



# PRIME UK RESIDENTIAL

UK - SPRING/SUMMER 2026



RESEARCH



# THE SHARP EYE ON PRIME

## CHANGE IS IN THE AIR

With this spring's shifting property landscape comes the opportunity to take stock.



**ANDREW PERRATT**  
HEAD OF UK RESIDENTIAL

Following a rainy yet optimistic start to 2026, the UK's prime property market has once again been stirred by geopolitical uncertainty. Whilst a rise in mortgage rates and inflation appears to have slowed the rate of exchanges, we have seen committed new buyers agreeing more deals than many commentators predicted. For a closer look at current market activity across all UK regions, turn to Frances McDonald's in-depth analysis on page 4.

Coming up, May is set to mark a generational shift for England's rental sector, with the long-anticipated arrival of the Renters' Rights Act. With a wave of regulatory changes set to affect many in the prime market, some landlords are reassessing their positions, while others are poised to gain ground. In her piece on page 12, Jess Tomlinson explores the impact of the Act and what the future holds for private rentals. Looking further ahead, with a new council tax surcharge on properties worth over £2m planned to take effect from 2028, Lucian Cook delves into the complexities for those involved in valuation. You can read his take on the surcharge on page 8.

Even in the most uncertain times, some areas retain endless appeal and resilience. On page 16, we reveal Great Britain's top 10 heritage cities, in an insightful feature that demonstrates the enduring power of architecture to enhance our urban lives.

With property moves largely dictated by personal life events, committed buyers and tenants remain, while sellers may need to find flex in a market awaiting brighter days. Whatever your property plans for the year, I hope this report brings some useful insight. And when the time comes for personalised, professional advice, our team is always here to support you.

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# PRIME MARKET RECOVERY TAKES A BREATH



**FRANCES MCDONALD**  
DIRECTOR RESIDENTIAL RESEARCH

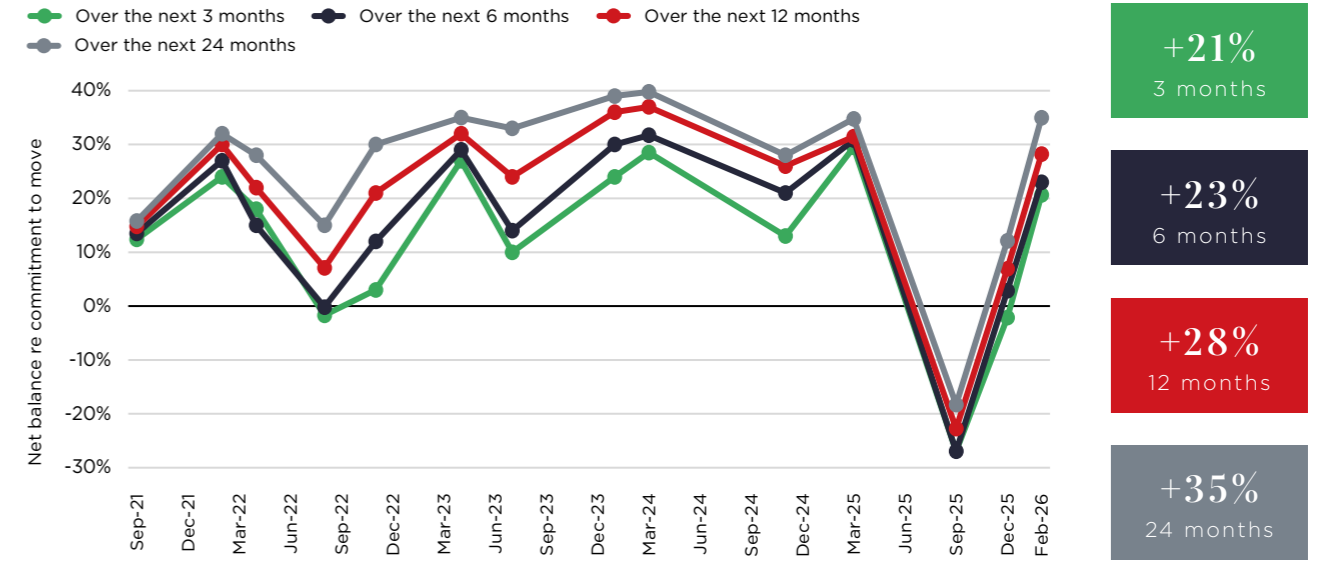
A promising start meets renewed caution in the prime markets, Frances McDonald discusses what impact recent events will have moving forward.

The start of 2026, while one of the wettest on record, showed promising signs for the UK's prime property market. With the long-anticipated Budget out of the way, the economy improving and, finally, some sunshine, the fundamentals for a recovery looked set.

Most notably, our late-February buyer and seller survey showed that commitment to move home had significantly improved. But the landscape changed quite quickly, following the start of the conflict in the Middle East, meaning the clouds of uncertainty soon reappeared in the prime housing markets.

Buyers have understandably become more cautious as higher energy prices, inflation and mortgage rates point to lower disposable household incomes and weaker GDP growth. This means it looks increasingly likely that the prime markets will remain price sensitive for a while longer.

## FEBRUARY SAW A SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IN COMMITMENT TO MOVE



Source: Savills Research buyer and seller surveys

Market activity in February was above the level of a year ago for the first time since September, though it remained marginally below the same benchmark in the market above £1 million.

In March, net agreed sales remained above the same month last year for both the whole market and the £1 million+ segment.

This tallies with Savills own data, which shows agreed sales remaining resilient throughout March.

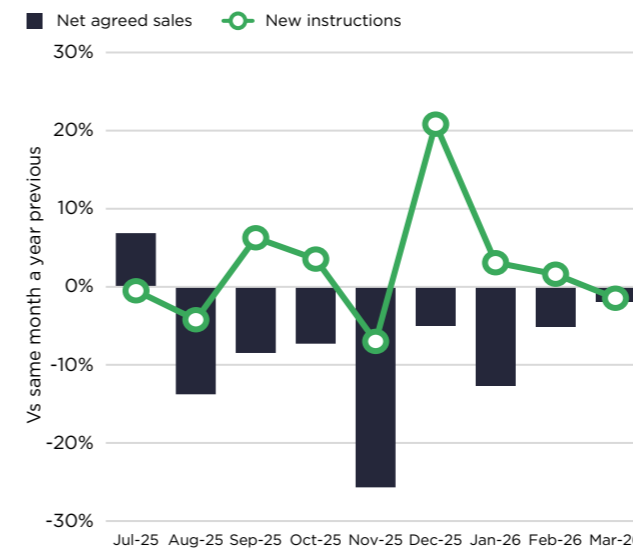
In the short term, these numbers have been supported by more motivated buyers, though smaller in number, and those looking to lock into mortgage offers and agree deals in anticipation of further rate rises.

That means the true impact of the recent wave of uncertainty will only become apparent in the coming weeks and months.

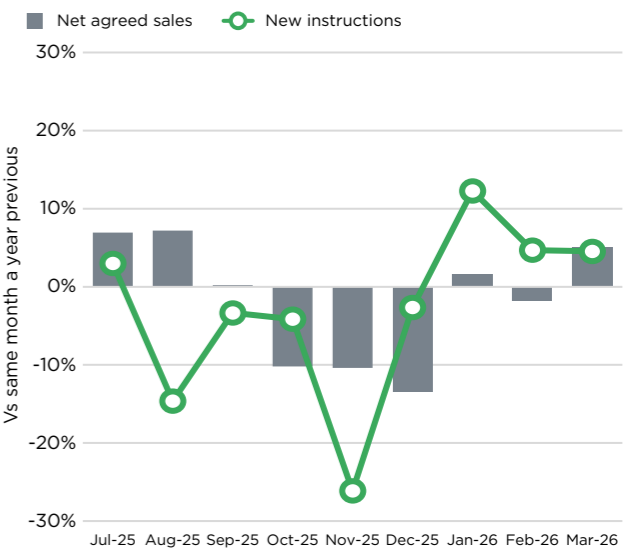
A more immediate impact has been felt in the capital, where the tax environment has continued to weigh on international demand and domestic buyers are more exposed to higher debt costs.

