

LAPS OF LUXURY

Homes close to rivers, canals and the sea have never been more in demand – or expensive

SWALLOWS And Amazons by Arthur Ransome has sold millions of copies since it was published in 1930.

For successive generations the book has conjured up an idyllic way of life – replete with messing about in boats and fishing on the calm waters of the Lake District. It's been the inspiration for management consultant Will Pitchers, 31, who wants to give his 11-year-old son, Archie, the same magical childhood. Will has bought a one-bedroom flat at Woodberry Down, a Berkeley Homes regeneration scheme in Finsbury Park – in London's Zone 2 – that has two reservoirs, one of which has a water sports centre.

It is the ideal spot for father and son to enjoy water and wildlife activities together when Archie visits. 'As neither of us has ever sailed before, we're looking forward to learning together,' says Will.

Woodberry Down, where one-bedroom apartments cost from £550,000, has 42 acres of open

water, and access to a nature reserve (woodberry-down.co.uk).

Like many employees, Will works from home. He has a workspace with views over the water, floor-to-ceiling windows and a balcony.

The trend for homeworking since lockdown has seen an increase in people looking for homes in rural and watery hotspots.

Fran Moynihan, of Savills estate agents, reports an eye-popping 936 per cent increase in buyers looking for waterside homes from June to September this year, compared with the same period last year.

'People have been re-assessing lifestyle choices since lockdown,'

she says. Competition is fierce. Homeworkers looking for a river frontage are vying with second-home buyers and older couples looking to downsize. This, plus a shortage in supply, has seen prices soar.

'The traditional hotspots are Oxford, Cambridge, Henley, Marlow and Windsor,' says Fran.

While a four-bedroom home within 100 metres of waterfront in the North-East can cost £230,000, one along the River Thames can cost in excess of £1 million.

Francis Stickney, head of sales at waterside property specialist Riverhomes (riverhomes.co.uk), says there are only about 3,000

homes along the Thames within the M25 and only about 50 or 60 come up for sale each year. So younger buyers seeking an affordable waterside home need to look further afield.

A £225,000, two-bedroom flat at Rochester Riverside, a £419 million scheme of 1,400 homes on the Medway in Kent (countrysideproperties.com), proved the perfect first home for 24-year-old Nadia Mitchell, who moved from a rented flat in East London in March. She swapped a monthly rent of £650 plus bills for a mortgage of £550.

'I've always been a big outdoors person, so being able to walk

along the river every day is amazing,' she said.

There are affordable homes at Chapel Riverside, Inland Homes' development overlooking the River Itchen, in Southampton, starting at £185,000 for a one-bedroom home (inlandhomes.co.uk).

And, up in Wigan, a listed cotton mill has been converted into 99 loft-style one-bedroom flats priced from £99,000 on the Bridgewater Canal (loomwharf.co.uk).



On the water: The Lockhouse at Ealees on the Rochdale Canal is on the market for £325,000

RESearch by the BlueHealth environmental project confirms the positive impact that living by water can have on wellbeing, with water-based sports such as fishing having a post-lockdown surge.

The Environment Agency reports that more than 100,000 more people have become hooked.

Crest Nicholson's enclave of two, three and four-bedroom houses, priced from £364,950, at Curbridge Meadows in Hampshire, has proved popular, since it is near the River Hamble (crestnicholson.com).

And for those wanting to live near a big city, a lockside home on a sleepy canal will offer the best of all worlds.

A three-bedroom home on the Rochdale Canal in Ealees, near Manchester, is on the market for £325,000 with Fine & Country (fineandcountry.com).

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