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Families are being encouraged to live in city centres, as they do in Paris. In central Milton Keynes, there will be schools and parks as well as 4,200 new homes. But, for now, the buyers of metropolitan apartments tend to be professionals, in their twenties and thirties, without children.

Many buy properties as investments. But, according to Mr Shaw, there is a growing demand for larger properties suitable for those in search of a better quality of life. "What tempts people to the city is culture and convenience," he



says. "But there is a danger of turning out commodity one- and two-bedroom flats where you can't tell one from the next. People want the kind of apartment they are used to having in London."

Rather than building from scratch, his company focuses on converting existing factories and warehouses into loft-style accommodation. With high ceilings, thick walls, and central locations,

converted buildings are as eco-friendly as newbuilds yet much more spacious.

The Factory, Spaceworks' latest project, is a development of loft apartments in central Norwich, with roof terraces bigger than some city centre flats. "If The Factory was in Shoreditch or Clerkenwell, the flats would be selling for millions," says Mr Shaw.

In Norwich, they are priced

from £185,000, despite being at least 30 per cent bigger than other city centre flats at the same price. "There are 24 flats in the building, but there could easily have been 50. It's about presenting the space in the best possible way. The kitchens and bathrooms are plain, modern and simple, and the rest of the space can be divided into a living room and one or two bedrooms."

With its clean finish and

- range of property prices
- 5 Convenient – close to shops, pubs and schools.
- 6 More to do (cinema, swimming pools, art galleries).
- 7 Easier for child care.
- 8 More better-paid jobs.
- 9 Near health services.
- 10 More choice (food, shops, bars).

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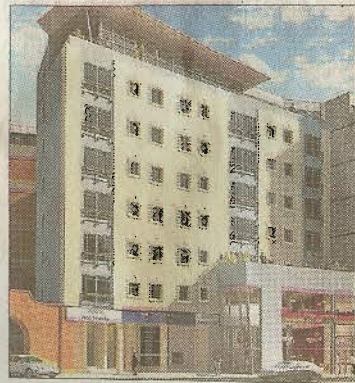
The new city slickers are adamant they are not "townies", but there is a danger they will enjoy city life rather too much. Three months after moving to Exeter, Mr Southard realised his girlfriend hadn't ventured out of the town centre once.

"I had to take her out into the countryside," he says. "She has everything she needs within a few seconds' walk and I was worried she was getting a bit stale."

Best of both worlds: Princesshay (above) offers the glamour of city life alongside a quick getaway to the country

HEART & SOLD

City centre development homes on offer



Apollo, Bristol

From £185,000

Apollo, in the heart of the city, occupies a converted office building. There are 42 one- and two-bedroom apartments with kitchens that include integrated appliances and high-gloss units, and bathrooms with natural stone tiles and fitted mirrors. (Knight Frank: 0117 917 4552).

Met Apartments, Manchester

From £199,000

Top specification apartments in a converted 1930s Art Deco building in the trendy Northern Quarter. Most apartments include a "loggja" space, providing covered terraced areas. Generous floor-to-ceiling heights; sliding doors provide open-plan space. (Knight Frank: 0161 238 8999).



The Factory, Norwich

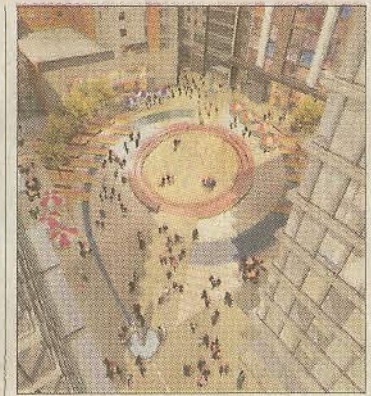
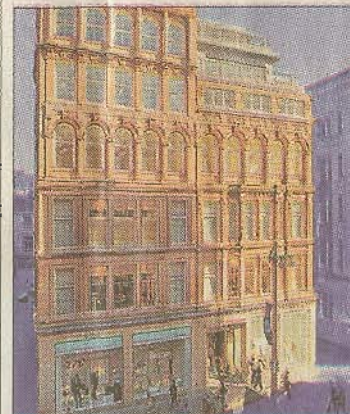
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The city's first design-led, loft-style scheme, a short walk from the station, restaurants, cinemas and wine bars. Buyers can choose to have their loft left as flexible living space or fitted with bedroom, bathroom and kitchen. (Savills: 01603 229258).