## IMPACT ON £1M+ MARKET ACTIVITY

### London



### Regional



Source: Savills Research using TwentyCI

**UNCERTAINTY FELT BY DISCRETIONARY MARKETS**

This heightened uncertainty means prime prices continued to fall during the first three months of the year across the majority of markets. However, in most cases, the rate of price falls has eased compared to late last year when tax uncertainty added to overcast market conditions.

In the more discretionary central London markets, which are typically the most sensitive to periods of uncertainty, prices remain almost -5% below where they were a year ago. In the short term there is the potential for some safe haven flows of wealth into this market, though the underlying tax environment still remains a barrier to price growth.

There is some evidence of more demand instead being

pushed into the super prime rental markets, as people initially look for a base in London without the commitment of buying.

**RECENT PERFORMANCE REFLECTIVE OF RELIANCE ON MORTGAGE DEBT**

Mortgage markets have been quick to respond to the recent conflict and its expected economic consequences. The members of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee voted unanimously to hold the base rate at 3.75% at their meeting in mid-March and there is now the possibility of rate rises, rather than cuts, over the course of 2026. As a consequence, fixed rate mortgage costs have headed north.

Prime markets across the Midlands, North of England and Scotland, continued to see marginal levels of price growth

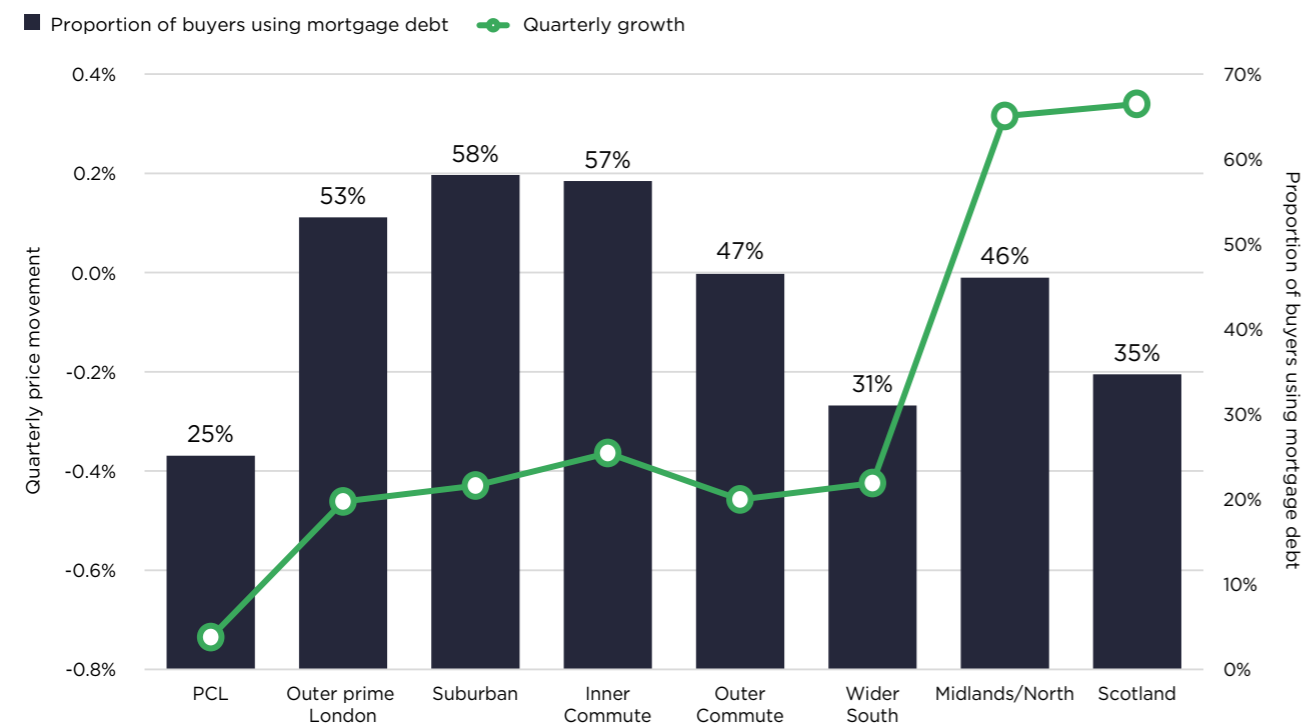
in the first quarter, reflecting the fact they are less reliant on mortgage debt than elsewhere.

Meanwhile prime properties in outer London and areas closest to the capital have felt the impact more quickly. Here, more than half of buyers use mortgage debt, meaning a more pronounced and more immediate squeeze on buyer budgets.

**+2%**  
**MARCH £1M+ NET AGREED SALES REMAINED ABOVE THE SAME MONTH LAST YEAR**

Source: Savills Research using TwentyCI

**USE OF MORTGAGE DEBT VS RECENT PRICE MOVEMENTS**



Source: Savills dealbook and prime indices, Q1 2026



**Those wanting to sell over the spring and summer will need to be realistic on pricing**



**RECOVERY DELAYED BY RENEWED UNCERTAINTY**

What does this mean for the outlook? Mortgage rates, along with other economic impacts that flow from disruption in the oil supply chain, ultimately depend on the length of the conflict which, on the face of it at least, the US president appears keen to limit.

In the short term, a smaller number of more committed buyers will look to take advantage of less competition in the market. And for those willing and able to take a medium term view, core fundamentals remain strong, particularly as properties at the top end continue to look good value.

Even so, those wanting to sell over the spring and summer will need to be realistic on pricing. Forecasts suggest that the long-anticipated recovery in the prime markets will take a little longer to break through, once the clouds part and sunshine returns.





# TIME FOR SOME HARD YAKKA



**LUCIAN COOK**  
HEAD OF RESIDENTIAL RESEARCH

Deciding on a High Value Council Tax Surcharge was the easy bit, argues Lucian Cook, Head of Residential Research at Savills. Implementing it is where the hard work really starts.

Given the plethora of options that were floated, assessed and then - one after the other - discounted prior to last year's Budget, you could be forgiven for thinking that government has done the hard yards when it comes to the reform of property taxation in England.

However, settling on the snappily titled "High Value Council Tax Surcharge" was arguably the easy bit.

### A STROLL IN THE PARK

After all, once you worked out that the progressive nature of stamp duty and Inheritance Tax meant that top-end properties already bore a significant tax burden, it became much easier to focus your efforts on addressing the limitations of an outdated Council Tax system.

Once the penny dropped that ramping up property taxes could easily hit working families in London and the South East, it became clear that getting

either the thresholds or the charges wrong could backfire both economically and politically. And once the media had flushed out the inadvertent housing market consequences of the more revolutionary proposals, so evolutionary reform became more appealing.

### PUTTING IN THE HARD YARDS

The hard bit is implementing it. Firstly, a consultation exercise will be conducted to determine which reliefs should be offered, to whom, and on what terms.

## HIGH VALUE COUNCIL TAX SURCHARGE

And then there is a valuation exercise to be undertaken, in a part of the market where the algorithms behind Automated Valuation Models quickly become less reliable than a manifesto promise.

