

Location, location, location

In the second of our special three-part series, neighbourhood experts Sue McGlynn and Garry Hall guide you through the second stage of your journey, moving on from an appreciation of the location and layout of the neighbourhood to the smaller scale of your street and how to choose the best one.

Last month, we covered the neighbourhood on a big scale, thinking about your choice of location relative to shops, leisure, public transport, schools and parks. We also talked through the different types of layout that you'll find when house hunting and what they can mean for your quality of life. We started to build a list of questions to ask when looking at potential neighbourhoods, and this month we'll add the things to look for in the street where you'll live.

SPACES IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

We are going to continue our journey by homing in on your chosen street. The street is the setting for your home – your very own address. The builders of Georgian London, Bath and Edinburgh knew the value of creating great tree-lined streets, avenues and squares. They realised that the quality of the street itself added value to each house in it, and this remains equally true today. In this article we explain what makes a quality street.

Convenient access to facilities such as shops and pubs is one thing, but you will have no doubt noticed that the more expensive areas are also attractively designed or feature other things that make them feel good to live in. How the street looks and feels is vitally important

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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to first impressions, how your home address is perceived by other people and for how much enjoyment you'll get from living there. This goes beyond the buildings (although they are important, too), with most of the attractiveness generated by things in the spaces between the fronts of buildings.

Of course, people's tastes and preferences about places will vary. But property prices clearly identify the best streets within a neighbourhood. Some of this will be to do with house type and size, but it will also be affected by the overall quality of the street as an address. We could show any group of first time buyers six pictures of different streets, ranging from good to bad, and we can bet that they'd make very similar choices in ranking the best and worst. Breaking down why one is better than another is the tricky bit. Here we offer a set of simple tips to help you assess the quality of a street quickly and easily.

Part two: In your street – checking out the approach to your home

TIP 1: PRIDE IN LOCAL PLACES



An anywhere street, which makes an uninviting approach to your home

The best home builders have always tried to provide new housing that relates well to local traditions and building materials.

Whether contemporary or traditional in style, your home will be more highly valued if it contributes in a positive way to the character of a place, rather than detracts from it. The criticisms of 'anywhere' design have been widely covered in the press, as high streets have become 'clone' towns and new neighbourhoods look the same no matter



A road designed with local character

where they are in the country. So, within your price range, look for streets that have character, not just in the design of the buildings themselves but in the street spaces as well. The feel of the place will come from the design of the street as a whole and not just one or two individual houses.

TIP 2: SAFE AND FRIENDLY STREETS

There are two main aspects to this – first of all the way in which the houses are arranged and grouped on either side of the street and second the way that vehicles move in the street and whether their number and speed are likely to be a problem. This is a big issue and has a whole host of knock-on effects for surveillance of the street and safety, as well as how friendly and active your street seems.

All the houses along both sides of the street should play their part in presenting an attractive 'face' to the street. Research has shown that streets with lots of doors and windows opening on to them are generally safer, and you are more

likely to bump into your neighbours and get to know them. Avoid streets that have a lot of blank walls and high fences along their edges – they will feel less safe, friendly and attractive to walk along. Think about the street at night, too – will it still feel welcoming and safe after dark, with good lighting and the comforting presence of lit windows and doors? As you move down the street, check that the properties look cared for and are well maintained.

We dealt with connected and dead-end neighbourhood layouts in the first article, and you may have strong views about the amount of traffic moving along your street. You will need



Blank walls and fences can make the street feel unsafe and may put off future buyers

to get a feel for how busy a street is and whether this is positive or negative as a setting for your home. Don't worry about through street locations so long as they are not routes used by HGVs. The

presence of cars in the street can actually add to safety and activity. Potential risks to pedestrians and cyclists are significantly reduced as long as vehicles are moving slowly. The evidence shows that where a street looks attractive and

QUALITY STREET CHECKLIST:



- Does the street have a special identity and character that you can be proud of as an address?
- Does the street feel friendly, safe and well maintained as you walk along, with lots of doors and windows facing it, or do you walk past blank walls and fences?
- Is parking well organised and integrated into the street?
- Does the street have trees and greenery visible within it, either on the pavement or in gardens?
- Are any public squares and play spaces nearby or are they tucked away and feel unsafe?

Thinking about the various elements in this list should make you more familiar with what matters to you and what doesn't. Whatever you choose, remember that one day you might want to sell up and move on, and an attractive street address will give you a flying start with other first time buyers.



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drivers are aware of people coming and going, then vehicle speeds reduce. An attractive and well-designed street can ensure that car speeds are kept low, providing a safe environment for walking and cycling and a pleasant place to meet and chat to neighbours.

TIP 3: GOOD PARKING, BAD PARKING



'Wheels up' parking causes problems

After noise, parking is the biggest cause of neighbour disputes. It's important to understand how different arrangements for parking cars knock on in everyday life. Lots of newer estates use parking courts, with older layouts using on-street parking or driveways and garages. It is more convenient to have private parking within your own plot, but do not necessarily be put off by on-street parking. It is an efficient way to park and can also be handy for your visitors. Parking on the street can slow traffic down and be more convenient for access to and surveillance from



Landscaped parking areas look far more attractive

your home. Studies show that even when provided, people tend not to use rear parking courts and instead choose to park near their front door. If the streets have not been designed to accommodate this, then tricky issues can arise, with 'wheels up' parking that obstructs pavements and verges. Look for streets with trees that lessen the visual impact of parked cars or well-landscaped squares that integrate parking spaces into the design.

TIP 4: CONTACT WITH NATURE

Even confirmed townies appreciate some contact with nature. Street trees soften even the most urban areas, add visual interest through the seasons, screen views between houses to protect privacy and reduce the impact of on-street car parking. Many of the best neighbourhoods feature large trees visible from the street. Trees don't have to be on the pavement: trees and other planting in front gardens can do the trick just as well, so long as you choose the variety

carefully. If a neighbourhood is newly built, try to imagine what the trees will be like when you come to sell on. Most developers use semi-mature trees that are a decent size to start with, so you won't have to wait 15 years before they



Trees help to make streets look prettier and can screen parking and average-looking buildings

start to make an impact. Not all streets that are attractive have trees on them, and this might be true if you are thinking about living in a town centre. However, pretty much all streets

will feature trees or greenery somewhere: keep an eye out for them when you are next out and about in your current neighbourhood – you may be surprised how much they add even to very built-up areas.

TIP 5: SOCIABLE SPACES

Special public spaces like squares, pocket parks and play spaces add interest and increase opportunities for socialising in your neighbourhood. They can be great places for special events and social gatherings, like farmers' markets and street parties. Look for well-placed and well-maintained public squares and pocket parks where you can relax, sitting in



Squares and play spaces should be well overlooked to make them feel safe and inviting to use

the sun or shade, and which can provide you with extra outdoor space if you do not have your own garden.

Squares and play areas that are tucked away around the back of houses are

more likely to be used for antisocial behaviour and may feel less safe. Even if you don't use spaces like this, the next person looking to live in your house may do, and you want your area to appeal to as many people as possible when it's time to sell on. 🏠



NEXT TIME...

Next month, we'll be looking even closer to home, arriving at your front gate and thinking about how your home and its garden is designed in more detail.