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#### **METHODOLOGY**

Connells Group analyses detailed data from its estate agency, land & new homes, lettings, mortgage, survey & valuation and asset management businesses from October 2012 to today. Each month, the researchers analyse tens of thousands of registrations, instructions, applications, approvals and valuations and use these trends to publish a quarterly report which reflects trends across the entire property spectrum. Where commercial sensitivity may be an issue, figures are indexed to show trends without publishing raw data.

#### INTRODUCTION

# David Livesey GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE •



Despite some continued challenges within the market as consumer attention was drawn towards the Brexit and general election debates, our figures for the final quarter of 2019 show a more positive performance than expected. Supported by the clear election result, and subsequent 'Boris bounce', the usual seasonal slowdown failed to materialise, with December ahead of December 2018 on all key measures.

This does feel like a turning point for the housing market and, in the weeks immediately following the election, we have seen those that were hesitant, both vendors and purchasers, gain confidence and take action to progress with their sale or purchase.

It was pleasing to see purchaser demand strengthen as new applicant registrations remained ahead of 2018 for the second quarter in a row, with Q4 registrations 4% ahead of Q4 2018. Again, first-time buyers were a key driver for this increase as their registrations saw a 13% uplift on Q4 2018. First-time buyers are a key feature of a healthy market although, with overall stock levels remaining low, it may be some time before these buyers are able to take their first step onto the property ladder.

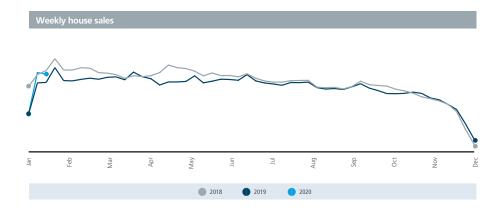
With the increased level of uncertainty during the quarter weighing heavily on the minds of prospective vendors, we saw market appraisal activity down 1% on Q4 2018. This was a better performance than we had expected, but whilst vendors had the confidence to explore the market for their property, the vast majority were keen to wait for the election result before deciding their next move. Against this background, new instructions in the quarter were 7% below Q4 2018. On a more positive note, whilst new instructions do look set to remain challenging in the new year market, a definite change in appetite was evident from the 12th December resulting in the month moving slightly ahead of December 2018. Whilst new instruction activity has certainly been slower to respond to the election results than other activities, it will be interesting to see if this gathers pace in the new year.

The number of properties available for sale at the end of December was 2% below that seen at the end of December 2018. The average asking price for new instructions during Q4 was 3% lower than Q4 2018, as pricing remains sensitive to wider market conditions.

Viewing activity in the quarter increased by 5% when compared to Q4 2018, with December up 12% on December 2018. Prospective buyers continued to show increased confidence with sales activity showing an improved position, with Q4 being the first quarter of 2019 to be ahead of 2018, up 1% on Q4 2018. This was a marked improvement on the differential that had been seen during the first half of the year and reflects a number of hesitant purchasers now having the confidence to proceed. This positive movement has continued into the new year with sales activity in the first few weeks of the year up 5% on the start of 2019.

Average house prices at completion for Q4 were in line with Q3 and, with the year heavily influenced by Brexit, house prices for 2019 as a whole were 2% lower than we saw in 2018. This is a position that we expect to see reverse in 2020 as the country starts to move on from the uncertainty that Brexit has given in recent years.

The new homes market ended the year with a flourish, with new instructions up 10% and sales activity up 18% on Q4 2018. The sector has proven to be more resilient during 2019 than some would have expected, and our strong and successful housebuilder partnerships continue to deliver year-on-year growth. With the



number of new instructions continuing to increase, bringing much needed stock to the market, we expect to see further growth in new homes transactions during the next quarter.

Despite the changes that we have seen within the lettings market this year, the market remains active with average rental values in Q4 moving 2% ahead of Q4 2018. Whilst we have continued to see a reduction in the number of new rental properties coming to market during the second half of the year, ending the year with 16% less stock than at the end of 2018, there are some early signs that this trend may reverse as we enter 2020. Although applicant registrations during 2019 have consistently tracked below 2018, the demand for rental property remains ahead of the level of available stock and we, therefore, expect increased pressure on average rental values in the year ahead.