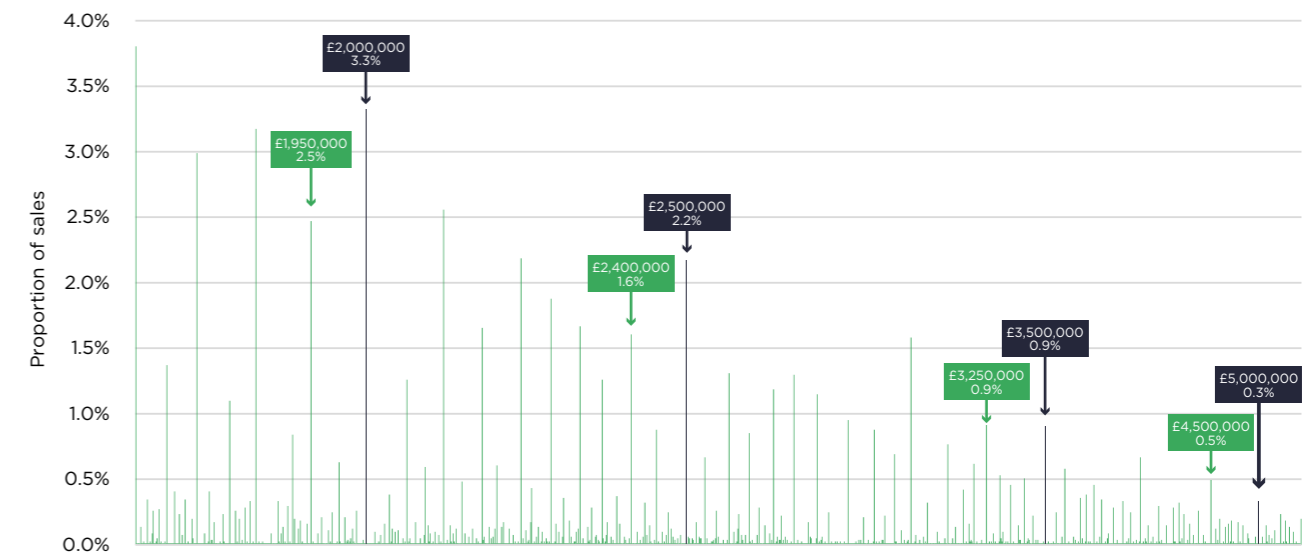
Not only are properties much less uniform than in the mainstream, but there is also more elasticity in their values.

That is borne out by our assessment of achieved prices relative to asking price and spread in the size of properties marketed at or around £2 million. In addition, many of the properties being valued will not have changed hands for some time, limiting the amount of recent transactional data on which to base assessments of value.



Our best estimates are that there are in the order of 140,000 properties worth £2 million or more, but precisely identifying them is going to require an assessment of many more.

### DISTRIBUTION OF RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY SALES BETWEEN £1.8M AND £5.5M IN 2024 & 2025



Source: Savills Research using Land Registry



**STAFFING UP**

Reports that HMRC are looking to recruit up to 1,000 valuers to help in this exercise are testament to the scale of the administrative challenge. They, much like our own valuation teams, are going to be busy.

Our best estimates are that there are in the order of 140,000 properties worth £2 million or more, but precisely identifying them is going to require an assessment of many more, given how quickly the pyramid of property values tapers at the top.

The exercise won't require those valuers to arrive at a precise property value. Instead, it will require them to make a judgment as to whether it fits into one of the four valuation bands.

But anything near a threshold is likely to be closely scrutinised and often challenged. This is especially the case as homeowners are likely to be fully aware that the balance between the art and science of valuation becomes more weighted to the former than the latter at this end of the market.

**THE BALANCE BETWEEN ART AND SCIENCE**

The exercise is made no easier by the date of valuation. In weaker market conditions, the impact of imperfections on property values becomes more magnified in what is already a discerning market. And the tea leaves tell us that the prime property market is likely to remain price sensitive this year.



A 2026 valuation date raises the important question of whether valuers will make their assessment in knowledge that the tax is coming (as appears to be the case) or whether they will be expressly directed to ignore that.

It is worth remembering that at the time it was announced, The Treasury suggested that the tax surcharge would have a 2.5% depreciatory impact on prices.

In theory, that brings a £2 million home down in value to £1.95 million, a £2.5 million home down to below

£2.45 million, a £3.5 million home closer to £3.4 million and a £5 million home below £4.9 million.

So, the bunching of transactions spot on the proposed valuation thresholds seen in 2024 and 2025 is likely to fall below them in 2026.

**WORTH THE CANDLE?**

All of that begs the question as to whether the whole exercise is worth the candle, especially given the tax is due to be implemented in 2028, soon followed by a general election in 2029.

But, in that regard, affected homeowners should perhaps be careful of what they wish for.

The proposals are far less aggressive than we might have feared. They also directly address the precise limitations of the current tax system, which are often put forward as justification for wider tax reform. And though there is always a risk that they are the thin end of the wedge, building in inflation-linked increases mitigates that.

**THE HIGH VALUE COUNCIL TAX SURCHARGE IN ENGLAND**

Payable on properties worth £2m or more in England from April 2028.

Payable by the owner of the property rather than the occupier.

**Annual Costs**

- £2m to £2.5m = £2,500 pa
- £2.5m to £3.5m = £3,500 pa
- £3.5m to £5.0m = £5,000 pa
- £5.0m and over = £7,500 pa

Based on 2026 values with 5-yearly revaluations planned.

Charges increased annually in line with CPI from April 2029 onwards.

Consultation on reliefs and exemptions pending.

**MEANWHILE IN SCOTLAND**

2 new Council Tax bands introduced from April 2028.

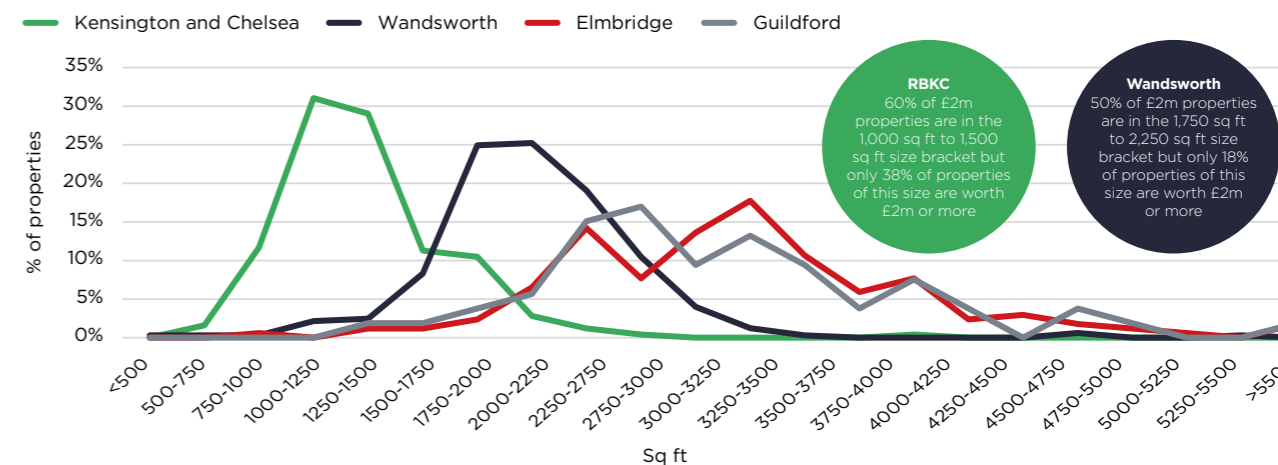
**Band I:** properties with an up to date value of between £1m and £2m.

**Band J:** properties with an up to date value of above £2m.

Will affect less than 1% of Scottish housing stock.

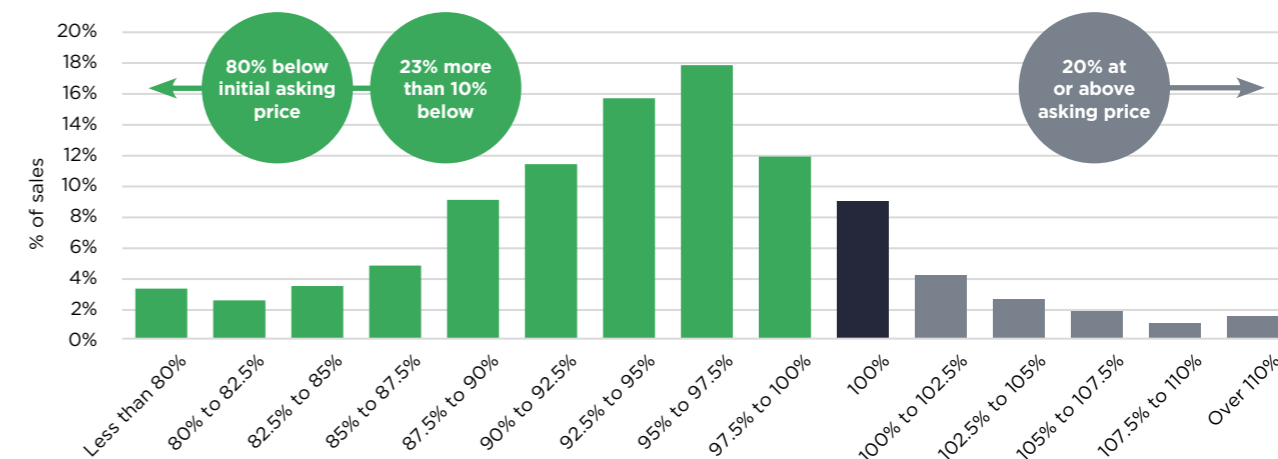
The wider Council Tax framework remains unchanged.

