

Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Estate Agent Survey



April 2016

About the survey

To help it construct a Neighbourhood Plan, the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (FNPSG) sought information about the demand for housing in Felsted. In March 2016, to supplement the information being gathered through a Housing Needs Survey being conducted by the Steering Group with the Rural Community Council for Essex, the Steering Group decided to survey estate agents to determine the demand for market housing in Felsted Parish.

Objective

To ascertain the views of industry participants on the extent and types of properties in demand to buy or rent in Felsted.

Methodology

Using a questionnaire as a script, approaches were made to residential estate agents transacting in properties in Felsted and asking about:

- Relative demand for properties for sale and rent
- The size and price range of properties in demand
- Who the purchasers are, where they come from and
- What attracts purchasers to Felsted

The questionnaire was based on similar successful surveys conducted by other neighbourhood planning groups.

Where appropriate property websites (RightMove and Zoopla etc.) were used to cross check the information provided by the agents.

Some initial contact was made with agents within around 20 miles of Felsted. However, it became clear that agents in Braintree and Bishops Stortford had very little commercial involvement in the parish and were not worthy of inclusion in the survey proper.

In April 2016 the NPSG sent survey enquiry forms to sixteen estate agents believed to have relevant experience of the housing market in Felsted. The agents were located in Felsted, Great Dunmow and Chelmsford.

Response to the circular was initially poor and the proforma survey form was returned completed by only three agencies. Follow-up calls were made to the remaining thirteen agencies and structured telephone interviews conducted. These interviews were very positive and, in the main, the agencies were open and helpful. Three agencies said their experience of the parish was limited and a fourth specialised in barn conversions and their experience was not relevant to the general market. The remaining twelve respondents formed the main survey cohort. However, to ensure we used the largest possible cohort, we also directly visited a second group of agents in Chelmsford to confirm whether they were in the Felsted market.

Features of the Responses

There was some difficulty in ensuring the agents confined their comments only to the legal parish of Felsted. For example, some agents referred to Flitch Green/Oakwood Park as Felsted, the actual parish boundary being of less consequence than the market driven price boundaries, consequently some remarks needed to be regarded with caution or discounted.

There was a general consistency of response from all the agents. Where differences were noted they stemmed from the unique selling proposition differentiators used by the various agencies to attract business in a segmented market. For example, in the purchase market only one agent specifically cited period properties and country homes as being in demand and, in the much smaller rental market in the parish, only one company was focused on rental customers associated with airport workers and described a very specific customer demographic.

Gaining information in a form which allows graphical statistical representation proved impossible. Though the agents hold detailed data on transactions, few of the agents appeared to analyse their business information or share it in a way that would allow graphical presentation. For example, purchasers contact agents in the area in which they want live. Consequently, agents did not appear to analyse the postcodes of potential purchasers to determine their geographical distribution but could provide anecdotal evidence based on experience.

The survey comprised 10 brief questions about the purchase and rental markets and the opportunity for additional comment. The questions were used to initiate discussion with the respondents and for the reason stated in the previous paragraph not followed slavishly.

Summary of the noted responses and comments.

What type of residential property is in demand to be purchased?

Summary

Felsted is a highly desirable residential area and property stock – the properties on agents books available for sale or rent - is almost always low and insufficient to meet demand. Demand is across the range from building plots and 2 bedroom flats to substantial country homes. The mid to upper end of the market in the sub £750K range is particularly strong. A number of agents commented that bungalows were in very short supply and would sell quickly. 'Whatever is built will be purchased' was a recurring response. The name 'Felsted' has kudos and properties command a premium price. Because Felsted commands a premium over adjacent parishes, affordability is perceived as a critical issue for family purchasers.

Comments

All property from flats to five plus bed homes.

The market is strongest in the sub £750K price range.

The market is strong for all types of property but slightly less strong for equestrian or shared ownership properties.

Bungalows.

Anything, there is a shortage!

Property suitable for younger people – Felsted is too desirable.

New builds – bungalows are always in demand.

50% of buyers want a house

25% of buyers want a property with land

25% of buyers want flats

Build it and it will be bought!

Houses with land

Period properties

Number of bedrooms required?

Summary

There is strong demand in all categories but three and four bed homes were identified by agents surveyed as being in particularly short supply and strong demand.

Comments

Any number so long as they are in Felsted.

2-4 beds but most are looking for 3-4.

Demand for all bedroom numbers is equally strong.

3/4/5 bed homes.

3/4 bed homes.

3/4 bed homes.

3/4 bed homes.

