

Buying and selling your home

From when to sell to managing a chain: all you need to know to make a smooth move to your next home

Which?



Expert advice to ensure the process goes smoothly

This guide takes you step by step through the best ways to get your house on the market, scout for suitable next properties, figure out your finances and manage the chain.

As you're reading it, if you're looking for more in-depth information or someone to help you through the process, there's also plenty of expert advice on which.co.uk.

And to guide you through the process, we'll email you our top tips and insider advice over the next few weeks.

We're on hand to help with the mortgage too. A move is a great time to see if you can find a better deal. Which? Mortgage Advisers will research the whole market for you to find the best mortgage to suit your circumstances. So that's one less thing to worry about.

Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage.



The handy icons below will help you navigate around the guide



Money



Location and property



Steps to take



Services you'll need

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Pick the best time to sell and buy

There are good and not so good times to sell and buy a house. Here's how to choose the perfect timing to get the most out of the process

The decision to sell isn't one you take lightly. There has to be a good reason. Perhaps you need more space or you're looking to relocate? But sometimes there are other factors. The market in your area might be looking up, so your home could be desirable to potential buyers.

But remember, if you want to buy another house - possibly a bigger one - it, too, might be going up in price.

Timing factors to consider:

■ **The time of year** - most property sales take place in spring and early summer (but can go flat during school holidays). Houses look their best, people aren't spending on Christmas and, frankly, putting all your possessions in a removal van is easier in the sunshine.

- **Your financial situation** - could you raise the deposit for the next property, perhaps from the money you make on this one? The price you set for your current home should reflect the market at the time, but the size of the deposit you need may be a factor in determining the lowest offer you're willing to accept. Make sure you can sustain the mortgage repayments for a bigger house with your current earnings.
- **The market** - if other properties in your area are selling fast, it's likely that yours will go quite painlessly too if it's of a similar standard. But the properties you want to buy may also be thin on the ground. Equally, there may be some bargains out there, but it could be because the market is slow. In that case you could be held back if you can't sell your current house quickly enough. Get an understanding of the current market by talking to estate agents and checking online to see what is selling and how quickly.

Budgeting for your dream move

There are a lot of costs involved on both sides when you're buying and selling. Make sure you factor in all the outlays with our checklist

Looking through the estate agent's window, it's tempting to think that the prices you see are what you get, but unfortunately everyone wants a slice of the pie.

Selling costs

- **Estate agent fees** - typically 1-2% of the final sale price
- **EPC** - the energy performance certificate to show how much it costs to heat your home. Maximum of around £100.
- **Conveyancer's fees** - getting all the contracts and money moved can cost between £300 and £600 plus.
- **Mortgage early-repayment fees** - if you are still within an early, fixed term of your mortgage.
- **'Prepping'** - don't forget how much you could spend on renovations to your property before you put it on the market. A few fresh coats of paint and tidying up the garden can all mount up. Allow up to 1.5% of the property's value.

Buying costs

- **Conveyancer's fees** - these vary depending on the house you want to buy, but the average cost is £850.

- **Mortgage arrangement fees** - a broker will research the market for you to get the best deal for your circumstances.
- **Stamp duty** - it's zero for properties up to £125,000, then on a sliding scale starting at 2%. Visit www.gov.uk/stamp-duty-land-tax-rates for more information.
- **Insurance** - you have to have buildings insurance on the property from the point you exchange, because legally the house is now your responsibility.
- **Removal vans** - can be £1,000 plus if they're also packing up your old place.

On top of all of this, you need to calculate:

- **Your selling price vs new buying price** - how much of a shortfall will you need to make up?
- **Keeping up the payments** - if you upgrade, can your income match the new outgoings?





Choosing a mortgage

Mortgage rules have tightened up in recent years. Find out what you need to do to get lenders to back your dream move

Here's a quick reminder of the main ways interest is applied:

- **Variable** - you start on a typical interest rate based on the loan-to-value ratio (LTV), and it varies, usually when the Bank of England changes its rate.
- **Capped rate** - can't go over a certain interest rate for a period of time, although it can go lower.
- **Discounted rate** - a set amount lower than the standard variable rate for a period, so it will fluctuate, just at a lower amount.
- **Fixed** - a deal over two, three or even five years where the rate doesn't change over that period.
- **Tracker** - set at a margin above the Bank of England rate, it stays at that margin for the length of the deal.
- **Offset** - run alongside your current or savings account, the amount of interest repayable changes each month depending on how much money you have in your

other accounts. This doesn't affect your rate - that will be set from the start and can also be variable, fixed or a tracker as well as offset.

