

PROPERTY

Your weekly local guide to buying and selling

Home of the week



A barn with three gables

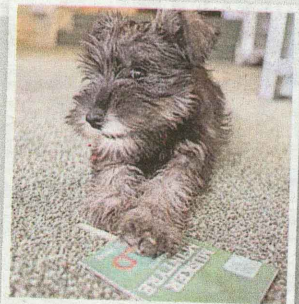
One of the few treble gabled barns in the county, this is now a luxury home. Property editor **Caroline Culot** reports on pages 2-3.

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IT'S A DOG'S LIFE

The pets of property greeting potential buyers

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Frank
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Bake wood not bread!

A couple of years ago I came across a house (actually, an extension) which was built a century ago by Boulton and Paul of Norwich, who were joinery specialists and for a time aircraft makers, many will remember the name more recently for doors and windows. The house was of weatherboarded timber frame, and it has survived perfectly well in tact over all that time. I was sufficiently impressed to design an extension to my own house using that method although should add that my extension awaits building so I've not tested it yet.

Timber is one of the first building materials used and timber buildings approaching 1400 years old still survive in Japan. There are hundreds of period timber framed houses in the UK and its standard practice in Scandinavia to have timber clad houses, where century old and more properties are still lived in, so if you can tell me why lenders in this country are reluctant to accept them I'd be interested to know.

I like brick buildings and love the rustic effect that can be achieved from stone, but in seeking a property which can look good, meet and surpass current insulation standards, has great sustainability credentials and yet can still be affordable to build then timber is difficult to match. To be honest some of the continental systems are hard to beat, especially in kit form, but its quite easy to create an entirely bespoke design and there are some great products available in the UK.

Did you know you can bake wood for extra durability, or that a nail gives a stronger joint in a pre-drilled hole? Wood is much lighter than masonry and faster to construct as well, and it can be used to several storey height (or carried on a steel frame).

There are, of course, potential problems and we all know that wood does not like fire and that it does not like water, it has to be kept away from both (there were two great fires in Medieval Norwich as well as the great fire of London). There are perfectly good ways of achieving this and you do need to know what you're doing in the construction of timber buildings, wood has the habit of shrinking on drying after it's built and that can have unwanted effects if not catered for. If its not looked after properly there's a greater risk of problems, and sometimes the mass and weight of masonry has useful advantages so it's a case of the right material for the right scheme.

I'll bet your shed or garden house is not built out of masonry, and if you can avoid the splinters (they're on to that too) wood is a great material to work with and I doubt that there are many amongst us who don't find timber buildings to be attractive. I'm not against other building materials, lets see a resurgence of clay lump, but I do like wood.

Frank Davey is a chartered surveyor at Allgood & Davey on 01603 861961.

Allgood & Davey has sponsored this column.

Home of the week



Park Farm Barn of three gables...

Property editor **Caroline Culot** visited 5, Park Farm Barns, Wolterton Park; for sale for £975,000 with Bedfords on 01328 730500.



It was my utter delight to be shown around this fantastic barn conversion by Michael McNamara himself and his wife Clare. I have written about their barns many times over the years but sadly never actually met them! And really, you only understand the vision and the passion when you speak to the man responsible for transforming a former farm building into a stunning luxury home that just oozes style and status - everything it was

“
The three gables were a symbol of style and wealth...”

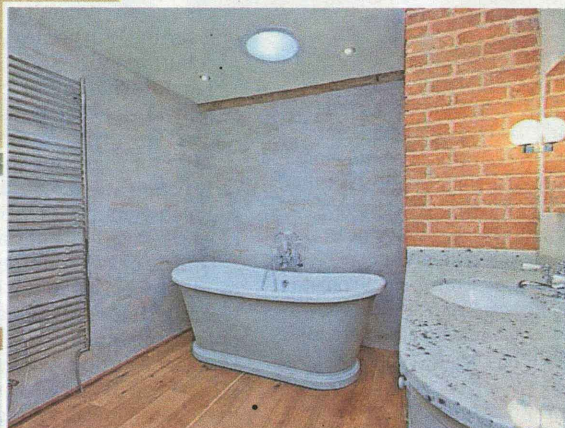
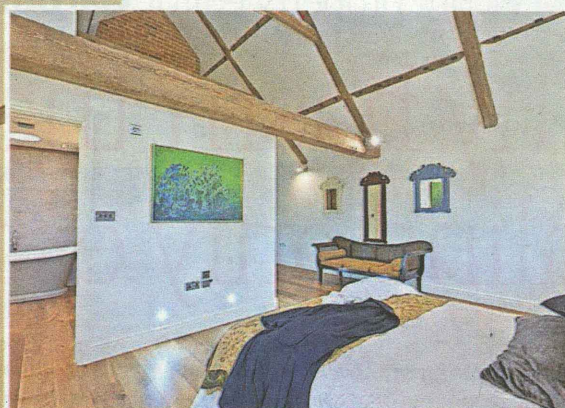
actually cannily designed to stand for. This barn is no ordinary barn as it boasts not one or two but three Dutch gables, the two at the side designed so they could be seen by visitors travelling past on their way to and from Wolterton Hall. In other words, this Grade II listed 19th century barn was a real status symbol and now it can be enjoyed by someone actually living in it. Michael McNamara has worked his magic - I've featured his barns at