3/4 bed homes at the lower affordable end of the market

Some demand for kudos properties with 5+ bedrooms.

4.5+ beds.

Smaller 2/3 beds.

Who are the potential purchasers?

Summary

All agents reported that there to be a wide mix of purchasers, about half of whom are local clients looking to up or downsize from their existing local property; the elderly looking to downsize to more manageable homes and growing or aspirational families looking for larger properties. A significant number of potential purchasers are families with school age children. There are fewer first time buyers because the cost of entry to the Felsted market demands a high deposit. The parish also attracts some commuters.

Comments

Families with school age children.

Downsizers.

First time buyers.

Commuters.

A wide mix of applicants.

Local up and downsizers.

Local up and downsizers.

Commuters.

Younger couples with school age children.

People who want to stay in the area.

A wide mix from across the board – downsizers.

80% are younger couples with school age children.

Commuters

Where are they coming from?

There is a consistent view that around 40 - 50% of sales are to local people seeking to remain local but in a different property as their housing needs change. In this context, 'local' is not confined to Felsted parish but to around a 5-mile radius. Around 15% were within 5 miles of the parish. Around 40% 'ride a wave' out from London, Epping, Ongar and into NW Essex. There was a suggestion that some people who find some areas of Bishops Stortford 'too expensive' choose to move to Felsted, though this was not a widely held view. Around 10% come to the parish from much further afield attracted by the access to excellent schools.

Comments

50/50 locals and people migrating out from NE London and South Essex.

People who can't afford what they want in Bishops Stortford.

60% are not local.

North and East London.

Other parts of Essex and East Herts.

Ongar, Epping, North London and Chelmsford.

Essex generally.

London.

London and the SE.

15% are from a 5 mile radius.

10% are from way outside the area – anywhere, it's the schools.

What do people say attracts them to Felsted?

Summary

This was the most consistent area of the survey with all agents commenting on the schools being a very significant driver of demand. Though all mentioned Felsted school and were united in stressing its importance, there was also very significant recognition of the reputation of the Felsted Primary school as being a major attraction to the village and to homes in its catchment area. Next came the amenities, comprising the highly regarded village shop and post office, described as "The best little Tardis in Essex", doctors, pubs and the restaurants. The safety and community feel of the pretty village in a rural setting with access to road and rail links was also very highly prized.

Comments

The schools Felsted and the primary school.

Amenities

The shop.

The schools Felsted and the primary school.

Amenities.

The shop – "The best Tardis in Essex"

Access to London, Chelmsford and the A120.

The schools.

Reputation for good village life.

Good shop.

Pubs.

Rural location.

The community.

Felsted school – very important.

Beautiful village.

Restaurants.

Access to Chelmsford.

Transport links.

Amenities.

Felsted school.

Safe community.

Access to London.

Felsted school.

Village location and countryside.

Kudos of the name Felsted.

Looks great – the aesthetic!

Pubs restaurants.

Primary school.

Felsted School.

The Countryside.

Amenities.

Access to Stansted and London.

The Rental Market

Not all the agents interviewed were in both the sales and rental markets.

Most agents commented that the same factors mentioned by buyers are also what attract rental clients and the agents found it difficult to add any unique or discrete commentary relating only to the rental market.

Some customers cited their inability to raise a large enough deposit to purchase property in Felsted, which was significantly more expensive than adjacent but less desirable areas, so rented as a second choice.

Uncertainty about lifestyle horizons were also a factor unique to the rental market where people, for a range of domestic and economic reasons, were uncertain how long they wanted to be in the area and were consequently reluctant to commit to a purchase.

The agent's comments were cross-checked with Rightmove, Zoopla and other property websites and local press. At the time of preparation of this report, only 5 properties were available to let. The properties offered were consistent with the agent's various comments.

What is your experience of the demand for RENTAL properties in Felsted?

There is strong demand for all rental properties but stock is so limited the market is supply driven. Three, four and five bedroom homes are in demand but there is particularly high demand for smaller properties for rent.

What size properties are people looking to rent?

Any size but there is strong demand for two and three bedroom homes.

How much do they expect to pay?

At the lowest end of the market a less well-appointed or poorly located 2 / 3 bedroom property would command a minimum of £850 to £950 per calendar month. Better properties of a similar size command a rental of £1,250 per calendar month. The majority of the market is in the £1,250 to £1,600 per calendar month range with unique luxury homes achieving significantly higher returns.

What attracts people to Felstedas renters?

In addition to *all* the comments made by buyers, rental customers cited proximity to Stansted (where they worked).