The mortgage market continues to be supported by a healthy level of remortgage business and we have started to see the improvements in house sales reflected in the mix of activity in our mortgage business. During the final quarter of the year, we have seen purchase activity move closer to 2018 levels and first-time buyer business increase as many look to take their first step onto the property ladder in 2020. These are positive indicators for the coming quarter, with every chance that the improvements seen during Q4 will gather pace in the coming months. Good mortgage availability and ultra-low interest rates can only help too.

As we expected, 2019 was another challenging year for the market as Brexit continued to distract. We entered 2019 with an expectation that the first quarter of the year would finally bring the clarity that the market so desperately needed, and it seems that we enter 2020 with a more concrete expectation. Much is still unknown about the final Brexit arrangements, however, in the weeks following the election result we have seen evidence of a 'Boris bounce', as customers exhibit a more positive outlook which is starting to turn into meaningful action.

We still expect the market to be challenging during Q1, but with our branches reporting increased activity during the first few weeks of the new year, the outlook for 2020 is a positive one.

# **ESTATE AGENCY**

**David Plumtree**GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE 
(ESTATE AGENCY)



Having regard to the uncertainty created by Brexit and the December election, activity across our branch network in Q4 was better than anticipated, with a clear uplift evident as soon as that uncertainty was removed by the compelling election outcome.

The real hesitancy in action in the quarter was from potential sellers, with valuation and instruction activity well below the seasonal norm and materially down on what was a lacklustre Q4 in 2018. Buyer activity was more resilient, with sales levels broadly holding up to Q4 2018 levels. There was a noticeable pickup in activity and market sentiment in the short period after the election result and before the Christmas break, and this has certainly built further momentum into the first few weeks of 2020.

We continued to see downward pressure on house prices, with a 1% drop in average prices when compared to Q4 2018.

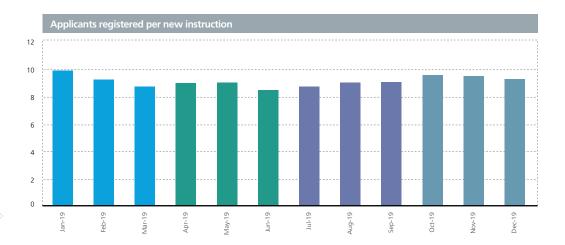




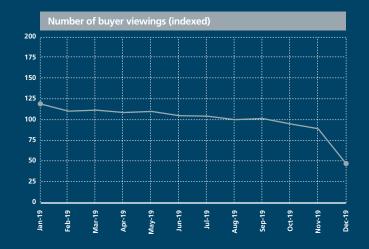
## New buyers and instructions

- Activity during Q4 was impacted by the December general election, however, with a post-election uplift in activity countering the usual seasonal slowdown, we saw a strong end to the year with December ahead of December 2018 on most measures.
- New applicant registrations in December were up 16% on December 2018, with the quarter as a whole up by 4% on Q4 2018. The increase in first-time buyer registrations that we saw in Q3 continued and were up 13% on Q4 2018.
- Despite a 5% year-on-year increase in market appraisal activity in December, Q4 appraisal activity was 1% below Q4 2018.
- o The timing of the general election had a definite impact on new instruction volumes, which were down 7% on Q4 2018. An uptick in activity following the election result gave a more positive end to the year, with December volumes edging ahead of December 2018. With a marked change in confidence levels post the election, and with more positive vendors ready to enter the market, there is every sign that we will see a strong start to 2020.
- The ratio of applicants registered to new instructions increased to 9.4 during the quarter, up from 8.9 in Q3, and in line with that seen in Q4 2018.





# **ESTATE AGENCY**







#### Viewings

- During the quarter, viewing activity was 5% ahead of Q4 2018. This was supported by a very strong end to the year, with viewing activity in December 12% ahead of December 2018.
- The total number of properties available for sale at the end of December was 2% lower than December 2018.

#### Offers

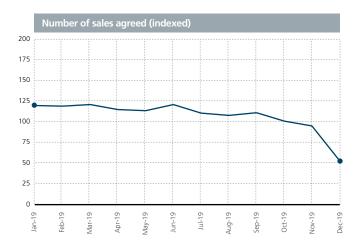
- Supported by the increased level of viewing activity, and purchasers showing increased confidence as the year ended, the number of offers made during the quarter showed a 37% improvement on Q4 2018.
- The average level of viewings per offer continued to decrease,
   5.9 in Q4, down from 7.6 in Q4 2018.



