



BARNSTORMING

Ancient beams, lofty spaces and beautiful locations. Why not bag a barn conversion, suggests Cheryl Markosky

Renovated barns are a bit like Marmite. “They don’t always appeal to everyone. It’s a question of love or hate,” says Grantley’s Michael Oury.

Aficionados love the rustic charm and characterful agricultural features a rejuvenated barn can offer, while those nervous of challenging layouts tend to gravitate towards more conventional dwellings.

On the plus side, many of Michael’s buyers in Surrey and West Sussex are keen to get their hands on these old farm buildings to transform them into splendid homes with substantial entertainment areas.

Barns appeal to all age groups, according to Michael. “The younger generation likes the open-plan living they provide, and the older generation’s attracted to grand spaces that will accommodate large pieces of antique furniture.”

Barn conversions are great for families – offering light, space, vaulted ceilings and enormous windows, points out Ed Church of Strutt & Parker Canterbury. Most popular are barns in thriving villages within easy commuting distance of London.

“People like country views – and by definition most barn conversions are in proper countryside settings – but being in the middle of nowhere can also put people off,” he explains.

Barn conversions are performing much in line with the mainstream property market – with the exception of the exceptional, finds Christopher Bartlett of Stacks Property Search.

“If you come across a beautiful barn on its own with a number of acres, there will be significant competition,” he notes. A great conversion achieves a sympathetic balance

THE BARN HOUSE, CODICOTE, HERTFORDSHIRE

£4,500,000

Five-bed rejuvenated barn with topiary garden designed by Julie Toll, close to Knebworth station with trains to King’s Cross in 32 minutes.

www.struttandparker.com

between old and new, with defined areas and plenty of light.

But not all barn conversions are well done – some converted in the Eighties and Nineties are seriously flawed. “They can be badly laid out, with rooms leading off each other, too much living space and not enough for bedrooms,” says Christopher.

Robin Gould, director of buying agency Prime Purchase, thinks a barn owner has to be prepared to live in a quirky building with beams in first-floor spaces at head height, where you’ll forever crack your head.

“While there tends to be cavernous spaces on the ground floor, the first floor is more of a challenge, with often only Velux windows in the roof admitting light, but not allowing you to see out of them.”

Michael adds that planning can dictate that first-floor accommodation is split into two areas at opposite ends of the structure, making them potentially inappropriate for very young children.

There’s also the problem of heat loss in an immense, open space. But Jackson-Stops’ Dawn Carritt has a solution. “Use glass to divide up areas. Glass ceilings may be a way to retain the open feeling while stopping all the heat disappearing into the eaves.”

She also recommends zoning heating in a very long barn to keep the heating bills down when you aren’t using certain sections.

New-build barn equivalents are becoming more prevalent these days. Philip Brown at Millwood Designer Homes says: “It’s no



surprise farm-style properties such as barns are highly sought by buyers attracted to striking architectural features.”

He’s currently selling six-bedroom Smithers Barn with great “agri-appeal” at Lavender Fields in Isfield, East Sussex. Built from reclaimed and local materials, it represents the evolution of indigenous buildings on this patch over time.

As the cost of converting a period barn – which is likely to be listed – can be appreciably more than converting a house, it might make sense to opt for a newer model that looks bucolic, but actually works in practical terms.

Michael’s seen several new barn homes with interesting, contemporary designs that encompass the very latest technology to deliver every luxury imaginable.

If you think a barn is for you – be it timeworn or avant-garde – being the owner of an idiosyncratic building with modern flourishes could represent the best of both worlds.

ST NORTONS BARN, FIVE OAK GREEN, KENT

£895,000

Restored five-bed barn measuring over 2,800 square feet, with bespoke spiral staircase, galleried landings, and exposed wall and ceiling beams.

www.struttandparker.com



SMITHERS BARN, LAVENDER FIELDS, ISFIELD, EAST SUSSEX

£1,295,000

New take on a barn in a hamlet development, with open-plan kitchen/breakfast room, separate dining and drawing rooms, and home office attached to double garage.

www.millwooddesignerhomes.co.uk



HIGH BARN, EFFINGHAM, SURREY
 £3,500,000
 Converted oak-frame period barn with three wings around a central courtyard, offering 10 bedrooms, leisure complex and terrace with pool and Jacuzzi.
www.grantleygroup.co.uk



LEAVERS BARN, HADLOW, KENT
 £1,299,995
 Six-bed, period barn conversion with farmhouse-style kitchen, vaulted master bedroom, and triple-bay garage with loft storage, studio and office.
www.knightfrank.com



TIGBOURNE FARM, WORMLEY, SURREY
 £895,000
 A 20th-century Dutch barn with arched ceiling and solid walnut kitchen, only 500 metres from Witley station with a 75-minute run into London Waterloo.
www.savills.com

BARN CONVERT

Jess Simpson, 39, wanted a new project and to move to the country – but the last thing she wanted was a barn conversion.

Despite her reticence to be a barn owner, she ended up with not one, but two old barns and a bungalow when she bought a range of buildings to create three new homes.

A decade ago, Jess – who runs a rural property acquisition and consultancy company – and her husband Roger, 47, purchased a 1970s bungalow, two barns and stables in the village of East Hendred in Oxfordshire.

“It took two years to get planning permission. We started with the smaller barn, which was a practice run for the larger one. We could try different ideas, products and systems – and make mistakes – on the mini-version,” says Jess. 🏠

