

Garden villages in bloom



Will the new garden villages take root and blossom?
Cheryl Markosky reports

Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts smooched in a leafy garden in Notting Hill. Colin Firth's sexy Mr Darcy plunged into a lake at Cheshire's Lyme Park in *Pride and Prejudice*. And contestants on *The Great British Bake Off* whip up cakes under canvas in the lush surroundings of a Berkshire stately home.

Everyone loves a British garden. Which makes the government's recent plans for more than 48,000 homes in 14 new garden villages and three garden towns an enticing prospect.

Following on from the 2014 launch of Ebbsfleet — the first garden city in almost 100 years — plans include a 1,000-home garden village on the site of a former airfield in Deenethorpe, Northamptonshire; another garden community on greenfield land in the Oxfordshire Cotswolds; and garden towns in the Aylesbury, Taunton and Harlow/Gilston areas.

Anthony Aitken, Colliers International's head of planning, regards proposals for the garden locales as a small, but welcome step. "The government will be erecting fewer than 50,000 homes, while we require 250,000 a year — so there's still a lot more to be done."

However, if new garden neighbourhoods are planned as well as the first garden city

of Letchworth (1905) in Hertfordshire, and the chocolatier Cadbury family's Bournville (1900) near Birmingham, the latest crop of garden conurbations could be a good thing, argues Aitken.

Some UK new towns haven't gone down well, laments Daniel Galati, land and new homes director at Mullucks Wells. But he believes the future 10,000-home garden town of Harlow and Gilston on the Essex-Hertfordshire border has been well thought-out.

"It will have generous open spaces, a number of schools and new health services that will take pressure off oversubscribed doctor's surgeries," Galati says.

Another initiative is a £1.2bn Starter Homes Land Fund that will deliver discounted new homes to first-time buyers between the ages of 23 and 40, who've been struggling to get on the property ladder.

Many of these keen new purchasers will buy off-plan, which means purchasing a property before it's built.

"Buying off-plan gives you the ability to lock in a home at today's prices, with as



little as a 5% deposit," explains Ben Morris, Collier International's director of new homes. "In many instances, the property's worth more when it's completed, offering extra equity on day one."

Other pluses are that "you get to choose the ideal layout and aspect of your property, the best parking space on-site and you can negotiate a discount for an early purchase," notes Glentree agent Trevor Abrahmsohn.

And yet, there can be negatives, too. Abrahmsohn cautions that you could lose money if the market falls and after-sales service could be a blessing or a nightmare, depending on the developer. The most common complaint Rachel Johnston of Stacks Property Search hears is that people didn't understand how close other houses would be to their home. "Make sure you understand exactly what development will be going on around you."

Much of what we love about existing villages — whether they're on-screen stars, or not — is their character, arising out of the piecemeal way they evolve over time, says Michael Holmes, spokesperson for the National Homebuilding & Renovating Show. "Allowing new settlements to evolve and grow in a similar way, with individually designed, high-quality, sustainable homes will ensure they develop their own unique charm."



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the NEC Birmingham. *Homes & Property* readers interested in gaining free entry can download and print tickets, usually worth £36, by visiting homebuildingshow.co.uk/mailonsunday. Please note, this offer expires at 15.00 on 5 February 2017.