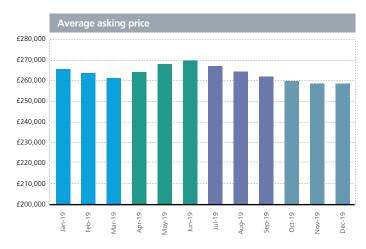




# **ESTATE AGENCY**







#### **Sales**

- Sales activity continued to improve as the year progressed, with The average number of offers per sale agreed rose to 2.5, from The average asking price at instruction in December was sales in Q4 1% above Q4 2018.
  - 2.3 in Q3 2019.

#### **Prices**

£262,151, a 3% reduction on December 2018.





# LAND & NEW HOMES

Roger Barrett
GROUP LAND & NEW HOMES
MANAGING DIRECTOR



The year ended on a really positive note with Q4 sales up by 18% and instructions up 10%. This improvement has led to a year-on-year increase in sales of 2.2%, with instructions up by 7%.

These market improvements are set against a much more stable political backcloth, and we have already seen positive signs of the new homes sales market continuing on an upward curve and building upon the growth we have seen in the new homes sector more generally throughout 2019. Housebuilders have shown a clear commitment to increasing housing output with supply up over 90% in the last six years.

In order to continue increasing the supply chain, there are challenges ahead for both larger developers and SMEs including dealing with their environmental and social responsibility, quality and delivery, housing affordability and talent that will enable the industry to develop an effective and sustainable workforce.

**New homes** instructions up



New homes sales up





#### New buyers and instructions

- The new homes market can be more susceptible to external influences, however, the potential distractions presented by Brexit and the general election failed to hinder a strong Q4 performance.
- The sector ended the year strongly with new instructions 10% ahead of Q4 2018, this continued the year-on-year quarterly improvements that we have seen. With increased stock availability, we are well positioned for a positive start to 2020.

### **Sales activity**

- o There were no signs of a seasonal slowdown within the new homes market with sales activity exceeding our expectations, the number of sales in the quarter was 18% ahead of Q4 2018. With an increase in applicant registrations, particularly first-time buyers, and a growing appetite for new property, transaction volumes look set for continued improvement.
- With the increased level of sales activity, our pipeline of new homes sales at the end of the year was 18% ahead of December 2018.
- Despite the positive sales levels, the number of new homes available for sale at the end of December was 5% higher than at the end of December 2018.

# Housing supply and market activity

- o It has been a difficult year for planning, with a peak in local plans submitted to beat the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) deadline in January. This resulted in an increased workload at public inquiries around the country while national policy changes and implementation has been delayed by the political turmoil in Westminster. The influence of design will become a major focus in 2020 with the publication of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission report and the Government's own National Model Design Code.
- Whilst National House-Building Council (NHBC) new homes registrations continue to edge up year on year, delivering major increases in overall housing supply remains challenging and, as such, developers continue to explore partnering arrangements with registered providers as a way of improving housing volumes.
- As a partner of choice for new homes developers across the UK, our 2019 performance will be ahead of the industry average and the positive end to the year gives us increased confidence for 2020.





# **RESIDENTIAL LETTINGS**

Stephen Nation
GROUP LETTINGS
MANAGING DIRECTOR



Despite the distractions that the end of 2019 delivered, the lettings market performed as would be expected at this time of year. Rents rose compared to the same period in 2018, indicating strong demand against a falling level of new instructions. The total number of new tenancies held up reasonably well in Q4 but, for 2019 as a whole, were improved.

With 2019 behind us, the first signs for 2020 are that a strong lettings market is likely to continue and the reduced level of instructions seen in December appears to be correcting itself, with some better results coming through. Demand from tenants also seems to be continuing, so rents are likely to progress in an upwards direction.





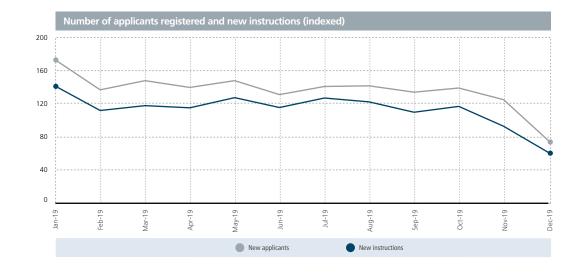




2%
compared to the same period in 2018

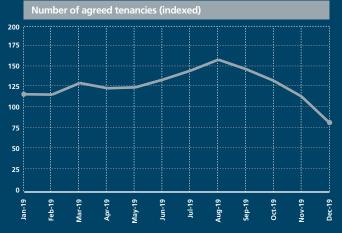
#### **New applicants and instructions**