Snettisham over the years - and he and his wife Clare tirelessly work to create beautiful homes that people want to live in. Mr McNamara has converted more than 50 barns and is being aided now by both sons in the business. Interestingly, as he showed me round, he said he never knows exactly how a conversion will finish off; he has an instinct for how to adapt and re-work it, but it's not until he's really immersed in the task that all the finishing touches come together. He works well with his wife who ensures the practical touches are also there as well as the stylish ones - so sockets are in the right places, there's enough storage space and interestingly recently the decision was taken not to create first floor sitting rooms as they have found these not to be popular. They also always try and put one bedroom and an en suite downstairs. With this barn, it is no surprise that it is beautiful throughout with a large flexible kitchen opening out to a lovely enclosed rear garden. You have close to 3,500 sqft so lots of space with four bedrooms (one on the ground floor) including a fabulous master with an en suite with a contemporary double ended slipper bath and large shower. The McNamaras have also brought light in darker corners using innovative 'sun tunnels', a modern take on the cupola and unusually for a barn, this one comes with a large converted attic space which could be a playroom or study. Outside are three cartsheds and a port-couchere...there's too little room for me to say all I want so go and see for yourselves as there is an open day tomorrow from 10am-4pm!

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Online or high street agent?

I have noted with interest far more press coverage recently about the use of internet estate agents and the suggested demise of the traditional high street approach, probably due in large part to national TV advertising by two of these styled businesses.

The drivers revolve almost entirely around the low fee payable with the internet offering and the fact no one uses the high street anymore! I'm sure this news is well received by the local community!

I place high value on having high-profile town centre offices.

As we have emerged from the recession there has been a renaissance on the high street with quality independent retailers opening, spurred on by their champion, Mary Portas. This attracts local people and visitors alike to shop and transact business. Online marketing is an important advertising media to us, but is a small part of a large and diverse "tool-kit".

I believe that estate agency is not an "anonymous" business. Our industry is less about property and more about people and I therefore believe it is vital that we are able to deal face-to-face with buyers and sellers alike, and imperative that that all our people have first-hand local knowledge and live within the communities they work in. There are also spin-offs to the local communities as we contribute to the local economies and communities in which we operate.

I looked at statistics for my business. Of the total enquires received in all forms through my branches since January this year 68% came from Rightmove and the remainder from callers to the offices, Eastern Daily Press, our own property magazine, window displays, previous clients, recommendations and open houses. Of the remainder 21% were physical callers to the offices, so one-fifth of all enquires. I would suggest as a property seller this is a large market to exclude from your potential buyers and confirms to me the huge value of dealing with clients and customers face to face. You would be surprised at the number of people who know my firm and just wander in for advice on a whole range of property related matters.

There are a good number of buyers who can't or don't want to perpetually spend their evening surfing the internet for property. Many agents still run traditional mailing lists. In my own firm we make a point of ringing those registered prior to releasing on the net. Many years' experience has shown us buyers will end up purchasing something totally different from their original "roses round the door" request when house hunting commenced, and often prompted by the personal contact of their agent.

The EDP still has a fantastic property supplement and I would be the first to admit the enquiry levels are nowhere near the levels prior to the net however, I am still surprised by readership numbers on a Friday and direct enquiries of properties highlighted on one of the feature pages.

Fees will vary from agent to agent, some will have small or no contract periods at all, floor plans boards, newspaper advertising and exposure on websites is all part of what we do and usually on a "No sale No Fee" basis. Valuations are conducted by local experienced professionals who know their market rather than a representative covering East Anglia!

Nick Eley is partner at Watsons on 01603 619916. Watsons has sponsored this column.

Why hasn't buying and selling using an online agency caught on? Read more from our agents on page 4.

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