



Prospective buyers queue for the Trinity Square flats TOM PILSTON

## HOUSING

# First-time buyers queue overnight in the rain to buy 'affordable' £199,000 homes

By Adam Lusher

For the first time in his career, "John" had taken a sickie from his work as an NHS dentist. But then, perhaps it could be said that desperate times called for desperate measures.

After four years of searching, the 38-year-old saw a chance of finally buying his first home, at an affordable price. So he was queuing in the rain for the start of the great Galliard Homes sale.

As part of its "Get on the Ladder" starter home campaign, the developer was offering – on a first come, first served basis – one-bedroom studios for £199,000, in Hounslow, west London, where the average one-bedroom flat costs £358,000, in a city where the average property price is £500,000.

Others had queued overnight. So John found himself number 59 in a queue growing to more than 200.

"Of course it's crazy that people are queuing in the rain like this," he said. "I never imagined this would be what I had to do to get my first home. But here I am, a highly qualified professional on £45,000 a year, struggling to get on the property ladder."

He was hoping to get something for £300,000, towards the £315,000 highest price of the 228 apartments on offer at Galliard's Trinity Square development.

"I have put in offers for about 20 properties," he sighed, "but if you're not a cash buyer and you're not prepared to pay 10 per cent over the asking price, you have very little chance. There is definitely a housing crisis."

That, though, was not how Galliard Homes was positioning this. The website spoke of "a full-height impressive atrium", and "excellent

transport connections". The press people briefed about "the capital's largest new homes development specifically designed and priced for first-time buyers and investors". They listed six Get on the Ladder projects since the campaign started last year.

A study by the Town and Country Planning Association has showed the UK needs to build more than 1.5 million homes in five years. A spokesman for the housing charity Shelter said the queue showed "how desperate people are".

Monika, at the head of the queue, was an investor. "If I can get one of the £199,000 studios, I will be able to sell it for £260,000 in a few months, or rent it for around £1,100 a month."

The clock struck five: it was time to buy an affordable home, or make a shrewd investment.