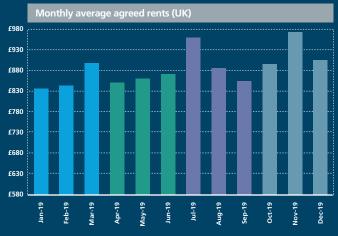
- During the final quarter of the year, the lettings market continued to operate at a steady pace, albeit at a slightly lower level than seen in the final quarter of 2018.
- The number of new applicants registering to rent followed the same pattern seen throughout 2018, with Q4 registrations 8% below the corresponding quarter of 2018. This 8% reduction mirrors the full year position. There are a number of factors that contribute to this reduction, including a continuing increase in the average length of tenancies.
- o It was disappointing to see the number of new instructions in the quarter 7% below the final quarter of 2018. There are fewer new landlords entering the market, and some existing landlords may still be assessing their portfolios but, with fewer properties coming to the market, we expect to see increased pressure on rental values as we enter 2020.
- The ratio of registered applicants to new instructions reduced to 5.3 for Q4, only slightly behind the 5.4 seen in Q4 2018.
- We ended the year with 16% fewer properties available for rent than at the end of 2018.

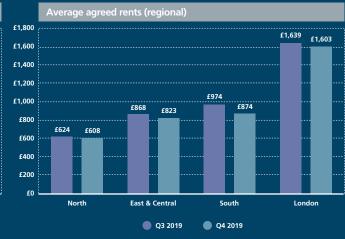




# **RESIDENTIAL LETTINGS**







# Agreed tenancies and average rents

- The number of new tenancies agreed was 1% behind Q4 2018, a positive result considering the uncertainty that the December election introduced into the quarter.
- The average UK rent in Q4 stood at £906, 2% ahead of Q4 2018.
- During Q4, average rental values eased across all regions, with the South seeing the greatest reduction.



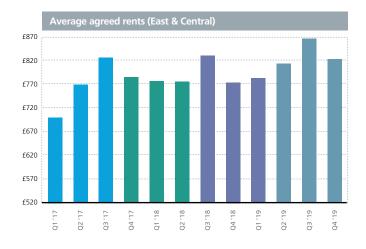


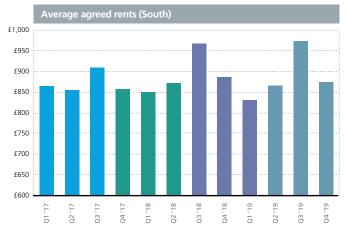


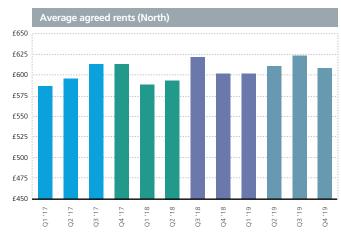


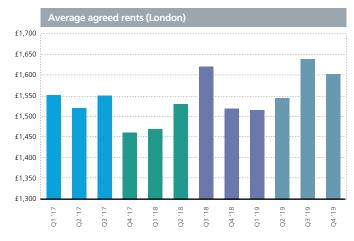


## **RESIDENTIAL LETTINGS**









#### **Regional rents**

- The final quarter of the year saw average rents follow a similar pattern to the end of 2018, with rent reductions seen across all regions when compared to Q3.
- With the exception of the South, where we saw a 1% reduction, average rents for the quarter were above those seen in Q4 2018 in all other regions.
- The East & Central region saw the highest year-on-year increase, with average rental values in Q4 6% ahead of Q4 2018.
- Average rents within London have continued to see year-onyear increases with Q4 5% ahead of Q4 2018.

# **MORTGAGES**

Adrian Scott
GROUP MORTGAGE
SERVICES DIRECTOR



As Q4 2019 progressed, we saw signs that the residential purchase market was improving, even though Q4 as a whole was steady.

There was a good month in November for first-time buyers and this continued into early December. Overall, these numbers support the view that residential purchase activity will start 2020 well.

However, the constant growth of residential remortgage business over the last two years eased in Q4. Given the volume of maturities in 2020, this is not suggested to be any more than a blip, but will be monitored during early 2020.

