



**For the first time, I can see my future':  
why I'm tempted to sell up and leave London.**

<https://www.theguardian.com/see-if-its-time-to-sell/2021/jun/02/for-the-first-time-i-can-see-my-future-why-im-tempted-to-sell-up-and-leave-london>

The pandemic made many of us reconsider how we want to live – and what we want from our homes. Now that lockdown has lifted, Francesca Brown and her family are preparing to make good on their promise to leave London for more space and quiet.

Being locked down in a cramped London flat with small children and no garden proved to be a testing time – especially for our long-suffering and very polite downstairs neighbours. When I originally bought my flat more than a decade ago, I was young, single and out all the time. The place seemed vast back then. Even when my boyfriend and I settled down here together and had kids, the bijou nature of it didn't bother us as we'd happily be out at work, school, nursery. On the weekend, trips to museums, swimming and soft play, or to friends' much bigger houses filled our time. The flat was simply a stop-off point on our way to other things.

Then lockdown reality hit us. The park gave some respite from our four walls but it soon became clear that our lives had become much, much smaller and curtailed. The kids were literally climbing the walls while their toys, art, baking kits and books cluttered every surface. We both began to hate the flat. Not being able to fit a family dinner table anywhere or having no built-in storage for toys, DIY stuff or the vacuum cleaner turned from minor annoyances into full-blown irritants. Endlessly trying to tidy things away so we could have some space to work and home school became utterly miserable. The one thing that kept us going was thinking whether it was time to swap our curbed city living for something else.

As things have fluctuated all year, so many factors have made us yearn for a change. My boyfriend's mum works for the NHS and hasn't seen her grandchildren for 18 months now – we miss her terribly and lockdown has brought home to us how being nearer to her and our other parents could make a real difference to all of our lives. They'd get to see their grandchildren grow up and we'd have some much-needed support and possibly even lie-ins. Friends who left the city sent us photographs from local beaches, of cycling trips down country lanes and, most touchingly of all, their children running free in the sunshine in their own back gardens having no regrets about making the swap.

But how could we plan for a future or make any sorts of decisions without having a clear idea of how we could use the equity from the flat to start a new life?

Then we discovered the My Home experience on Zoopla. For the first time, we got an insight into what our next step could be. Using trusted data sources such as HM Land Registry, Royal Mail and Ordnance Survey, it was able to give us a realistic estimate of what our flat could be worth. And we were pretty chuffed with what it said. Mostly because we can think in terms of real figures for the first time.

Taking into account moving, sales and legal fees, we debated whether it was possible to embrace a mortgage-free move to a small house with a garden that lets us take a breather over the next few years (something we could all do with after a pandemic) or use part of the equity towards a dream family home that would last us forever.





We could finally envision different possibilities and find the right one for us. From vast wrecks that needed doing up in Cheshire (we've had three sets of friends move there over the past five years so would have a built-in social network) to beautiful Victorian terraces in Newcastle (we're both from the north-east) that would be a Metro ride away from Tynemouth beach, all of our property searches had one thing in common: a garden.

The idea of the children having space to run around, create messy art, have water fights, play on trampolines or build forts and plant their own fruit and vegetables is such an incredible thought to us right now – even somewhere to sulk with their friends once the teenage years arrive. Similarly, my partner and I could be the type of people who buy fire pits – just imagine!

With things in such transition, we're not sure what we will do as it's a big move but, for the first time, it feels reassuring and hopeful that we have options. There are solutions to where we want to be in life and we have the tools and information at our fingertips to make informed decisions. We can make choices that'll be right for all of us as a family and, crucially, we're able to dream past these four walls.

by Francesca Brown

**Are these sentences true [T] or false [F]?**

		<b>T</b>	<b>F</b>
1.	The family bought the flat after their children were born.		
2.	Francesca's family spent a lot of time out of the house before the pandemic started.		
3.	Many of Francesca's friends left London so they could spend time in nature.		
4.	The family's friend recommended them a website Zoopla, where they could find good home offers.		
5.	HM Land Registry, Royal Mail and Ordnance Survey helped them estimate how much their flat is worth.		
6.	The Browns decided to move to Cheshire, because their friends live there as well.		
7.	The family has already picked a dream house for them to live in.		

Key:

1F; 2T; 3T; 4F; 5T; 6F; 7F

