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### Keswick, Cumbria

Terriers and poodles had a vote, Keswick would be the runaway winner as Britain's Friendliest Town. In 2012, the popular Lake District tourist centre scooped the Open for Dogs prize in a competition run by the Kennel Club. Just turn up with an Irish setter called Bob and you will be treated like royalty. Two-legged visitors also get a pretty warm welcome. The local Borrowdale one might have a blue hue, but the town is a rosy example of a community that relies on tourism without becoming cynical and acquisitive. Solid, double-fronted properties and Victorian terraces make up most of the housing stock.

**On the market** Ten-bedroom house with spectacular lakeside views, near the heart of Keswick. £2.25million with Carter Jonas (carterjonas.co.uk).

### 2 Harrogate, North Yorkshire

Yorkshire folk can sometimes be a bit ruffly suspicious of outsiders, but the smiles of welcome get broader the further north in the county you travel. According to a recent Rightmove survey, the spa town of Harrogate is the happiest community in Britain, taking into account factors such as good neighbourliness and handsome surroundings, including beautiful countryside and nearby towns such as Knaresborough. And it was voted happiest town last year, too. No wonder, when you look at their elegant, period town houses.

**On the market** Four-bedroom terrace (pictured below right). £895,000 with Knight Frank (knightfrank.co.uk).

### 3 Taunton, Somerset

You don't have to be tanked up with the local cider to appreciate the friendliness of Taunton and the people who live there. The county cricket ground, beloved of West country sports fans, is legendary for its relaxed good humour. An abundance of independent shops and businesses in the town centre reveals an idiosyncratic community brimming with optimism. There are plenty of charming Victorian terraces in town, and picturesque country cottages nearby.

**On the market** Four-bedroom, modern detached house in Bathpool, Taunton. £345,000 with Wilkie & Tuckwood (wilkie.co.uk).

### 4 Plymouth, Devon

A healthy number of cyclists can often be a litmus test for a

flourishing community. Nowhere in Britain beats Plymouth on this count. The likeable Devon city, with its proud naval traditions, is the most bicycle-friendly place in the country, according to a survey by Virgin Money. Even if you prefer to explore by foot, you are likely to be struck by the fact that it seems to be a city at ease with itself. A large student population means there are plenty of flats around, with opportunities for investment.

**On the market** Grade II-listed Georgian town house overlooking the Tamar estuary. £675,000 with Strutt & Parker (struttandparker.com).

### 5 Gateside, Fife

Not many people had heard of Gateside when it was crowned the friendliest community in Britain in a competition run by Tesco. "I am surprised we won because we are such a wee village," said one of Gateside's 200 residents. But it was easy to see what had impressed the judges. The locals are not just friendly, they share their skills. Many offer maths tutoring, gardening and bicycle repairs. Property prices are low compared with the rest of the country.

**On the market** Two-bedroom traditional cottage. £142,000 with Andersons (andersons-kinross.co.uk).

### 6 Narberth, Pembrokeshire

When a family whose son had been badly wounded in Afghanistan moved to Narberth recently, the community held a Help for Heroes cake sale, raising £6,500 for the charity. The gesture was typical of a warm-hearted Welsh town in which some of the spirit of Dylan Thomas's Llareggub in *Under Milk Wood* lives on. "Everyone has a cheery word for anybody. The thought of the elderly being lonely or friendless is unthinkable," says Carol Peett of The County Homeseach Company, West Wales. The beautiful surrounding countryside attracts escapees from the rat race and holidaymakers, so smallholdings and letting businesses are sought-after.

**On the market** Seven-bedroom Georgian country house two miles from Narberth. £650,000 with Fine & Country (fineandcountry.co.uk).

### 7 Bramhall, Stockport

In 2010, researchers at Sheffield University tried to identify Britain's friendliest communities. The one that impressed them most was Bramhall, a leafy village near Stockport in Greater Manchester. Among 30,000 residents, they found few who were obviously

lonely or "felt they did not belong". This might be because the village has 70-odd clubs, societies and sports groups. Consequently, property isn't that cheap here.

**On the market** Idiosyncratic, five-bedroom contemporary home on Ladybrook Road. £1.2million with Gascoigne Halman (gascoignehalman.co.uk).

### 8 Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Best known for its regatta, Henley has also become notable for the number and range of charity events it hosts. "The NSPCC Christmas Fair always attracts a huge crowd," explains Nicholas Brown of Knight Frank Henley. Good neighbourliness is in its blood and, for a celebrity-rich community, it is also remarkably down-to-earth. The late George Harrison was a great supporter of the town and would regularly drink with locals in a pub near his house.

**On the market** Five-bedroom, 2001-built detached house in period style (below centre), Turville Heath, £1.8million with Knight Frank (knightfrank.co.uk).

### 9 Haddenham, Buckinghamshire

It may be in the heart of *Midsomer Murders* country, but this likeable Buckinghamshire village must be the last place in the country you would expect to get a knife in the back. Everybody here is nice. There are so many communal activities – church fetes, concerts, fun runs, am-dram productions, bridge clubs, pub quizzes – that there genuinely is something for everyone. Even the massed cohorts of golden retrievers seem to be smiling. You might not find much on the market and, if you do, it's sure to be snapped up quickly.

**On the market** Three-bedroom period cottage in Haddenham, formerly the village blacksmith's house. £650,000 with Tim Russ & Company (timruss.co.uk).

### 10 North Dorset

A 2012 government survey found that in North Dorset – which includes the towns of Shaftesbury, Gillingham and Blandford Forum – 93.74 per cent of residents felt they lived in an area where "neighbours look out for each other". Dorset folk are so unfailingly affable that even the remaining 6.26 per cent are hardly likely to be curmudgeons and backbiters. It is a wonderfully mellow part of the country, epitomised by Gold Hill in Shaftesbury, which was made famous in the Hovis advert.

**On the market** Six-bedroom country retreat on the edge of Hilton, Dorset (right), £2.3 million (knightfrank.co.uk).



Go with the flow: Plymouth's naval traditions are on display in a town that 'seems at ease with itself'



10 Dorset