First-time buyers in London accounted for

36% of business

Residential remortgages were



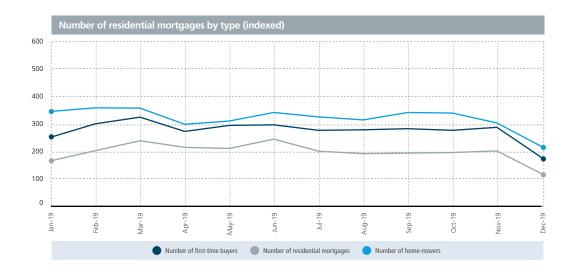
13% lower than Q4 2018

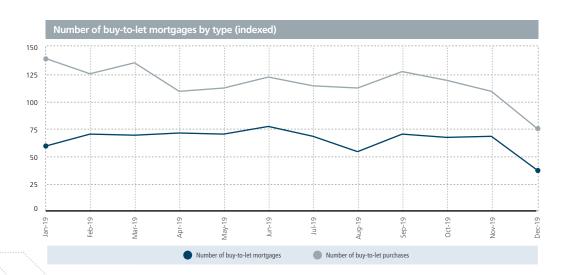
#### Residential

- Reflecting the progress that we have seen in sales activity across our estate agency network, the residential sector of the mortgage market saw transaction levels move closer to those seen in 2018. Q4 activity levels were 2% lower than Q4 2018.
- In Q3, we reported an increase in first-time buyer registrations across our network and it was pleasing to see these buyers starting to find their first property, supporting an improvement in first-time buyer activity during the final quarter of the year. This gives us some confidence for 2020, despite the 2019 volumes being 7% below 2018.
- We ended the year with residential purchase activity starting to reflect the improvement in house sales reported during Q3, with Q4 activity just ahead of Q4 2018.
- Whilst still accounting for the largest share of activity, residential remortgage volumes reduced during the quarter, showing a 13% reduction on Q4 2018.

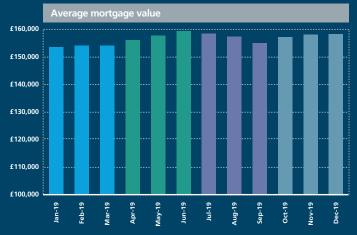
#### **Buy-to-let**

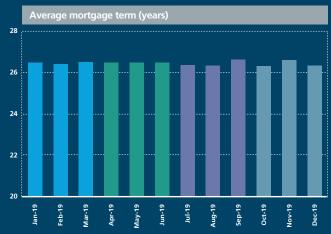
- Perhaps influenced by the announcement and timing of the December election, the buy-to-let sector has eased in recent months, with Q4 showing a 4% reduction on Q4 2018. The sector continued to account for 18% of mortgage activity, in line with Q3 and Q4 2018.
- Buy-to-let remortgage activity declined during the quarter, showing a 6% reduction on Q4 2018. This continues the pattern seen in previous quarters, and whilst many landlords have taken the opportunity to refinance their portfolios during the course of the year, volumes in 2019 as a whole were below 2018 levels.
- Purchase activity of buy-to-let customers is yet to see signs of a positive shift in the market with Q4 down 3% on Q4 2018. There are still plenty of keenly-priced properties on the market, but investors are taking longer to consider additional purchases.





# **MORTGAGES**





# **Mortgage values**

At £158,418, the average mortgage value increased by 2% during Q4 and is up 3% on Q4 2018.

# **Mortgage terms**

The average mortgage term at the end of Q4 was 26.4 years, slightly down on Q3 but up from 26.1 at the end of Q4 2018.