Moving your mortgage

Many mortgages are portable, meaning you can move them to a new property. This is helpful if you are still in a fixed period and liable for an early repayment charge, or are in negative equity. But you still might have to pay valuation fees and could have to go through an application interview involving proof of income and spending.

Reviewing your mortgage

This is the perfect time to review your current mortgage. You may find you can get a better rate elsewhere and save thousands, or alternatively a fixed-rate mortgage could help you budget in your new home. Which? Mortgage Advisers can research the whole market to find the best mortgage for you, so you can make that switch.



Boost your sale price

You want to make your home as attractive as possible to secure a sale. Whether you go through an agent is also key to how you go about selling. Here are some top tips

Selling your home

There's no legal requirement to have an estate agent, but if you do decide to use one, remember that cost is just one consideration. Your agent should show off your property, and you should feel confident in their ability to handle your sale efficiently and professionally.

Look around for the most successful agents with the most 'sold' boards, and also the particulars and house brochures you like best.

You can also look into using an online agent which can be cheaper, but you'll have to run the viewings yourself and may have to pay fees upfront, whether you sell or not.

Whichever you choose, you'll want your house to be looking its best when it's on sale.

Spruce up your home for free

■ **Clear the clutter** - toys and books stacked in corners all scream 'not enough space'. Make your home look as spacious and clutter-free as possible.

- **Clean** - it sounds obvious but giving the place a spring clean makes it inviting.
- **Fix snags** - blown bulbs, curtains dangling from a rail - fix the little things that can make your home look shabby.
- **Green fingers** - weed borders, trim hedges and in particular focus on the front for important 'kerb appeal'.

Invest a little

- **A fresh coat of paint** - buyers can be put off by a multicoloured interior. Go wild with a tin of Magnolia paint and you give buyers a blank canvas they can picture themselves in.
- **Deal with big problems now** - some things might feel too expensive to change, but investing a few hundred in fixing broken tiles now could mean a difference of thousands on the sale.

Not sure which trader to trust? Which? Trusted Traders lists traders in your area. They've all passed a thorough assessment so you can be sure you're choosing the right one for the job. Visit trustedtraders.which.co.uk.



Making the sale go smoothly

The legal requirements when you sell your home are all about information. Here's a helpful list of what you'll need to hand

From sale to completion, the process can take between 6 to 12 weeks, but paperwork delays can make it longer. If you keep on top of the paperwork and chasing of other parties, you can make sure your sale stays on schedule.

To-do list

■ **EPCs** - Energy Performance Certificates need to be available as soon as you market your property. You or your agent need to contact an approved assessor, who will visit and give you a certificate which will usually be printed on your paperwork.

- **Choose your conveyancer** - this can be a solicitor or dedicated conveyancer. Their fees vary, so make sure you ask for a list of all the charges you will incur to compare like with like. Instruct your conveyancer as soon as you put your house on the market. Give them proof of ID, proof of address, estate agent details and mortgage roll number.
- **Property information form** - includes mortgage details, who owns what boundary, any neighbour disputes, mains services and guarantees.
- **Fixtures and fittings form** - list as many things that will stay or go as far as you can tell at the moment.

After the offer

- **What is the buyer's situation?** Your conveyancer will contact their conveyancer to see where they're at with the mortgage and their sale.
- **Give conditions** - let your conveyancer know if there is an agreed time or date to complete.
- **Read and sign the contract** - check you agree with the dates, property information, deposit amount on exchange and the full price.
- **Answer any questions** - this can hold up exchange, so ensure you answer questions quickly, and chase for responses to yours.

Deposit paid

- **Contracts are signed and exchanged.** Your house is now legally theirs and they'll need to insure it. You'll also need to insure your new home (see pages 10-13 for buying information) and read electricity and gas meters.
- **Agree a completion date** - bear in mind you need to arrange removals, so try to find a time that works for both you and the buyer.

Finding a buyer for your home

From getting people through the door to signing on the dotted line, here's what you need to know

An estate agent will typically charge fees of 1-2% of the sale price. You can do it cheaper online, but you should make sure the online agent has a presence in your area and prices your property accurately. See page 7 for more information on estate agents and boosting your sale price.