**SIZE OF RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES WITH AN ASKING PRICE BETWEEN £1.8M AND £2.2M**



Source: Savills Research using listings and EPC data

**£2M+ DISTRIBUTION OF SALE PRICE AS A PERCENTAGE OF INITIAL ASKING PRICE**



Source: Savills Research using listings data and Land Registry

# THE RENTERS' RIGHTS ACT IS (NEARLY) HERE



**JESS TOMLINSON**  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR RESIDENTIAL RESEARCH

The 1st May 2026 marks the biggest change to the residential lettings industry in over 30 years. As we enter the much anticipated 'new age' of the private rented sector, we look at the key changes, the longer term roadmap and who the landlords and tenants of the future will be.

**KEY CHANGES ON 1ST MAY 2026**

The Act impacts all landlords and tenants with Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) in England and

applies to both new and existing tenancies. Other tenancies aren't affected, such as those with annual rent in excess of £100,000 per year and company lets.

But still, the vast majority of the mainstream market and most of the prime market will be affected by the changes.

**WHILE NOT AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST, SOME OF THE KEY CHANGES\* ARE:**

- Fixed term tenancies no longer apply. Tenancies won't have contractual end dates and will run on a rolling basis, for example monthly. Any pre-agreed break clauses will be invalid.
  - Section 21 'no fault' notices are abolished. Landlords will need to have a reason to serve notice such as an intention to sell.
  - During the first 12 months of a tenancy a landlord cannot serve notice to move back into the property or sell it. The tenant has a 12-month protected period, provided they do not breach the terms of the tenancy.
  - Rent can only be increased once a year, following a formal process based on market rent and comparable evidence. Any pre-agreed rent increases will not be valid, and a tenant may challenge an increase they believe is not in line with market rent.
  - Landlords won't be able to accept offers over asking rent nor will they be able to accept lump sum rental payments at the beginning of a tenancy.
- \* For more details and the full list of changes coming on 1st May 2026 head to our [Renters' Rights Act hub page](#).



**THE LONGER TERM ROADMAP**

Notably, these changes form part of a wider network of regulatory and tax changes facing landlords.

Exposure to some of the tax changes announced in the November 2025 Budget will depend on how a property is owned. Meanwhile, local authorities are responsible for whether and how local licensing schemes are applied and, as such, the impact will be location specific. And the requirement to improve the energy efficiency of a property will depend on its current EPC rating.



**May 2026**

**Majority of Renters' Rights Act changes implemented on 1st May 2026**

**Late 2026**

**PRS database**

A digital public database which all landlords and properties must be on from the time the property is advertised to any lettings finishing.

**2027**

**PRS extension of Awaab's Law (subject to consultation)**

Will provide clear legal timeframes within which landlords must investigate and fix serious problems with damp and mould.

**2027**

**PRS Landlord Ombudsman Scheme**

A mandatory service offering independent, legally binding decisions to resolve disputes between tenants and private landlords.

**2027**

**Income tax change**

Increased income tax of an extra 2p in every £1 on income from properties for individual landlords.

**2028**

**High Value Council Tax Surcharge**

Applied to properties above £2m. Levied on the property owner as opposed to tenants (who will remain liable for other underlying council tax payments).

**2030**

**EPC requirements**

All rental properties will need to meet an EPC C rating as a minimum.

**Location specific**

Ongoing changes to selective licensing across certain councils ([link to Savills guide](#)).

**Longer term**

Longer term PRS Decent Homes Standard (subject to consultation).

**A 'NEW ERA' FOR THE RENTAL MARKET**

So, as the rental market evolves, who are going to be the landlords and tenants of the future?

**LANDLORDS**

Some private landlords have already reassessed their property portfolios in response to regulation, taxation or increased costs, meaning there has been an overall contraction of the PRS market. According to our analysis, the total value of housing stock in the private rented sector has fallen by £79 billion since 2022.

While some of this stock has been bought by larger, full-time landlords, a chunk has moved into the owner-occupied sector.

And while there hasn't been the mass exodus some feared, it seems inevitable that smaller landlords with outstanding mortgage debt will continue to review their options. How and when they act will be affected by changing market conditions in both the sales and lettings markets.

At the same time, accidental landlords are expected to be thinner on the ground. Therefore, stock constraints are likely to become more pronounced, particularly where these two landlord groups dominate, with new investment likely to be focussed on higher yielding properties.

In comparison, larger, international and institutional owners will be better equipped to weather regulatory change. Typically, they will take a longer term outlook, be more able to spread risk across their portfolio, have the management systems in place to deal with a greater regulatory burden and benefit from economies of scale in applying new minimum energy efficiency standards.

**TENANTS**

There is no such thing as a typical tenant for prime property. It varies by location, property type and time of year. But there are some identifiable trends in different parts of the market.

Prime central London continues to have an international appeal on a global stage.

The high stamp duty costs associated with buying, compounded by recent changes to non-dom tax rules, will continue to push international demand into central London's prime rental market. Current global events are likely to accentuate that in the short term.



Such international demand is also a feature of the market through the belt of North West London that runs from St John's Wood to Hampstead, though to a lesser degree.



In other prime London markets, demand for flats is dominated by young professional renters in the early part of their careers, who are yet to buy their first home. Recent upward pressure on interest rates is likely to support demand from them in the short term, with improved access to homeownership over the longer term unlikely to fully offset the expected supply constraints in the rental market.



Tenants of family homes are more likely to be renting through choice or doing so in response to life events, whether that be a change in relationship status, exploring a new area before committing to a purchase or refurbishment of their main home. Such practical drivers of demand are unlikely to see much change.

The prime regional markets tend to be more consistently domestic.

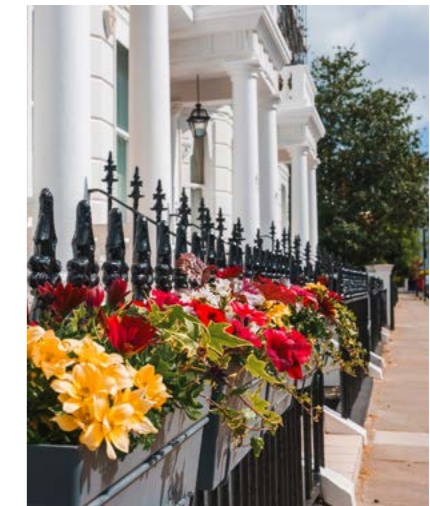


Regional towns and cities benefit from a high proportion of needs-based, younger tenants who are likely to remain the bedrock of demand for smaller homes.

More specifically, students and graduate sharers typically look to rent around university start dates and major employers' graduate intakes, adding to the seasonality of the market. Here, the lack of rental payment in advance will temper the competitive advantage of those historically offering this to a prospective landlord.

By comparison, as you move out into the commuter belt, so the proportion of older tenants looking for family housing increases.

Here, young professional couples and families make up a much higher proportion of demand given an increased need for space. They are likely to be chasing a smaller pool of available rental stock, given the profile of current landlords.