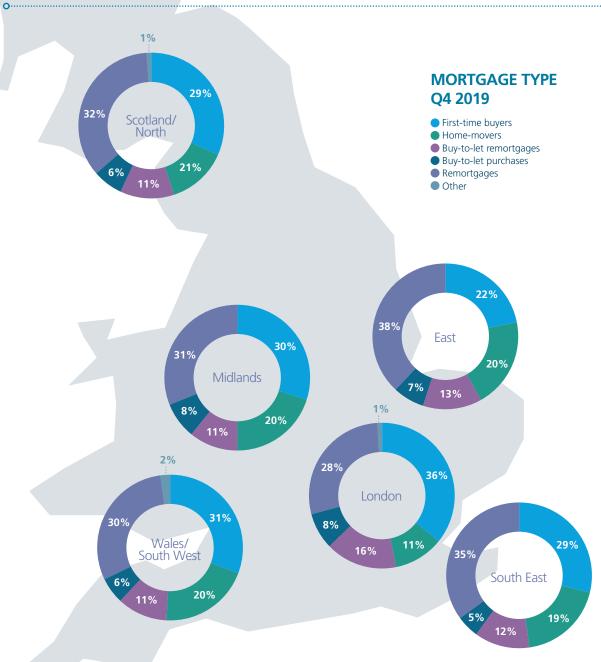
#### **UK MORTGAGE TYPE SPLIT**



Buy-to-let remortgages Other



#### **MORTGAGES**



#### **UK mortgage type split**

- Homeowner remortgage activity continued to drive the mortgage market, accounting for 33% of activity during Q4 and 34% of activity during 2019.
   With the residential sales market reporting a more positive end to the year, it will be interesting to see if this leading position is maintained in 2020.
- Supported by an improving level of homeowner and first-time-buyer activity, house purchase activity saw some improvement during the quarter, with volumes in Q4 moving just ahead of Q4 2018. This has been a gradual recovery during the second half of 2019 that, subject to any further distraction that the final Brexit arrangements may bring, we should see continue in the first quarter of 2020.
- Although we have seen a continued improvement in first-time buyer activity, this has not been sufficient to increase market share with first-time buyers maintaining a 28% share of activity - the same level as seen in Q3 2019. Homemovers continued to account for 19% of activity during Q4.
- The overall share of activity accounted for by both purchase and remortgage buy-to-let business remained level with Q3 2019, accounting for 18% of overall activity.

#### **Regional picture**

- First-time buyers maintained their return to the market, most notably in London where they accounted for 36% of activity in Q4, and the South East where they accounted for 29% of activity. At 22%, the East saw a 2 point reduction in the first-time buyer share of the market.
- Outside of London and the East, both up 2 points during the quarter, homeowner remortgage activity lost market share in all other regions.
- Home-movers increased their share of activity in most regions, with only London seeing a 3 point reduction to 11% as first-time buyer and remortgage activity grew.
- On a national level, both remortgage and purchase buy-to-let business remained steady at 18% of activity. Whilst other regions saw a 1 point reduction in the share of activity accounted for by the buy-to-let sector, the North saw a 3 point increase driven by remortgage activity.

# **ASSET MANAGEMENT**

Simon Matthews
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
AMG



The latest figures published by UK Finance cover the third quarter of 2019 and show a 26% increase in the total number of properties taken into possession when compared to Q3 2018. These numbers continue to reflect the backlog of historic cases being processed in line with the latest regulatory requirements. We continued to see a marked difference between the different sectors of the market, with the growth in the number of buy-to-let possessions exceeding those seen in the number of owner-occupied possessions. When compared to Q3 2018, buy-to-let possessions in Q3 2019 increased by 40%, whilst owner-occupied possessions increased by 19%.

At 23,470, the percentage of mortgages with arrears representing 10% or more of the balance outstanding saw a 5% reduction on Q2 2019.

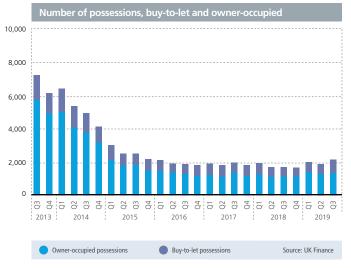
**Lowest**property
value
sold in Q4

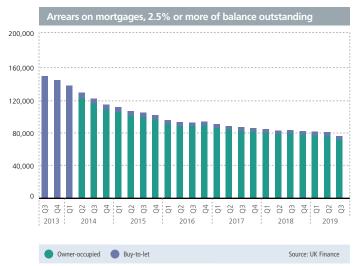
£13,000

Highest property value sold in Q4

£990,000

#### **ASSET MANAGEMENT**





#### **Possessions**

- The processing of a number of historical cases in line with the latest regulatory guidance continued to influence the number of possessions, with the 2,130 properties taken into possession during Q3 representing a 26% increase when compared to Q3 2018.
- On a rolling 12-month basis, there have been 7,620 possessions, with the buy-to-let sector accounting for 33% of these.

#### **Possession sales**

- Sales activity was unaffected in the lead up to the election and remained strong up until the quieter Christmas period.
- The average sale price for completed possession sales in Q4 was £122,273.

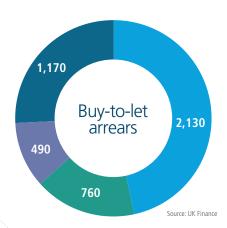
#### **Arrears**

- Owner-occupiers with arrears of 2.5% or more of the total balance totalled 71,590 in Q3 2019. This was 6% down on the previous quarter and 9% below Q3 2018.
- At 4,550, arrears of 2.5% or more of the total balance within the buy-to-let sector decreased by 2% on Q2 2019 and 3% on Q3 2018.
- The number of owner-occupied mortgages with arrears of 10% or more of the balance in Q3 was 8% lower than Q3 2018, whilst the buy-to-let sector remained level with Q3 2018.

