,244	14%
Norwich	£311,322	13%
Lancaster	£215,661	13%
Worcester	£312,447	13%
Bradford	£170,729	13%
Halifax		

Meanwhile, according to research by the property website Rightmove, the league table of cities to have recorded the biggest jump in demand from buyers over the past year is led jointly by Salisbury and Chichester in West Sussex, where interest from buyers has increased by 18pc year-on-year.

The majority of the most in-demand locations are in [London's "outer commute" zone](#) – one to two hours by train from the capital – and include Southampton, Peterborough, Canterbury and Norwich.

Salisbury's popularity has risen as the city has shrugged off its reputation as a poor relation to affluent Winchester 20 or so miles away, said James McKillop of estate agency Savills.

Now, he said, buyers are flooding in from London and beyond, on the lookout for well-priced homes, good transport links (Salisbury is less than an hour and a half from London), a lively cultural scene, grammar schools and lovely countryside on the doorstep in the form of Cranborne Chase.

The fact that Salisbury has superfast broadband appeals to those who will work from home.

Jamie Maslen of Oliver Chandler estate agents said demand for property in the city had taken him and his colleagues completely by surprise over the past year. "We thought the market was going to take a tumble, but as soon as we were released from the first lockdown my phone started ringing," he said.



Grade II-listed Mayor Ivie House in Salisbury dates from the 15th century and is in the heart of the city, near the Cathedral Close. It is £1m with Savills

"Then we had the stamp duty holiday and inquiries surged. We thought we would get a bit of a breather once the holiday was over, and that prices would realign, but the thing is that so much property has been sold that there is a real shortage of homes for sale, and because the demand is still there prices remain strong."

Predictably, many buyers have headed there from London, where, said Mr Maslen, if they sell a flat for £700,000 they will be able to buy a seven-bedroom detached house in a desirable Salisbury suburb such as Harnham or Laverstock. Demand in the city has been [heavily geared towards its suburbs](#) since the pandemic began.

"It is not the centre of Salisbury that people want, but somewhere close by with a lot more space," he said. "Gardens have never been more important."

Many of those selling up in Salisbury, meanwhile, tend to be heading west, to Wales, Devon or Cornwall. "Salisbury is a good halfway option between a big city and the country," said Mr Maslen.

Ed Lucas of the buying agency Property Vision said Hereford's pandemic appeal was similar to Salisbury's.



A three-bedroom stone cottage in Hereford with a barn conversion that is currently used by its owners as a holiday let. It is £700,000 with Inigo

"It is another one of those cities that are not really cities," he said. "It is small, it is pretty, it has got a sense of community you don't get in really big cities, and Herefordshire has got some incredible countryside."

Before the pandemic, many buyers would not be persuaded to venture further than the Cotswolds, but in the era of working from home Mr Lucas said they had become increasingly willing to embrace new areas in search of value for money. "People are less worried about where they live," he said. "They are looking for good value and a change of lifestyle."

Down on the south coast, Tim Wenning of estate agency Strutt & Parker said the strongest demand had been for homes in pretty villages and on the coast. But that does not mean that every buyer wants to live out in the sticks.

Mr Wenning estimated that around one in four of his clients wanted a home in, or within a short walk of, Chichester's beautiful city centre, with its shops and cafés, boutiques, theatre and thriving cultural scene.



This house sits on the northern fringes of Chichester, on the edge of the South Downs. It has four bedrooms and a large garden. It is £1.575m with Strutt & Parker

Many are young families who want to live near to its good schools, he added, while others are downsizing from larger, more remote homes once their families have grown up.

Within Chichester's ancient city walls, the Pallants has long been its most aspirational address, thanks to its streets of glorious Georgian townhouses. "You can step out of your front door and be in the heart of the city in five minutes," said Mr Wenning. A four-bedroom townhouse would cost around £800,000.

If you want to combine the joys of small city living with plenty of space and a good-sized garden, the key areas to get to know are Westgate, with its large Victorian houses and 1930s villas, and, a mile north of the city centre, Summersdale, with its leafy streets and peaceful atmosphere.

Buyers here are paying a premium for the location, said Mr Wenning. "You would need a budget of £1m-plus to buy a family home in either area."