

Estate agent attacks house price fall forecasts

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A LEADING Ulster estate agent has dismissed economic opinion that house prices will probably continue falling and attacked those who predict further falls in the housing market. Keith Mitchell, a founding partner of Templeton Robinson, also said that UK-wide housing statistics should be ignored by potential house buyers, claiming that such reports could damage the "fragile confidence now developing" among potential buyers in Northern Ireland.



Keith Mitchell

Homeowners in denial over property prices

Financial experts have predicted further turmoil in the housing market as job losses and repossessions mount during the recession.

But Mr Mitchell, attacking those predictions, said that the situation in England, Scotland and Wales - where values rose over a longer period of time and would therefore take longer to readjust - had been very different to that in the Province.

"In Northern Ireland our prices exploded over a short period of time and have reduced just as quickly," he said.

"In our view there is therefore no basis to suggest our values will become further depressed."

Templeton Robinson, which had five offices in Belfast and north Down, said that it had sold 75 homes almost equally split between newly-built houses and houses being resold during the last four weeks.

Mr Mitchell said: "Our advice to potential purchasers is to ensure the asking price for their desired property reflects the summer 2007 figure less around 30 per cent, but also to realise that vendors cannot be expected to reduce substantially further than that."

Veteran east Belfast estate agent Christopher Pooler claimed that most of the homes he is selling have had their price slashed by about 40 per cent but that many homeowners were refusing to accept that their house had plummeted in value.

Meanwhile, the latest monthly survey from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) will today reveal that fewer surveyors are reporting falling prices.

Almost half of chartered surveyors reported no drop in prices in January, down slightly from 59 per cent the previous month.

The RICS predicted that some investors may now re-enter the market.

RICS Northern Ireland housing spokesman Tom McClelland said that while the Northern Ireland price balance remained strongly negative, it had improved markedly in recent months:

"Northern Ireland chartered surveyors are widely reporting a rise in inquiries from potential buyers and the survey indicates that they are increasingly confident that transaction levels will grow in the months ahead albeit from very low levels," he said.

In October, Dr Graham Gudgin, a former economic advisor to the Assembly and now senior economic advisor at Oxford Economics, said that he believed Ulster prices would fall for about another year.

Fionnula Earley, chief economist at Nationwide Building Society, has also said that she expects house prices in Northern Ireland to continue falling this year.

And City of London financier Jonathan Davis, who predicted the current property crash when most local estate agents were still predicting prices would keep rising, has said that Ulster house prices will fall by an average of 50 per cent, meaning that some of the most overpriced properties would fall by 80 per cent.