

Moving to a new area can be an exciting and rewarding experience: new home, new friends and new challenges. Finding the right property when you live some distance away can be difficult. Finding it in the right location can be a real headache.

For Helen FitzGerald and her family, the decision to move to the Westcountry nine years ago began as a scribble on a scrap of paper – just one of those silly ideas you tend to have on a dull Monday morning when you think of all the things you would like to do before you get too old. Following numerous phone calls to house agents and schools, their plan began to take shape.

“Living and working in Sussex, we knew that finding a new home in Devon might take a little time,” said Helen. “Employing the services of a property search agent would have been the smart choice, but to be honest, such a luxury wasn’t really something we could afford; and anyway, our requirements were pretty straightforward, or so we thought – a four-bedroomed family house in a village near the coast.”

Following several visits which included overnight stays, and viewing houses that looked great on the agent’s details but disappointing on closer inspection, energy levels and general enthusiasm were beginning to evaporate. “In fact, things got so desperate that I rented a flat to save me going backwards and forwards to Sussex, leaving my long-suffering husband at home looking after the boys.”

At this stage many people can become totally demoralised when what started out as a dream seems to be turning into a nightmare. Fortunately for Helen and her family, after months and months of searching and nearly throwing in the towel, they finally had that bit of good luck, and in the summer of 1996 they moved just in time for the two boys to start their new schools in September.

It was as a result of this experience that Coastal Property Search was born. Helen set up the business with her colleague Hannah Harling. Both had a background in property but, following Helen’s experiences, were determined to go about things a little differently. “What we decided right from the start was that we would provide a really first-class professional service at sensible fees,” Helen said. “There would be no smart glossy brochures, no national advertising campaigns. Our most important priority was to make property search a luxury that nearly everyone could afford – whatever the size and price of the property.”

Because Coastal Property Search focuses on a relatively small area – roughly from Topsham along the coast to Burton Bradstock – they are able to offer a service based very much on local knowledge. “And because of the nature of our work, we are able to recommend and promote other local businesses too,” Helen said. “Recently we had a client who wanted to totally change the garden – so we were able to recommend a nearby landscape gardener.

“Part of our skill is to get to know our clients well and to listen to what they really want. People are often very specific and come up with a long wish list, but by developing that relationship we can talk through possible problems. We’d never call people down to view a shortlisted property, for example, unless we were very sure from our knowledge of the client that it may well fit the bill.

“Sometimes we have to encourage our clients to think very carefully. A remote cottage in the middle of glorious countryside miles from the nearest shop and pub might seem a great idea on a sunny day in summer, but not quite so appealing in the dark winter months.



In Search of that Perfect Property

Finding the ideal property can be a problem if you live some distance from the area, a problem for which two East Devon entrepreneurs have found a good solution. **Rowan Ross reports**

Buying a property near the sea can be a wonderful idea, particularly if you are considering renting it out, but if you are not familiar with the area, you need local information – and we can provide it. We know that each town or village along the Jurassic Coast has its own very special character, so we’re able to advise accordingly.”

Devon is frequently flagged up as the county to which people would most like to relocate. If they’re planning on a move to the coastal region of East Devon, then a simple way of doing it is within their reach. □

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Above Hannah Harling (left) and Helen FitzGerald