**BRINGING THINGS TO A CONCLUSION**

Finally, it is worth remembering tenants across the prime markets, not only initially rent, but also move on for a multitude of reasons.

This is unlikely to change in response to new regulation, meaning that while they will enjoy greater security of tenure, the rich tapestry of life will continue to underpin a turnover of rental stock. That means landlords need to continue to match their offering to the strongest seams of demand in their area.

\*Source: Savills Research using The Lettings Hub 2024-2025



# MOST DESIRABLE HERITAGE CITIES



**LUCIAN COOK**  
HEAD OF RESIDENTIAL RESEARCH

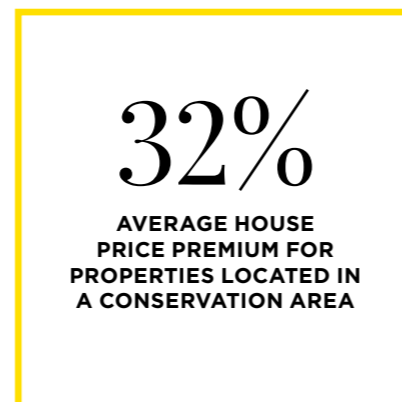
Across Great Britain, properties in Conservation Areas carry a 32% average house price premium. Here we rank our large and medium-sized cities according to the desirability of their built environments.

When looking for historical quotes to set the context for an article, you are rarely disappointed by the words of Winston Churchill. Indeed, it was he who said “We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us.”

Not bad as a prelude for a piece on the impact of how the heritage of the built environment

affects the desirability of a city. But to continually rely on one man for words of inspiration can smack of a lack of imagination.

And so, it came as a blessed relief to stumble upon the words of John Ruskin, a polymath of the Victorian era, who said “When we build, let us think that we build forever”. Ten words that sum up



Source: Savills Research

why the architectural pedigree of an area and its enduring appeal are closely interwoven.

The subjective nature of what constitutes good architecture sits somewhat uncomfortably for someone who spends more time analysing statistics than extolling the virtues of streetscape. But fortunately, from an analytical perspective, there are others who have done that heavy lifting in listing our nation’s heritage buildings and designating our Conservation Areas.

And it was these two measures which we used to deliver a shortlist of the most desirable heritage cities.

To ensure they would offer all the other advantages and amenities of city living, we added the proviso that these should have seen at least 2,500 housing transactions in the past five years. To include St David’s in Pembrokeshire (with a population of less than 2,000) would have sat uncomfortably, as would have accommodating the primarily financial district of the City of London.



That is not to denounce the charm of smaller cathedral cities, such as Ripon in Yorkshire, Wells in Somerset or Ely in Cambridgeshire, but instead to ensure our statistical selections have the broadest appeal for those who seek urban life. A mention in dispatches should also go to Canterbury, whose historical significance means it benefits from an abundance of heritage buildings, but unusually does not command a house price premium.

The top five include Bath with a plethora of crescents and circuses, and Edinburgh with the medieval street patterns of the Old Town and more regimented streets, squares and gardens of the New Town. While others contain buildings recognised by

UNESCO, these are the only two conurbations in the UK with more widespread World Heritage Status.

The appeal of both owes much to the quality of their Georgian architecture. No coincidence that this came out as the most popular historical architectural style in our recent client survey.