An estate agent will:

- Advertise online and in local press
- Print particulars
- Organise viewings
- Show people round
- Liaise between the buyer and your conveyancer, broker and other companies

Get the most out of the viewings

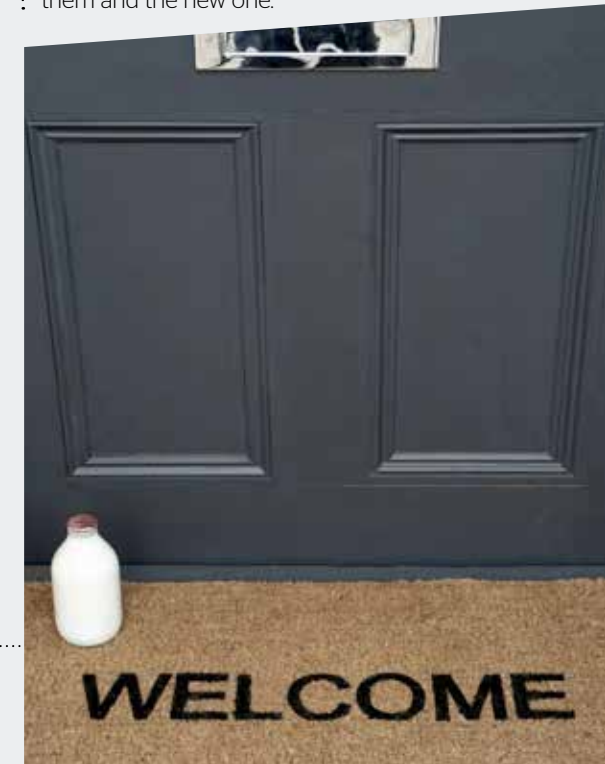
- Do it at a convenient time for you and the buyer.
- Brief the agent on good points to highlight, even if they're not related to the property, for example good local schools and shops.
- Think about an open day - these are helpful if your house is large and there is a lot of interest, but beware of trying to get too many people into a small space, as it will feel crowded.

When you get an offer

- **Are they the right buyer** - weigh up keen buyers with the likelihood of the sale happening. Check if they are in a chain.
- **Take it off the market** - you might agree to do this for a short period to let the buyer make the checks they need to proceed.

Possible problems to watch out for

- **Few or no viewings** - ask the agent why they think this is and review your strategy, including the price.
- **Problems with the property** - a survey might have found an issue. Review the problem and the price, or consider fixing it yourself.
- **Buyer pulls out** - try to find out why and see if there's anything you can do to help.
- **You don't like the agent** - if you're leaving your agent, tell them by phone and then in writing. You may have to give a notice period or you'll end up paying both them and the new one.





Choosing where to go next

Location is the most important thing when it comes to buying a house. Other elements - for instance the décor and number of bathrooms - you can probably change

If you've fallen in love with the area you currently live in, the location question is mostly answered for you. You know the pros and cons and where you're going to look. If you want to upgrade, consider 'up-and-coming' areas nearby.

But if you're moving to a new area, remember that there are a few things to research.

- Here's a handy checklist:
- **Amenities** - does it have all the shops, bars, transport links and schools that you need?
 - **Costs** - what are the monthly costs of living there, from transport to work to council and water rates and service charges in an apartment block?
 - **Noise and inconvenience** - rural or town, there will always be something. On a

- summer's day, will you be forced to close the windows because of airplane noise, smell from the farm or pub closing time?
- **Crime** - you can research statistics online to find out crime hotspots and decide if you'd rather stay well clear.
- **People** - a good mix of people is always nice, but you might want to be among young professionals or first-time parents for an instant neighbourly connection.
- **Up and coming** - check out recent estimated house sales on websites like Zoopla and Rightmove. Are prices generally rising or have they become stuck? Are you buying the most expensive house on the street? If you're thinking of pouring cash into your house to do it up and it's already the priciest, you might not make back your investment.

Viewing properties - finding your next home

Viewings can be conducted in a rush, especially if it's an open house. As well as getting a feel for the property, this is your chance to look out for potential issues. So make sure you dig deeper to find out everything you need to know and get the most out of every viewing

People often talk about gut feeling when it comes to deciding on a house, and a little instinct isn't a bad thing. However, it's a good idea to have a checklist to keep your heart from ruling your head.

Your checklist

Bring a list of what you need. It'll keep your eyes open when you fall in love with a beautiful stairwell and start ignoring the lack of wardrobe space.

- For example:
- Parking - you might not have a car now, but will you in the future?
 - Extra bedroom
 - Storage space
 - Working fireplaces

Be prepared to ignore the décor. White paint is inexpensive so you'll always be able to give it a fresh look. But if something like an avocado bathroom is a deal-breaker, make sure you have enough money left for renovations.