#### **ARREARS BANDING Q3 2019**







Ross Bowen
MANAGING DIRECTOR, O.....CONNELLS SURVEY & VALUATION



The final quarter of 2019 turned out well for Connells Survey & Valuation. Sustained service excellence was maintained, ensuring that customers benefited from a high-quality experience.

Across the sector, the tougher housing market over the year has resulted in some surveying firms postponing ongoing investment (at the very least) into renewing infrastructure and committing to further service development. Connells Survey & Valuation however, has continued its major investment programme developing IT systems, service digitalisation and extending service delivery teams including our trainee surveyor academy, ensuring we are well equipped for future business.

With a clear electoral mandate from the general election, the government and UK can now start to make robust plans to succeed outside the EU. With increased certainty ahead, we expect 2020 will bring a rise in housing activity and associated transactions in the survey and valuation sector.

Connells Survey & Valuation's service quality

16% ahead of other providers

Average reporting turnaround

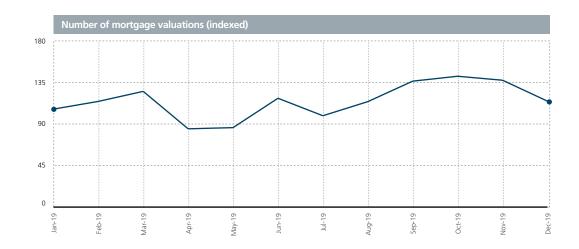
45
days, 0.9 days faster
than the market

# **Mortgage valuations**

- With the residential sales market seeing a continued improvement in sales activity, the number of mortgage valuations completed in Q4 was ahead of Q3 and showed a 9% increase over Q4 2018.
- Residential remortgage activity eased during the final quarter of the year, and whilst still a key part of the market, our Group mortgage business reported a 13% decrease in activity during the quarter when compared to Q4 2018.

#### **Surveys**

- Survey activity saw a further decline during Q4, down 5% on Q3 and well below the levels seen in 2018. The uplift in house sales activity is yet to feed through to the survey market.
- The proportion of activity accounted for by surveys in Q4 was 6%, slightly down on the 7% seen in Q4 2018.







#### **Buy-to-let**

 The buy-to-let sector remained strong during the quarter with volumes up 28% on Q4 2018, and associated remortgage activity helping to boost overall activity.

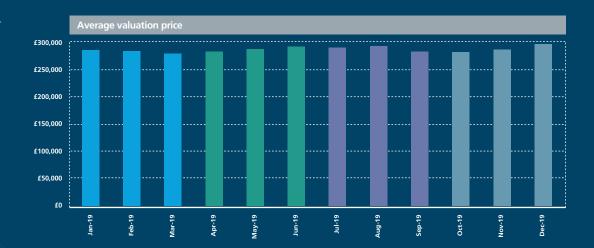
#### **Average valuation**

• The average property valuation during Q4 was £298,919, broadly static on Q4 2018.

# **Overall market activity**

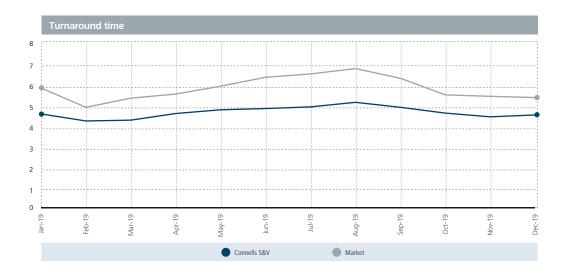
- Whilst the outcome of the December general election and the implications of this for our final Brexit arrangements are not reflected within our Q4 figures, it was pleasing to end the year with overall volumes 13% ahead of Q4 2018. With early signs that consumers within the residential sales and mortgage markets are starting to show increased confidence, we should see a positive start to the new year.
- Reflecting the wider residential market, the business mix for 2019 shifted towards the buy-to-let market as house sales activity remained subdued. With some positive signs starting to be seen as we enter 2020, we may well see this reverse in the coming months.