10 Buchanan Street, Glasgow

From £199,000

Spacious flats, around a courtyard setting. The properties are in the former storerooms of the shops below and have high ceilings, large windows and panoramic views. (Savills: 0141 222 5886).



The Hub Building 100, Milton Keynes

From £189,995

The Hub features offices, hotels, restaurants and apartments, situated around a courtyard, close to the station and high street. Some one- and two-bedroom apartments remain. Underground parking, open-plan reception rooms and large balconies. (Knight Frank: 01908 306262).

COVER STORY

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But, apparently, space is a small sacrifice to make for the convenience of living in a city centre. "I can do anything I want – it just depends what the weather is doing," says Mr Wallace. "You can get out of Bristol so easily – I can be mountain-biking, or on a plane to go snowboarding in the Alps, in 20 minutes."

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With its clean finish and

WHY LIVE IN THE CITY CENTRE?

- 1 Less commuting is better for the environment.
- 2 Transport links (airports, train stations).
- 3 Less lonely.
- 4 Greater choice of properties and greater range of property prices.
- 5 Convenient – close to shops, pubs and schools.
- 6 More to do (cinema, swimming pools, art galleries).
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light spaces, it is hard to believe that the engines for the Titanic and the Channel Tunnel boring machines were made under The Factory's curved roof.

Buildings such as The Factory are a stark reminder that people have searched for a better quality of life in city centres before – during the Industrial Revolution. And in areas such as Norwich and Manchester, these former workshops have become the linchpins of urban regeneration.

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BUNGALOW BILLING

Marketplace: page 3

'HORSES ARE RUNNING AMOK...'

A buy-to-let calamity: page 5

GORGEOUS GEORGIANS

Website wonder: pages 4-5

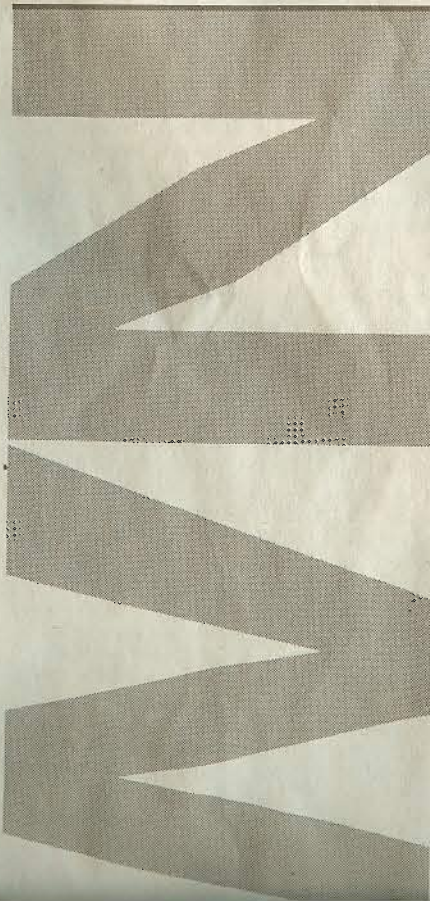


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BUYING IN FRANCE ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BUYING AND RENOVATING: OUR ONLINE GUIDE

Property

✿ BUYING OVERSEAS



Mix and match: Exeter Cathedral and the Princesshay development vie for the eye. Below, residents Chris Southard and Emma Hill and their block from street level

