

READING TEXT 9

The following passage has seven paragraphs, labelled A-G. Which paragraphs mention the following information? You do not need to mention all the paragraphs.

1. the relationship between local environment and behaviour_____
2. the benefits of asking around_____
3. becoming an organiser_____
4. partnerships against crime_____
5. problems which are not really problems_____
6. aspects of neighbourhood research_____

Will you love your neighbours?

A

When you are interested in buying a house, it's easy to check the location and specifications of the house, but how can you assess an area's community spirit - not just if the neighbours are friendly, but whether people will get involved in helping to deliver public services, setting up social enterprises and tackling local issues? Here are some tips for finding out what an area's community spirit is like.

B

If an estate agent shows you around, ask for the vendor's phone number. 'Meeting the seller is an opportunity to find out what an area is like,' says Chris Gittins, manager of Streets Alive (streetsalive.org.uk), which works with residents, councils and voluntary groups to build communities by hosting events and activities in streets. It is also worth trying to meet the neighbours to find out more about an area. If you don't find anyone at home, or don't get a clear response, talk to people in the pub or the corner shop.

C

Living Streets (livingstreets.org.uk), which promotes safe, active and enjoyable streets, says steer clear of heavy traffic. Its research shows that people living on busy streets shield themselves from noise, don't go outside and restrict their children's independence - all of which reduces interaction with neighbours. And although an open space may seem like an asset, it can also become a source of conflict, says Dominic Church, senior adviser at the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. 'If they are not kept clear and nobody is clearly responsible for the

maintenance, they can become breeding grounds for graffiti, antisocial behaviour and kids mucking about,' he says.

D

Local police can tell you whether there is a Neighbourhood (or Home) Watch scheme in your area (mynhw.co.uk). Living in an area with a scheme doesn't just reduce your insurance premiums and ensure that the police tackle local issues such as theft: research shows that even when neighbours have nothing in common they share a desire to create a safe area and create a community spirit. If there isn't a scheme, find out why.

E

Councils have lists of local voluntary organisations that can help to reveal the interests and activities of local communities. Some councils also run award schemes, which may include prizes for active and inspirational groups. Search the web, use social media and post queries on forums to find out residents' views. This may give you more varied and up-to-date information than the council. Look at newschoolsnetwork.org to see if there are any plans to set up a new free school in the area. This is a sign of socially engaged parents and community motivation.

F

Floods, high crime levels and other issues can give a neighbourhood a bad image, but they can boost community spirit. In my case, the floods of 2007 brought people together to tackle climate change, which led to a low-carbon group that this year won two national competitions worth more than £800,000. The CrimeMapper website (maps.police.uk) provides information on crime and antisocial behaviour by area and police force. You can search by five types of crime and get details of your local neighbourhood policing team, its contacts, and the next 'Have Your Say' meeting.

G

If you are confident about the house, you could go ahead with the purchase and hold a Street party to boost community spirit. 'People who have just moved into a house are critical to setting up street parties,' Gittins says. 'After two or three years it becomes harder - they meet neighbours, get set in their routines, and feel less motivated.'

Answer Key

1. C (local environment: people living on busy streets, open space ... not kept clear-, behaviour: reduces interaction with neighbours, graffiti, antisocial behaviour, kids mucking about)
2. B (benefits: an opportunity to find out-, asking around: trying to meet the neighbours, talk to people in the pub or the corner shop)
3. G (organisation: hold a street party to boost community spirit)
4. D (a Neighbourhood [or Home] Watch scheme, share a desire to create a safe area)
5. F (problems: a bad image-, not really problems: boost community spirit)
6. A (aspects: if the neighbours are friendly, ...will get involved in helping to deliver public services, setting up social enterprises and tackling local issues)