

Opera. Agas.
Infrastructure.

The Middleton newsletter.
January 2012.

The news from Middleton.

In this edition of the Middleton newsletter, we have a cheerfully ebullient piece from our client John Keevill of Tower Leasing, describing the fun he has had as sponsor and patron of the King's Head Theatre Company – 'the antidote to tame corporate sponsorships' as he describes it.

As for the market in country house properties – let's just say that every insight into key valuation factors is critical, which is why our experience and market intelligence will be more vital than ever this year.

Pricing country property has been, and will continue to be hard. More than once this year, we've seen vendors – influenced by the latest economic outlook on the Today programme – marketing property below actual value, forgetting that the rules of supply and demand still apply.

Since August 2011, supply of country house stock has been down 70% on a typical year, leaving vendors with many of the aces. Despite this, vendors remain nervous of open-market campaigns. We sent out an unprecedented number of confidentiality agreements to clients for specific private opportunities last year.

We wish you all well in 2012 and look forward to representing you with the diligence and independence that we know you value.

Train of thought.

Our reports always contain detailed research on developments which may positively or negatively impact a house and its suitability for your lifestyle. **Crossrail**, for example, will bring another 1.5m people within 45 minutes commuting distance of London's key business districts when it opens in 2018. And recent news confirms that the **HS2** link is likely to go ahead.

There are going to be a lot of people looking at country houses and estates in parts of the South of England, which might previously have been beyond their commute. We'll look at the impact of these projects as more information becomes available. But we estimate competition, and therefore purchase prices, will increase at least 24 months prior to their completion.

The Crossrail impact.

Journey	Crossrail journey time	Current journey time
Maidenhead to Canary Wharf	54 minutes, direct	1 hr 41 mins, 3 changes
Heathrow to Liverpool Street	32 minutes, direct	1 hr, direct (tube) <i>or</i> 45 minutes (Heathrow Express + tube)
Ilford to Heathrow T4	57 minutes, direct	1 hr 43 minutes, 3 changes (rail + tube + Heathrow Express)

Planning ahead.

A significant part of the due diligence that we carry out on any proposed property purchase is focused on planning issues.

This year we'll be keeping a particularly close eye on the progress through Parliament of the National Planning Policy for England, which involves the abolition of regional spatial strategies and an emphasis on planning at neighbourhood level. Our job is to anticipate and factor in the impacts that this legislation may have on the country house market.

From Agas to Yoga.

Claire Glover – who is part of the Middleton team looking after the ‘concierge’ part of our service – has managed requests ranging from sourcing an Aga mechanic to researching local yoga classes.

At the more conventional end of this service is the compilation of a comprehensive post-completion handbook covering everything from the security system to local contacts – both practical and social.

“My work starts once your property is under offer,” says Claire. “I want your completion day and your first few months to be entirely hassle-free. Every property and every area has its own idiosyncrasies. We’ll identify those, assess them and address them.”

Team-building.

The Middleton team has also been strengthened this year with the appointment of Judith Milton, who has 26 years' experience buying property in Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds. She provides a formidable insight into an area rich in country houses and estates.

Judith's property expertise, her passion for country houses and interiors, and deep knowledge of Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds ensure that the high level of demand and competition in this area are met and managed by Middleton.

Middleton client, John
Keevill talks La Bohème,
Islington pubs and 'stuffy
finance companies'.

Everyone comes out smiling

John Keevill hasn't fully forsaken the comforts of Covent Garden, where he has watched opera since 1975. But to listen to him enthuse about the 'visceral' impact of a performance of La Bohème at the King's Head – a 120-seat theatre in the back of a pub in Islington is a bit like hearing of a rugby supporter tiring of Twickenham, who finds himself back at his old club getting his feet muddy and his larynx lubricated.

Personal enthusiasm for something quirky and low-profile is one thing, however, but applying this to the world of corporate sponsorship requires imagination and a leap of faith.

John Keevill's company is Tower Leasing, which he founded in 1989. He describes the business as 'stuffy finance', and Tower's support of the King's Head Theatre Company as 'an antidote to the tame and obvious corporate sponsorships'.

“This isn’t sponsorship in the modern sense,” says John. “We aren’t going to be plastering our logo all over the actors’ outfits, and asking the theatre to produce something which matches our corporate values.”

“Part of the benefit for us is recognising that there is more to life than just finance. These are people who are working just as hard as us, with genuine creativity and resilience, and their reward is applause and fulfilment. When you support and become involved in this type of enterprise some of their risk-taking, energy and enthusiasm rubs off.”

“An opera at the Royal Opera House is a great spectacle,” says John. “But a production in this environment is visceral. Sometimes the theatre and the bar area virtually inter-mingle. You can be having a drink between acts, and suddenly find that the music has started up around you.”

“And let’s not down-play it too much. What people are actually getting at the King’s Head Theatre is a glimpse of the next Peter Halls, Jonathan Millers and Tom Stoppards. Ben Cooper has gone on to become touring

manager for the Young Vic at the age of 26. Adam Spreadbury-Maher has written a new version of Tosca for Malmö Opera, which he will direct on a tour of 20 venues.”

“We started off by buying a baby grand piano for the production company,” says John. “In 2012 we’ll be co-producing Carmen. We’ll take our staff, clients, partners to watch, and I know from past experience that they will be entranced by the whole thing. Everyone comes out of these productions smiling.”

“I’d happily encourage other organisations to get involved in this type of activity. It may appear primarily philanthropic, but there are genuine commercial benefits as well.”

MIDDLETON

ADVISORS