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ON THE HOME FRONT

What is your dinner party chatter about? I'm guessing it is far more likely to include discussion of house prices than the voting record of your local MP. As much as the body politic is going to take over the headlines for the next six weeks, most of us, especially at this time of year, are more interested in our own – and other people's – homes than the House of Commons.

Sellmyhome.co.uk, a website that charges £499 to market your house and still lists on Rightmove and Zoopla, has come up with a wheeze to quench our appetite for peering into other people's homes: a Facebook site with virtual



HELEN DAVIES

PROPERTY COLUMNIST OF THE YEAR

walkthroughs. It's a perfect lunchtime viewing. Last Friday's was a nicely mid-mod furnished flat in Bethnal Green. From the comments, other viewers were rather more serious than me, asking questions about the utility bills and the water pressure in the shower, while I wondered why, as a house-proud nation, there's one thing we never quite get right: the storage of spare loo rolls. Although they had obsessively tended to the rest of their home, they had the spares of most of a multipack just stacked up in the corner.

■ Middle-class aspiration has, traditionally, known no bounds –

until now. The migrations of the comfortably off in and around the smartest streets and leafiest suburbs of the UK has left well-trodden paths, but as we reveal on page 16, there are now 21 postcodes in Britain where the average home costs £1m – the typical national value is £180,252 according to the Land Registry, or £188,566 from the Halifax. As a result, our habits and habitats are changing. No longer can we afford to move up the property ladder as our parents may have done. We should still be thankful. The number of homeless families in temporary accommodation, according to the Department for Communities, has hit nearly 47,000 – a 28% rise in three years.

■ In contrast, residents of Russia, Ukraine, Nigeria and China are competing to pay £10,000 a week for a bolthole in the capital, some even offering up-front payments of £500,000. The prime London market has been most affected by the increased stamp duty charge and values are down 4.3% year on year, according to Savills. Instead all the drama is in rentals. In 10 weeks from the start of the year, EJ Harris estimates that £100m has been paid upfront by affluent tenants. There is a frenzy (for there must always be a property frenzy of some kind) and there are now three times the number of tenants chasing a

rental as there were this time last year. Dataloft calculates that the annual rent roll from prime central London in 2014 was £510m and that the average weekly rent for a luxury home in central London now stands at £3,500 a week – that's £182,000 a year. What was that average national house price again?

■ Largemortgageloans.com, which specialises in loans of £500,000 or more, has seen business increase by 71% in the past two years. Interestingly, the value of inquiries handled in the East Midlands has almost doubled in the same period, from over £28m in 2012 to almost £57m in 2014 – evidence, founder Paul Welch says, "that wealth coming into London has created a ripple effect across the UK, in line with the northern powerhouse."

■ And as the clocks go forwards and the sunlight streams in, it's time to get outdoors. Forget the first cuckoo, there's no clearer herald of spring than the first leathery blooms of magnolia and the whiff of freshly cut grass from the inaugural lawn-trim of the year, accompanied by the twittering trills of a robin. Every garden should have one.

■ Let me know how you like to mark spring @TheSTHome or helen.davies@sunday-times.co.uk

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