



Why Charlbury, Oxfordshire, is one of the best places to live in 2021

Near, but not too near to Chipping Norton, this is the real Cotswolds, and it's really nice



Best Places to Live in the Southeast: the community is at the heart of this gem in the Evenlode Valley
ALAMY

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The path to a contented life in civilised countryside in the Cotswolds is well-trodden, and seriously well-heeled. It is easy to make an expensive mistake and end up in a tourist or second-home hotspot. However, for a real life in a real community, with clubs from art and am-dram to cycling, look to Charlbury in the Evenlode Valley — near, but not too near to Chipping Norton (which is seven miles away).

Here the residents are a healthy mix of incomers (many have clocked decades and never looked back) and newcomers. “What unites everyone is that people tend to get stuck into the community and local issues,” says Richard Fairhurst, who moved to a cottage in the centre 20 years ago and got so stuck in that he’s now the chairman of the town council.

More than 100 residents have shares in the community-owned Charlbury Deli & Café; it’s stocked with locally cured charcuterie, savouries and cakes, many made by Lynne, who runs the store. Call in before they close at 2pm for a slice of apple, blackberry and thyme or chocolate and pear loaf. Top up the weekly shop with some top local produce at the Old Shed at Banbury Hill Farm or Jeremy Clarkson’s nearby Diddly Squat farm shop.

