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Property Mail

Join the pub crawl

Public houses may be closing but they can make for swish private homes, says **Fred Redwood**



THOSE dogged folk at the Campaign for Real Ale claim that some 31 pubs are closing every week. That may be bad news for the nation's beer drinkers, but it means opportunities galore for those who fancy converting a pub into a home.

There are plenty of them — people like Quintin Bull, who in 2012 transformed the Royal Oak in Dunkeswell, near Honiton, Devon, into a four-bedroom house for his family.

"We bought the Royal Oak when it was derelict and had been closed for eight months," says Bull, 40, a financier, who is now selling up for £390,000 with Humberstons (01404 42455, humberstons.com). "It took two years to convert but it was great fun."

"There was lots of space, which gave us a blank canvas so we could tailor the interior to our taste. We'd have stayed, but we needed to be nearer our children's school, which is an hour's drive away."

Local planning restrictions usually state that a conversion is unable to take place unless the owners can prove the pub cannot operate profitably and unless they have tried unsuccessfully to sell it as a going concern, says Paul Breen, the senior director of CBRE, a company of commercial property advisers.

Conditions have been even more stringent since the introduction of the 2012 Localism Act which gives locals — meaning a group of over 21 people — the right to preserve a building if it is in danger of being lost.

Even if you do get planning permission, taking over a pub is unlikely to make you popular with the neighbours.

That was the case when the comedian Harry Enfield applied to turn the former Queens No 1 in Edis Street, Primrose Hill, into a five-bedroom house. Enfield, best known for his catchphrase Louisa May, made nearly £10 million in 2008 from the sale of his Notting Hill house.

When he sought planning consent for this project, however, he was faced with 40 objections from local residents.

He placated them with charm — writing to each of them personally, stressing that he was a local boy, his family having lived in the area since 1929 — and pointing out there were six other pubs within 300 yards.

Careful attention should be paid to the fabric of any building that has served time as a hostelry. If a pub has not been making money, then it's unlikely that much care has been taken over its maintenance. The easy buzz can, nevertheless, often turn over a pretty profit.

Last year Giles Gibbs and Rupert Gordon bought The Old Swan at Toller Porcullum in Dorset for £300,000. Although this Edwardian pub had been derelict since 1998, Gibbs, 52, a designer, was immediately taken by its potential.

"I could see that a subtle alibi in the centre of the pub would make a marvellous internal courtyard," he says. And the big pub kitchen would be ideal for a modern family.

The pair spent £400,000 on the building work and now run the Swan, which looks brand new, is for sale for £790,000 with Jackson-Stops & Staff (01308 242123, jackson-stops.co.uk).

Older pubs have often had previous incarnations as private homes. When developer Keith Stout, 60, peeled back the decor of the pub he bought in Wetherfield, North Essex, he discovered a wealth of Georgian details including cornicing and a classic staircase.

With a dining room, gym, reception room and multi-media room in the old pub cellar, The Chase, as it is now called, is for sale for £845,900 with Chewton Rose (01204 564259, chewtonrose.co.uk).

Unsurprisingly, it is London pubs that make for the most ambitious conversions.

In Chelsea, the once popular Fulham Tap has been converted into six luxury apartments, which were put on the market for between

Q&A WITH ROSS CLARK PROPERTY EXPERT

Q: I HAVE found a house I want to purchase, but a friend who lives nearby insists that it is in a street with a terrible reputation for burglary. How do I find out if there is any truth in this?

A: All police forces in England now contribute statistics to a national crime map, which allows you to search for reported offences, down to street level.

If you visit police.uk, go to 'crime map' and tap in the postcode of the street, you should be able to see the number of offences in this and surrounding streets for each of the past few months.

Remember that burglaries often occur in clusters — it doesn't necessarily mean that the street will continue to suffer.

Q: I AM installing a log-burning stove in my living room. I've heard I might be able to get a grant as it is a form of renewable central heating. Is that correct, and, if so, how much might I get towards the cost?

A: NOTHING, I'm afraid. There is a scheme called the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI), which hands out grants to subsidise a stove to replace oil and gas boilers with environmentally-friendly central heating systems.

The scheme covers wood-fired boilers but not log-burners. The boiler must heat the entire house. The RHI also covers ground and air-source heat pumps and pellet boilers, which burn compressed lumps of green waste.

£975,000 and £2.95 million. Only three-bedroom apartment remain for £2.75 million (020 3492 5100, thelintongroup.co.uk).

Converting a pub in a holiday hotspot may be an ideal way to enter the lettings business.

"We have seen a big increase in searches for this type of property," says Saskia Welman, of HolidayLettings.co.uk. "As tourism continues to grow, more travellers are choosing self-catering."

Where better to put your feet than in a former pub?

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Interiors

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