

Here comes the sun

As the weather hots up, so will the market. Prospective tenants will have more choice (but also more competition) and landlords may find it easier to achieve asking rents but will need to be flexible in order to secure a good tenant. The start of the year hasn't exactly been the 'calm before the storm' though. In our previous quarterly letting report we laid out our predictions for the year ahead. Three months in, we take a look at how the market has performed:



A busy start to the year...

As ever, the Oxfordshire letting market was quiet in December and then had a big spike in activity in January. We see this every year as people take the time over the Christmas holiday to search for property online and send in enquiries, ready to get going in January (between 24th December and 8th January we received more than 800 emails from Rightmove and Zoopla). This early jump in activity contributed to our Abingdon team letting all 13 of the 1- and 2-bedroom apartments listed at Publishing House (Photo 1) – not such an unlucky number after all.

...and the beginning of the summer rush

We often find that searches for family homes tend to start after Easter. You don't often find families choosing to move in January, however it is not totally unheard of – our North Oxford team had a number of families getting in touch as soon as term started; Photo 2 shows a fantastic 3-bedroom home in Summertown which was let at £2,995¹ to a family moving to be closer to local schools. In general though, family homes need



to be available to view in the spring for move-in dates in July/August. Our recommendation to landlords of larger homes is to have your property available right now and looking its best. Be flexible on rental asking price, availability dates and pets; all these factors will influence how quickly you secure a tenant.

Right to Rent regulation

The new legislation came into effect in February and already our Central Oxford office has noticed a small shift in the market. The larger, family-style and premium-priced properties tend to attract the overseas tenants who are coming to Oxford for work and are funded by their employers. Previously, they would conduct rental property searches and visa applications in tandem. However, they are now playing it safe and waiting until they have their visa before they start looking. This makes sense and we are confident that the market will adapt to this new rhythm.



Stamp Duty

The increase in stamp duty on second properties – including properties bought to let – has already had an impact on prices. Our Banbury team commented that investors who had the money ready were keen to buy before the April deadline. The owner of a 1-bedroom apartment (Photo 3) completed in the middle of March and the property is now listed for rent at £795¹. The result of more people buying before April has been an increase in prices, in many cases by more than the 3% that the additional stamp duty will cost. However, the real challenge is for owners who are moving out of a property but retaining it to let. For example, if someone is buying to move in with a partner this new property is still classed as a second home and they will be taxed on its purchase. Understandably, people in this position have been rushing to complete by the end of Quarter 1.

Progress with new developments in West Oxfordshire

CALA Homes is progressing well with a small development at Spring Meadow in Witney (Photo 4). The 21 houses in the development are mainly 3- and 4-bedroom properties. There was one 2-bedroom house, but it was sold as soon as the site opened, which gives an indication of how popular they will be. CALA Homes is also planning another development in Bampton and Rivar Homes is in the early stages of a small development of 2- and 3-bedroom cottages in Long Hanborough. If you are interested in investing in residential property, we would be delighted to advise you, so please do give us a call.

Improving what you have

At the start of the year we predicted that the discerning landlord will improve their current properties to maintain or increase their return. Our building and renovation division, Bricks & Mortar, already has a list of jobs scheduled and authorised for the summer months. Landlords will use the time between tenancies to upgrade their properties and Bricks & Mortar will work closely with the letting team to secure a tenant before the works are completed.

¹ All individual rents in this report are pcm and marketing rents

Long-term relationships with tenants

We do like to keep our good tenants, although we realise that people move about as their jobs and circumstances change. Our East Oxford team in Headington has just matched one tenant with his fourth Finders Keepers' property in Oxford. The tenant first came to us in 2009 from abroad, more or less with just a suitcase in his hand. He rented the first property, in East Oxford, for a year before asking us to find him something a bit bigger. After a year in this larger property in St Clements we put him in touch with our colleagues in North Oxford when he planned to move there. Now he and his partner have taken another property in East Oxford as they have moved in together for the first time! Obviously we're thrilled with this development, and we'd like to think we can keep in contact with many more of our tenants – whether they are looking for a new property or becoming landlords themselves!



Most of you will know by now that Finders Keepers has become part of Countrywide PLC, the home of companies such as John D Wood and Hamptons International. Our culture of 'Property. Properly.', the hands-on Property Managers who deliver the full tenant lifecycle, the letting team focused on quality of tenant – these are the strengths that Countrywide admire and want to invest in even further. So fear not, we are as likely to scrap our operating standards and processes evolved over 40 years as we are to order our staff to wear Donald Trump wigs. Stay tuned for new services and developments.