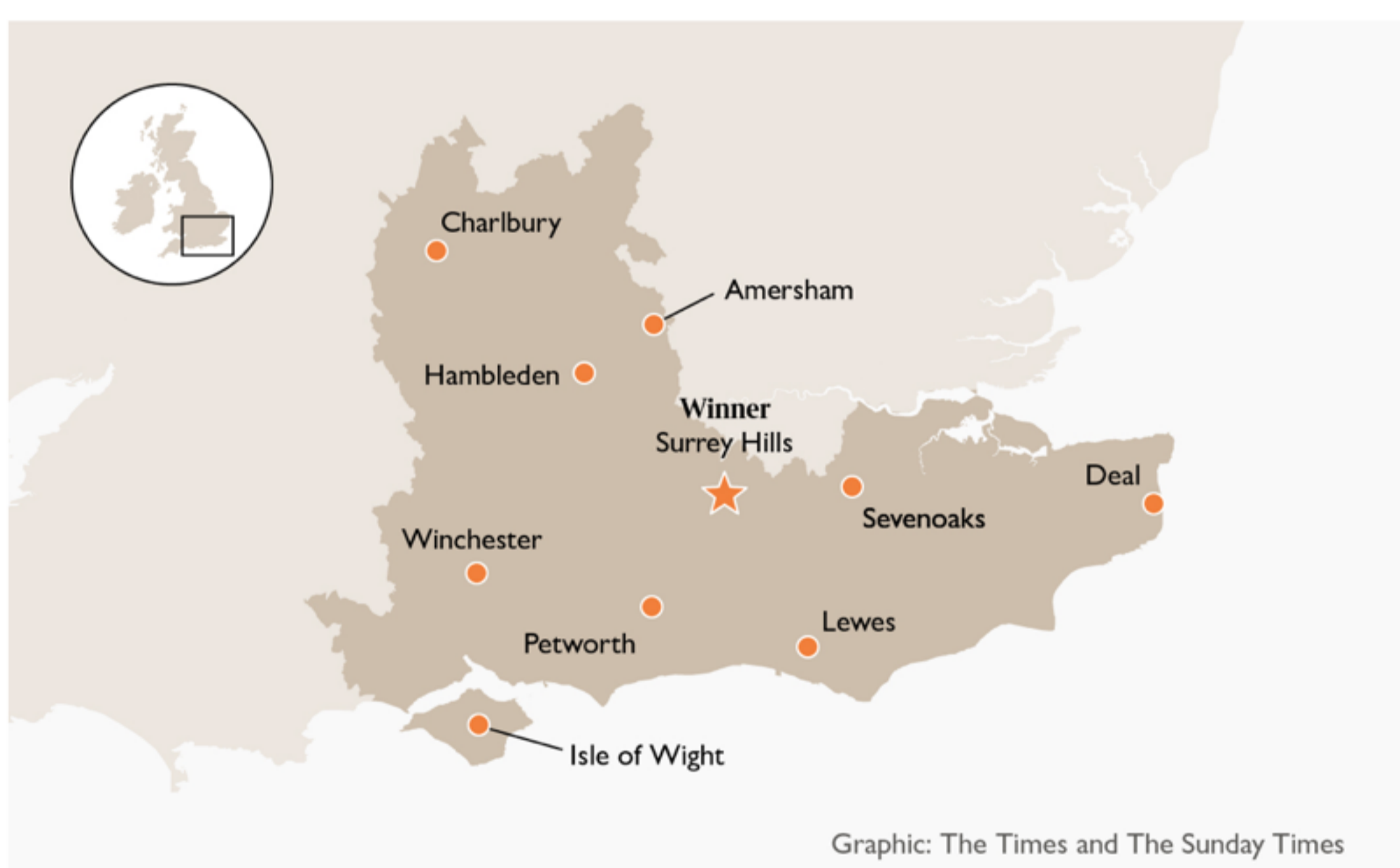


Everyone goes wild at the annual Wilderness Festival, which offers reduced-price tickets to locals
ALAMY

There’s a pretty strong environmental focus here too, with the Charlbury Green Hub (charlburygreenhub.org.uk) the source of everything eco, from linking people for lift shares to organising recycling.

The local summer fests are renowned, and 2021 should be no exception, kicking off with the Beer Festival around the cricket pitch on June 26, then the free music Riverside Festival in July. Tickets are now sold out for the Wilderness Festival, but locals may be able to buy at reduced prices from April: it’s four days of open-air music, food, stalls, frolics and fun in the grounds of the stately Cornbury Park (August 5-8).

Day-to-day socialising centred in the pubs, pre-Covid. Those at Kingham and Woodstock may have more idyllic settings, but the four in town offer a pretty good mix; the Bull Inn on Sheep Street has a mostly locally sourced menu, plus pizzas on a Sunday, and has been keeping customers happy with takeaway truffle cauliflower, mac and cheese for £14.



You'll love living here if

You like being off the tourist trail (just), but full on for rural Cotswold charm.

Best addresses

Church Lane and Church Street for classic Cotswold stone houses and cottages.

- HOUSE PRICES
- Starter home £285,000
 - Mid-market £400,000
 - Top end £925,000
 - Average rental price £1,050 pcm
 - Source: *TwentyCi*

Connections

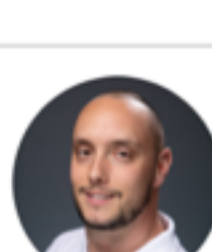
Trains from grade II listed Charlbury station take less than 20 minutes to Oxford and 1 hour 10 minutes to London Paddington. By car you can get to Oxford in 35 minutes, Cheltenham in 50 minutes, and London via the M40 in 1 hour 45 minutes.

Broadband

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Has working from home become a prerequisite rather than a perk?

Very good superfast coverage and outside Charlbury the majority of properties have access to full fibre via the Gigaclear network.

Schools

Charlbury Primary became an academy with a new headteacher in 2019 after being rated inadequate by Ofsted that year. There are primaries rated good in the nearby villages of Finstock, Chadlington and Stonesfield. The nearest secondary is Chipping Norton School (ages 11 to 18), rated good in 2017. Co-ed independents in the area include Windrush Valley School (ages 3 to 11, from £2,335 per term) and Kingham Hill School (ages 11 to 18, from £6,175 per term).

Air quality

Good. No reported problems.

Don't miss

Heart-lifting views on walks through the Cornbury Park Estate and the ancient Wychwood Forest.

What's the catch?

House prices are creeping up, averaging £525,889 (Zoopla), fuelled by demand from the WFH brigade.

► Covid restrictions were in force when this article was published