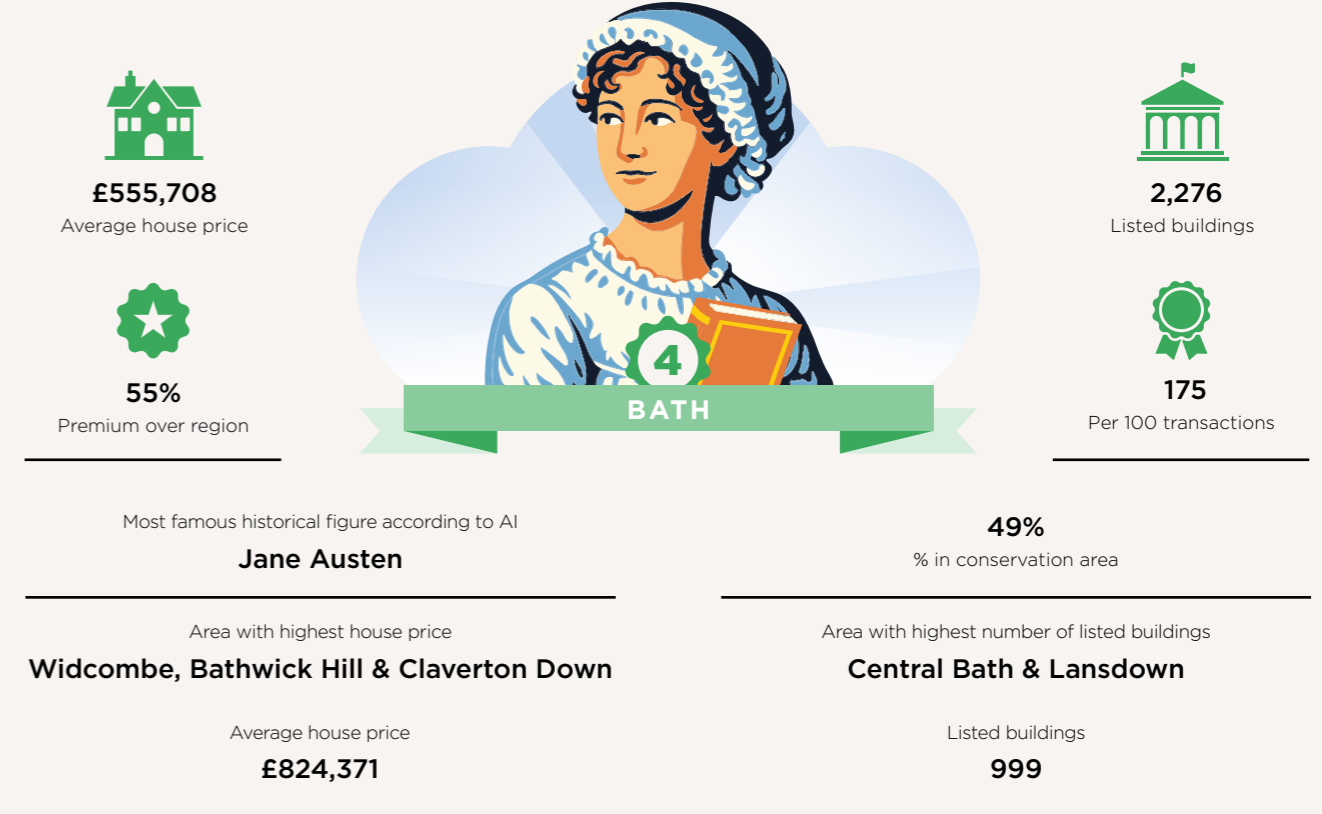
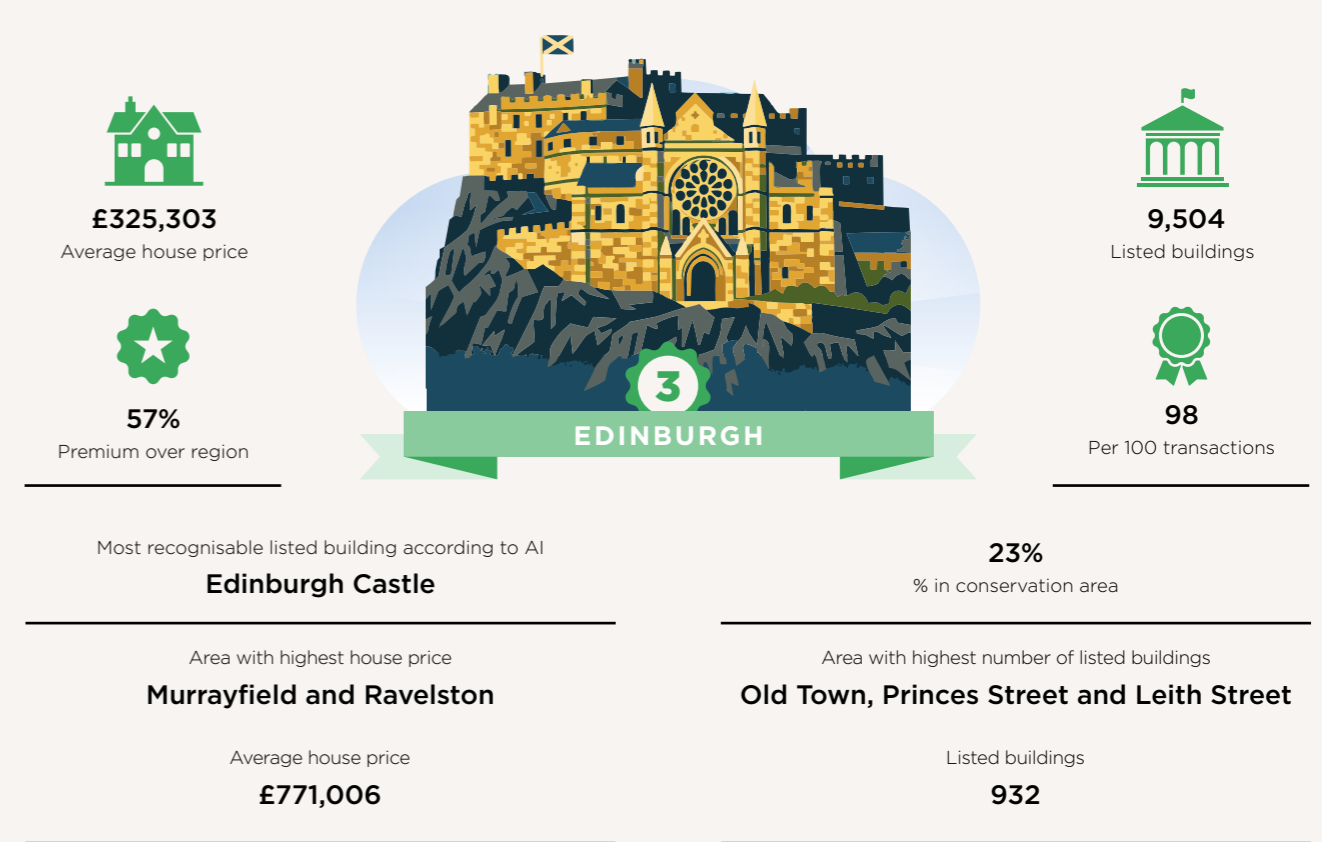
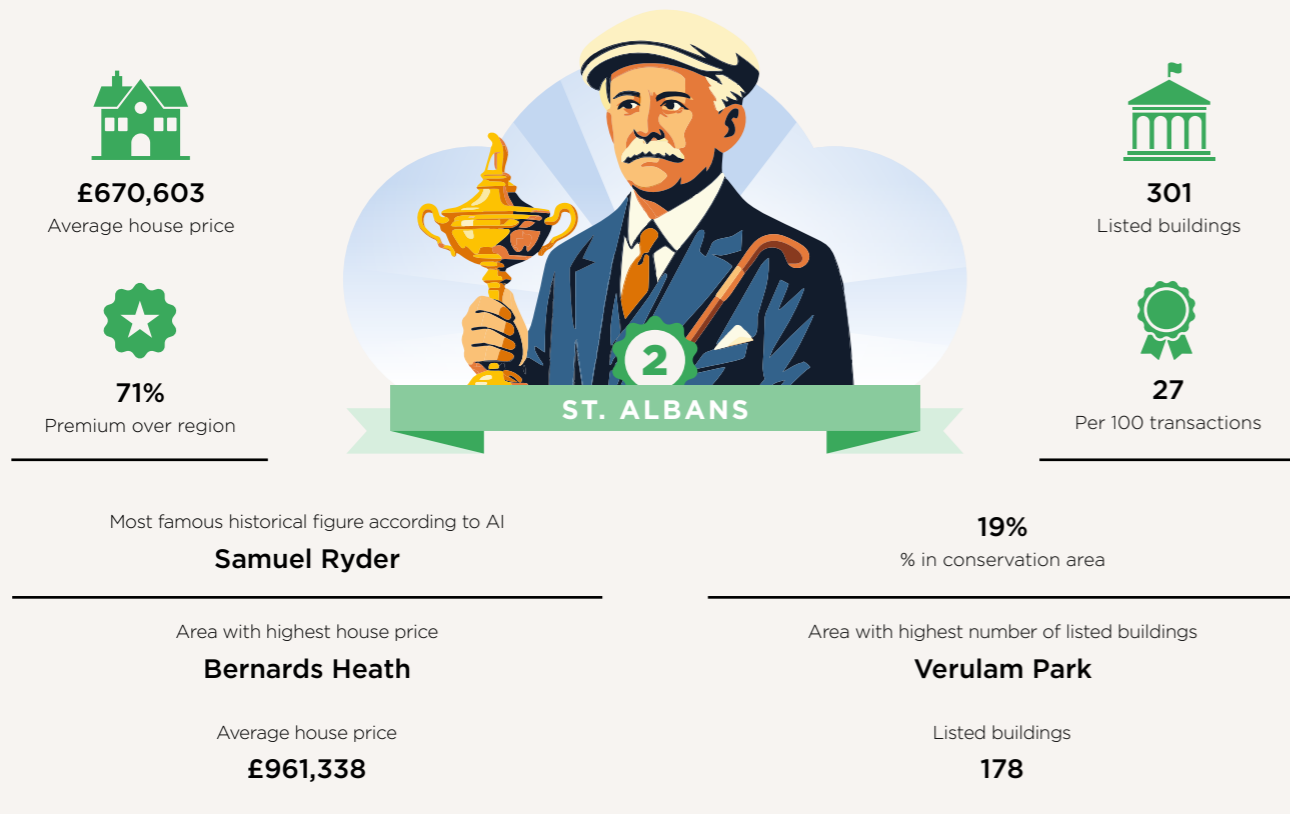
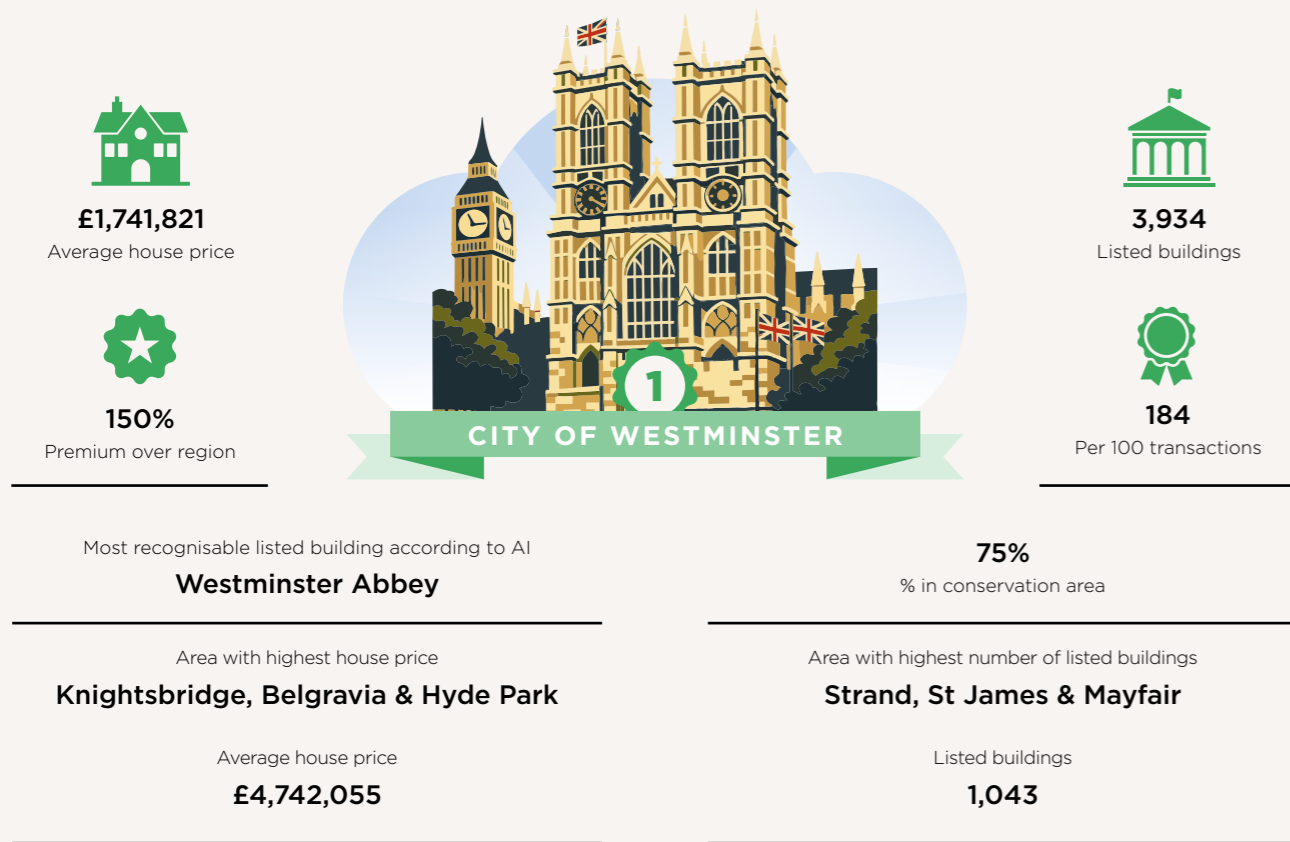
But, by ranking desirability by reference to how the average house price in each shortlisted city compares to its wider regional equivalent, the City of Westminster comes top of the list. This is despite the pressure seen on house prices through the likes of Mayfair, Marylebone, St James’ and St John’s Wood in recent years.