Look out for:

- Damp
- Window problems
- Biggish cracks in plasterwork
- Crooked bricks (particularly in chimneys)
- Age of electrics/gas system
- Age of boiler
- Water pressure

Don't be afraid to flick a light switch or count the power points. You can ask to run the tap, but agents don't like doing this without the homeowner present in case it leaks!

If you're interested, always ask for a second viewing, preferably at a different time of day. If you've noticed you're in an area with main roads or schools and you've viewed it mid-afternoon, ask to come back at rush hour.

Ask the agent:

- Has it been on the market long?
- When and why is the seller moving?
- Have many people have seen it?
- What's included in the price?
- Have any offers been made/accepted/fallen through? Be aware, though, that by law an agent can't confirm how much has been offered.
- If the property is a flat or apartment, is it leasehold, and how long is left on the lease? A leasehold flat means someone else (the freeholder) owns the land and rest of the building. The lease should be over 80 years long, as most lenders won't lend on a flat that has fewer than 80 years left.

Making an offer

Once you're sure that your heart isn't ruling your head and you've found the ideal new home, it's time to make an offer. Here's a reminder of the process

Making an offer on a house can be a subtle exercise in negotiation, but one with a very high price tag. Make sure you do your homework so you come up with an offer that you can justify and the seller will accept.

Consider the following:

- **Sold prices** – check what similar properties have sold for.
- **The market** – if the price is rising generally, the seller will expect your offer to reflect this.
- **Length of time on the market** – the longer it's been on, the less you might be able to offer.
- **The state of the house** – if it clearly needs work you may be able to come in lower, as long as it's not already been marketed with that in mind.
- **Your position** – if you are able to move quickly, you're more attractive to the seller. What stage are you at in the sale of your current home?

Don't worry if you're not right first time – your first offer may be rejected. If you think you can comfortably go higher and are willing to compromise then make a second bid that you think will be acceptable.



Top negotiating tips

- **Set your maximum and stick to it** – People can get 'bid fever' and before you know it you've gone beyond what you were willing to pay for fear that someone else might snatch the property.
- **Don't be pressured** – the selling agent may tell you that there has been lots of interest or even that another offer has come in. This might influence you to raise your offer, but only go as high as you're willing to.
- **Set conditions** – even if you haven't had the survey done yet, make sure any concerns you have are noted.

Always send in your offer in writing and get confirmation it has been received. If you're delivering your offer by email request a read receipt; if it's by post send by recorded delivery.

Sorting out the surveys and contracts

Before making it official, you'll need to get the surveys and contracts sorted on both sides. Here's how to keep it running smoothly

The survey

Surveys vary and can range from someone standing in the road looking at the house to going round with damp meters and ladders to check every nook and cranny. They're a non-refundable expense on a house you're not 100% sure you're going to buy yet.

Mortgage valuation – this is compulsory and is not a survey on the property's condition. It tells the lender the house is there and whether it is worth what the seller says it is. Any big difference here and the mortgage company won't lend to you. On top of this you'll also need one of the following:

Condition report – a general assessment of the house's condition, but not a valuation.

Homebuyer report – for standard, post-1930s buildings it covers the general structure, from walls, floors and ceilings to roof tiles, chimneys and windows, as well as the location (for instance, does it suffer from flooding or pollution?).

Buildings survey – much more thorough and a good idea for older properties, non-standard constructions and if you're planning major renovations. It checks the condition of timber beams and potential pests and so on.

Snagging survey – if you're buying a new build it's a good idea to get one of these. It roots out problems such as poor plumbing or ill-fitting sockets.

Contracts

Once the results of the survey are in, send a copy to your conveyancer for their information and if there are no issues you can move to contract, if everything is as you expect. If not, you can ask the seller to modify either the contract or the sale price (or both) based on the report.

Make sure you have:

- **Deposit** – this needs to be available for exchange.
- **Answers** – to questions from the survey and property information and fixtures and fittings forms.
- **Mortgage offer** – in paper and agreed.
- **Documentation** – check the seller has acquired all the building consents, guarantees, any leases and so on.





Managing the chain

The property chain can be a cause of stress – some of it wholly unnecessary. Here’s how to manage the chain with a cool head

A chain can be made up of around seven separate properties, each with their own buyers, sellers, agents, conveyancers and timetables, but all having to complete on the same day.

It’s one of the most complicated parts of the whole process, but it can be managed with a bit of help from you.