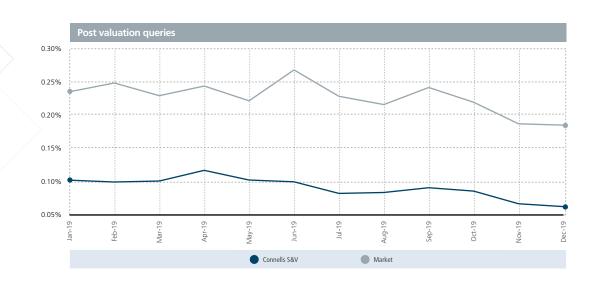




# **Service delivery**

- During the quarter, Connells Survey & Valuation's service delivery moved from an average 4.9 days in Q3 to 4.5 days, this is nearly a day ahead of the rest of the market where average turnaround times during the quarter were 5.4 days.
- During Q4, the reporting quality by Connells Survey & Valuation averaged 93% compared with the 80% delivered across the rest of the market. Throughout 2019, Connells Survey & Valuation's clients have again continued to benefit from market-leading quality.







# **MARKET SUMMARY**

# REGIONAL AVERAGE HOUSE PRICE AT COMPLETION Q4 2019

Scotland/North
No change from Q4 2018

£148,957



**East 4% up** from Q4 2018

£258,901



Midlands
1% down from Q4 2018

£193,556



Wales/South West 1% down from Q4 2018

£199,889



**London 1% down** from Q4 2018

£431,332



South East No change from Q4 2018

£287,989

UK average house price at completion Q4 2019

£220,873

in line with Q3 2019

(£221,934)

in line with Q4 2018 (£221,245)

# REGIONAL AVERAGE RENT Q4 2019













## **ABOUT CONNELLS GROUP**

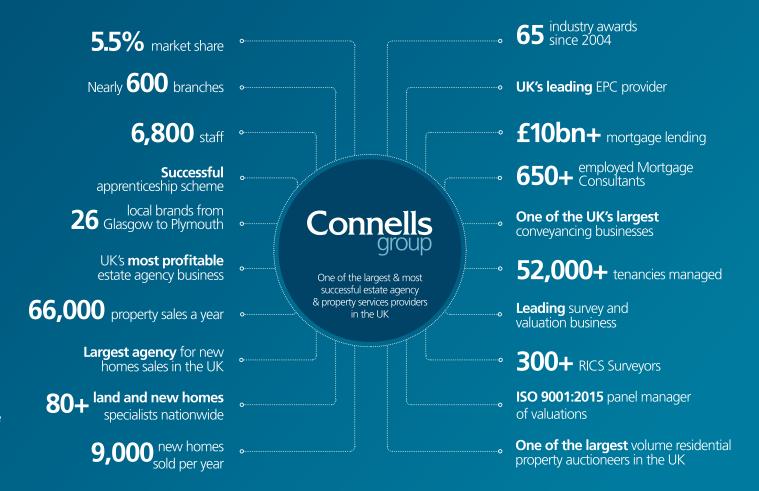
Connells Group is one of the largest and most successful estate agency and property services providers in the UK. Founded in 1936 and with a network of nearly 600 branches nationwide, the Group combines residential sales and lettings expertise with a range of consumer and corporate services including new homes, mortgage services, conveyancing, EPC provision, surveying, corporate lettings, asset management, land and planning, LPA receivers and auctions.

Alongside the Connells estate agency brand, the Group trades under other well-known and trusted local names including Allen & Harris, Bagshaws Residential, Barnard Marcus, Barnfields, Brown & Merry, Fox & Sons, Jones & Chapman, Manners & Harrison, Roger Platt, Shipways, Swetenhams, William H Brown, Sharman Quinney, Pattison Lane, Burchell Edwards, Ashley Adams, Atkinson Stilgoe, Kevin Henry, Peter Alan, Thomas George, Rook Matthews Sayer, Paul Dubberley, Hurfords, Knight Partnership and Gascoigne Halman.

Corporate clients benefit from Connells Group's broad range of award-winning services and depth of experience and expertise.

We work with some of the UK's leading organisations and institutions on property and land acquisition and disposal, asset management, mortgage sales and distribution, corporate lettings, auctions, conveyancing and surveying, to name a few.

Connells Group is a subsidiary of the Skipton Building Society, one of the UK's largest providers of financial services and products.



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# **ABOUT CONNELLS GROUP**

#### **OUR BUSINESS BRANDS**











#### **OUR LOCAL ESTATE AGENCY BRANDS**























































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