While Bath and Edinburgh stand out because of their World Heritage status, Westminster and St Albans top the list of desirability

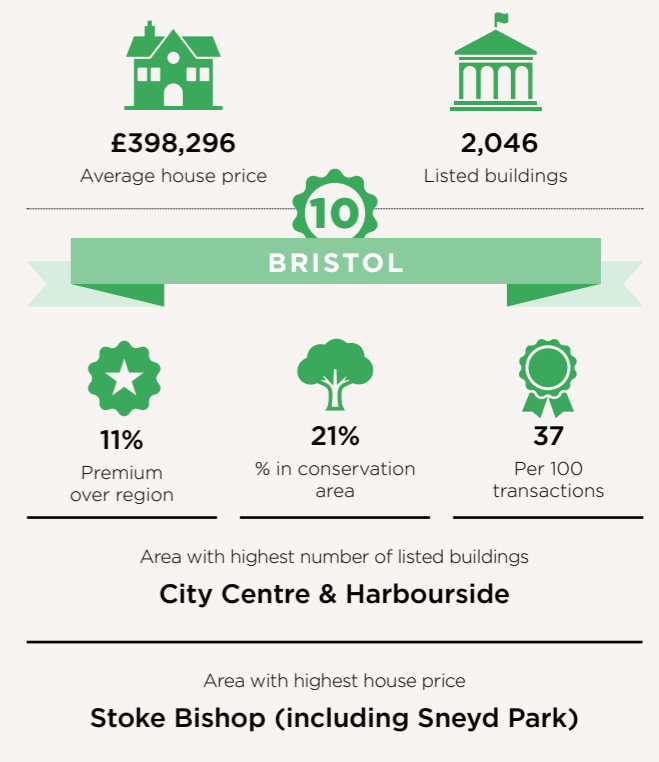
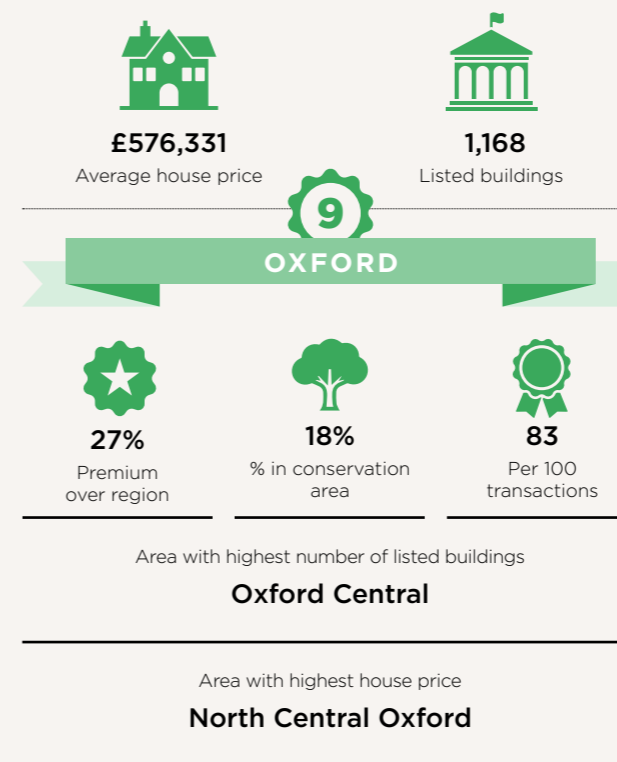
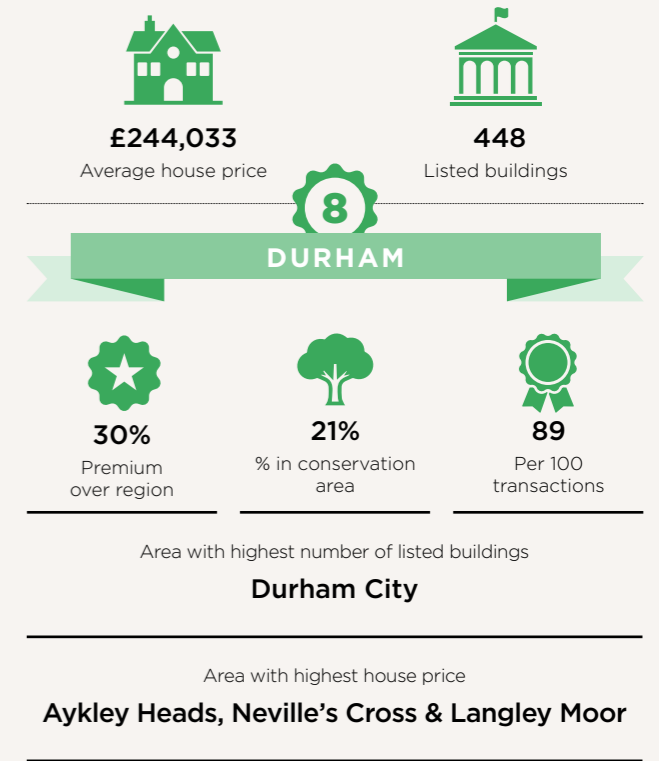
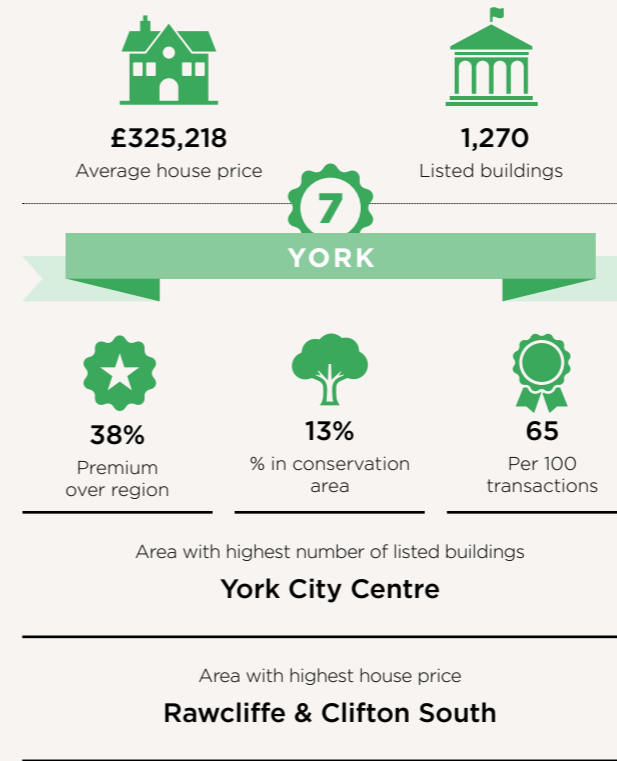
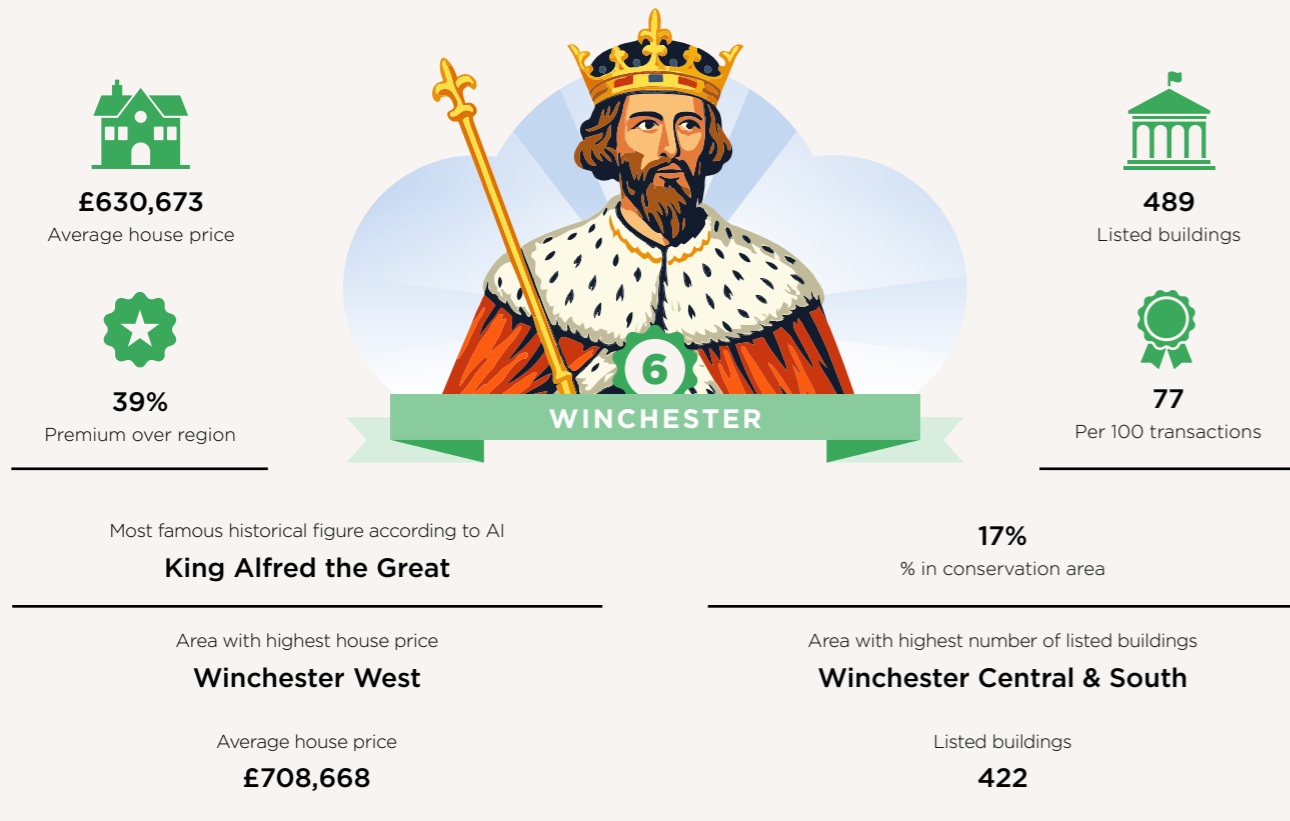
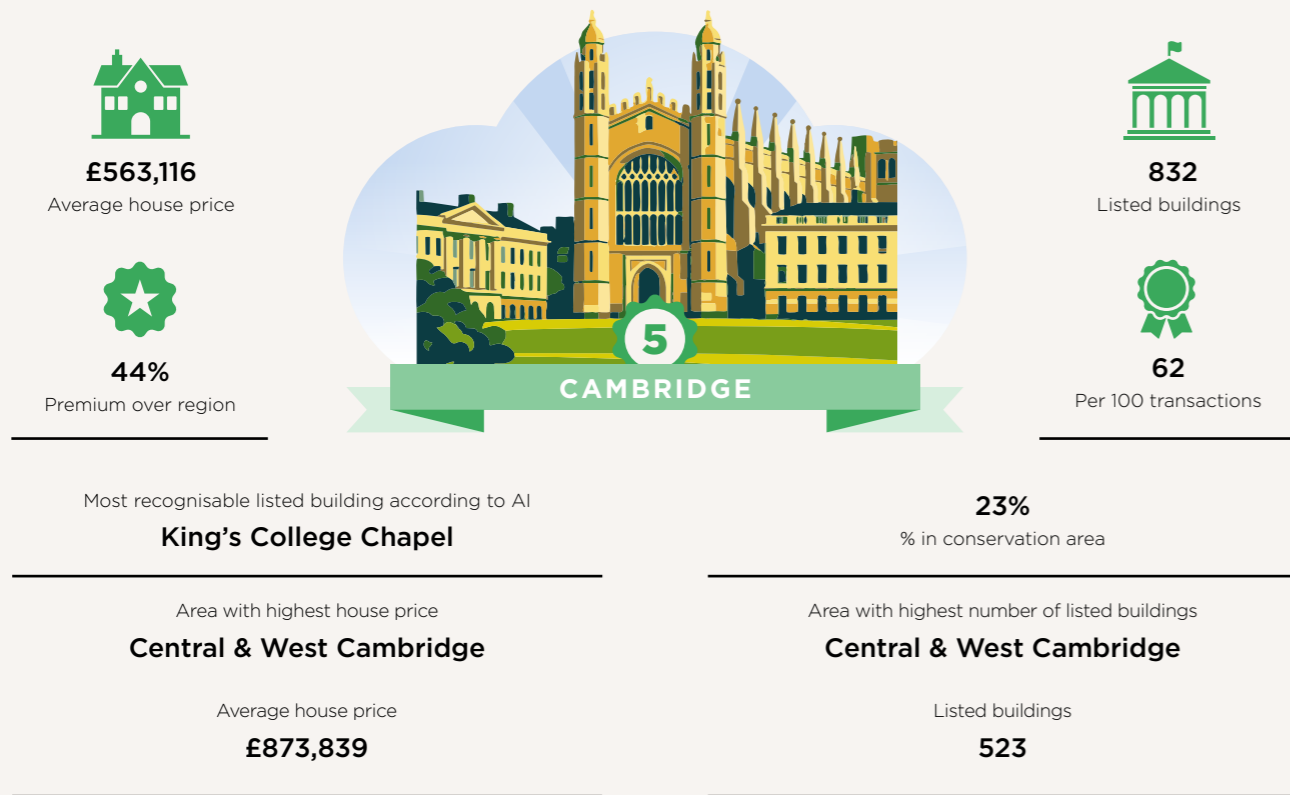


# TOP 10 PROFILES HERITAGE CITIES



Source: Savills Research using Land Registry, Historic England and Historic Environment Scotland

# TOP 10 PROFILES HERITAGE CITIES



Source: Savills Research using Land Registry, Historic England and Historic Environment Scotland



## Savills Research

We're a dedicated team with an unrivalled reputation for producing well-informed and accurate analysis, research and commentary across all sectors of the UK property market. To view copies of our previous publications, go to [www.savills.co.uk/insight-and-opinion/](http://www.savills.co.uk/insight-and-opinion/)



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