How to navigate the chain

■ **Be bossy** – not too much, but keep on top of when things should be happening and call or email your conveyancer to

prompt others in the chain if things go quiet.

■ **Know where everyone is** – it may not make it move faster, but it saves frustration if you know that one party’s conveyancer is going to be on holiday for two weeks.

■ **Put clauses in** – making it official lets other parties realise that they, too, have to be proactive in keeping on top of things or their sale or purchase will be affected.

■ **Property problems** – if surveys reveal a problem with your purchase or sale, consider how important they are versus the potential destruction in the chain. You might want to agree to fix the issue, lower the price or, if it’s in a property you’re buying, negotiate or deal with it. By this point there are few major surprises, so compromise is possible.

■ **Hedge your bets** – gazumping isn’t as common as people think, but it can happen and will break your chain. Agree to take your property off the market only if the buyer has a mortgage agreement in principle and agrees to some firm dates. If you’re buying, keep an eye open for other properties that you could move on quickly if your ideal house falls through.



Keeping the chain moving

There are ways to avoid the chain pain. Here’s how to dodge some weak links to keep the process moving

You can’t make everyone in the chain do your bidding, but by doing your bit, you can avoid being the weak link and help everyone else to keep on top of things.

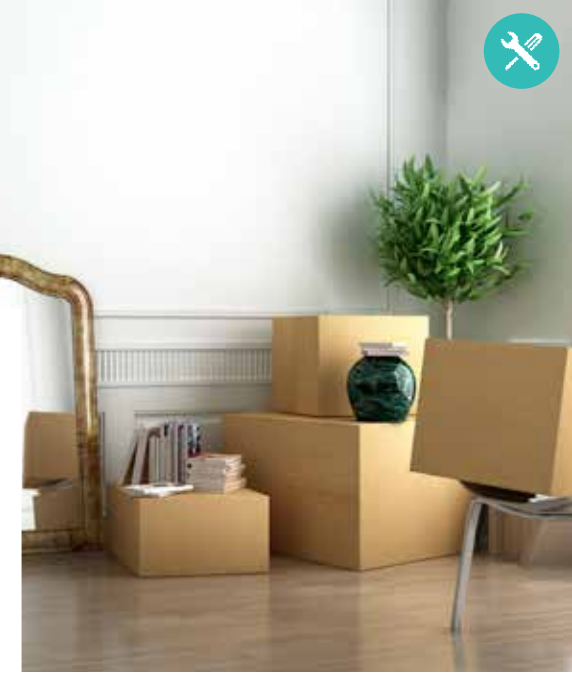
These are the stages you’ll need to look out for and stay on top of:

- Property title deeds drawn
- Preliminary enquiries and local searches
- Fixtures and fittings and property information forms
- Key information from leasehold documents
- Mortgage valuation
- Survey
- Answers to buyers’ questions
- Written mortgage offer
- Contracts drawn up
- Deposits available
- Completion date agreed
- Buildings insurance in place

Avoid the chain completely

Not all property purchases have a chain. Here are some cases when buying and selling is likely to be that little bit easier:

- **Buying an empty property** – or one at auction. But with the auction option you have to have your deposit available on the day and be ready to complete swiftly.
- **Find a buyer who isn’t in a chain** – particulars often trumpet ‘no chain’ as it’s a hugely attractive feature.
- **Buy from a developer** – they may also offer part exchange so you don’t need a buyer. Be aware that their offer may not be as good as you’ll get on the open market.
- **Look at renting** – moving into rented accommodation may seem like throwing money away, but it may be worth it for a few months to avoid the chain and become a cash buyer. It may also make your home more attractive to prospective buyers.



Find the best mortgage deal for you

Moving home is the ideal time to shop around and find the best mortgage deal for you. At Which? Mortgage Advisers, we'll research the whole market for the best fit, so you can rest assured your mortgage is working as hard as it can.

You'll get your own, expert, dedicated adviser who'll run through your mortgage options and manage the whole process. If you have any questions along the way, just pick up the phone.

Why choose Which? Mortgage Advisers

We're not like most mortgage advisers - and here's why:

■ **Find the best deal for you** - we search the whole market, even those deals you'll only get by applying direct to the lender

■ **100% unbiased** - our expert advisers aren't paid individual commission so there's no hidden agenda when they recommend a mortgage

■ **No waiting around** - you'll get straight through and we'll usually be able to arrange an appointment with an adviser over the phone within 24 hours

■ **Guidance at every stage** - once we've found your mortgage, your dedicated adviser will look after the paperwork and the application process to make it all run smoothly

Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage.

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