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A step by step guide to buying and selling your home



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A Step by Step Guide to Buying and Selling your home in England

As a home stager I get asked questions all the time about the home buying and selling process. I hope this step by step guide to buying and selling a home in England, UK helps answer these questions.

**** Step 1. Get Your Finances In Order . ****

For most of us buying and selling a home is the most important financial decision we ever make and many buyers and sellers find this the most stressful step in the whole process.

With the average home in the London borough of Bexley now standing at £377,306.00 (August 2020) buying a home is defiantly a major financial commitment .

One of the first things to think about when buying or selling a home is to work out whether you can afford to move. At this stage it's worth seeking advice from a regulated mortgage advisor so you know exactly how much you can borrow and the best deal for your situation.

Check the mortgage broker you engage is regulated by the financial conduct authority and doesn't charge upfront fees. Visit your bank or independent mortgage advisor. Independents can offer mortgages across the whole of the market not just limited to a banks own products.

If you're still within your existing mortgage term its important to check whether you will face any early repayment charges or fees to port the mortgage to your new property.

Whether you engage your Bank or a independent mortgage adviser they can support you to make the right mortgage choice for you and your financial circumstances.

As well as a mortgage don't forget to factor in other costs such as estate agent fees, solicitors fees, surveys , stamp duty , moving costs , etc. Its worth having these costs at hand before visiting the mortgage broker as these costs can really mount up.

The average cost of moving house is currently approx £10,000 (2020) so it definitely pays to organise and get your finances in place as part of the first steps of the buying and selling process.

Important Note :-

The financial references in this guide are for general information and do not constitute any form of financial advice or recommendation and is not intended to be relied upon in making financial decisions. Appropriate independent financial advice should be sought before making any financial decision.

**** Step 2 Getting Your Home Ready to Sell. ****

The next step is to get your home ready to sell . To spruce it up or “Stage it” so it looks its best for valuations and viewings.

Skipping this stage could cost you thousands and be the difference between a quick full asking price sale and a long drawn out one with multiple price reductions .

If you haven’t sold a home for a while property portals such as Rightmove and Zoopla are now the gateways to attracting buyers. It's like a dating app. Your home has just seconds to impress before buyers swipe left or right so its important for your home to give a good first impression to nail those viewings and that sale.

Staging defiantly increases the likelihood of a quicker sale providing a good first impression and attracting more interest, more viewings and more potential offers.

As a seller conduct a critical review of your home. If you’ve got bright red walls or multi patterned wallpaper you may want to think about toning it down to appeal to a widest number of buyers.

Buyers today look for clean , tidy, light and spacious homes so make sure your home is at least clean, tidy and free from clutter. This give potential buyers a blank canvas to imagine how they would use the space. A well presented home allows buyers to imagine themselves living in it and helps them justify the price.

As well as sprucing up the interior don’t forget the exterior and especially the front garden. Many buyers will do a “drive pass” and may cross your home off their list without ever stepping foot inside. So tidy up the front garden, mow the lawn, pull out the weeds, clean the windows and repair any broken gates or fences.

If you follow these principles your home will sell quickly letting you move on to your new home.

**** Step 3 Getting your home valued and setting the asking price ****

Getting your home valued and setting the right asking price is crucial. Too high and you risk putting buyers off. Too low and you may end up selling for less than you could have achieved.

Research how much your home is worth based on recent market activity and invite three estate agents to value your home. Make sure you pick local agents with a proven track record of selling similar homes in your area. Ask each agent why they think your home is worth the price they suggest and ask for examples of how much similar local properties have sold for in the last few months.

While estate agents can advise you, it's entirely up to you what asking price you set when selling your home. If all of the agents have given you similar valuations, you can be fairly confident that they're correct and base your decision on their recommendations.

If there are big difference between the agents valuations it can be hard to know what to do. Some agents overvalue properties in order to win business. It can be tempting to choose the agent with the highest value but an unrealistic asking price can lead to a long drawn out sale with possible future price reductions .

The optimum time to sell your home is in the first 4/6 weeks of going onto the market so ensure you price your home realistically and set an asking price based on a combination of the average valuation and recent selling prices of local homes similar to yours. This way your home will attract the highest number of buyers and by following the tips in this guide the highest chance of a quick and profitable sale.

**** Step 4 Instructing an Estate Agent ****

Once you've chosen an estate agent you'll sign a contract which lays out the terms and conditions under which they'll sell your home this is known as 'instructing'. Before signing the contract be sure to compare fees .

Most agents in North Kent charge between 1-2% (August 2020) although recently a few are offering as low as 0.5% but check the service you receive for this low fee. You can always haggle for a better deal - not only on the fee but tie-in and notice periods in the T&C's .

Once you've instructed an agent they'll take professional images of your home. For photography day make sure your home spotless and clutter-free, even if it means shifting items or clutter from one room to another between photos. Check that toilet lids are closed, bedspreads smoothed and cushions plumped,

Your estate agent will also create a floor plan and write a description to accompany the listing. Ensure the agent sends this information to you to approved before its published . Once the marketing materials are ready and approved the agent will list your property online on the property portals such as Rightmove / Zoopla / OnTheMarket as well as your agent's own website.

**** Step 5 Getting your paperwork in order and Viewings****

Getting your paperwork in order will help the process move along quicker. One of the first steps is ensuring you have a energy performance certificate (EPC) in place for your home. You'll need one to be able to sell. Your agent can check if there is a valid EPC for your home . (EPC's are valid for 10 years) or can organise a new EPC for an average charge of approx £50. (August 2020)

With regard to viewings if you're using a high-street estate agent they should offer to conduct viewings on your behalf. This is a great option as they'll know how to show your property in its best light and buyers may feel more comfortable asking questions.

If possible make sure you're out of the house while viewings take place. If you're conducting viewings yourself think carefully about the order in which you show the rooms and any features you'd like to draw buyers' attention to. Try a practice run with a friend so you can get their opinion on your spiel and become comfortable giving "the tour".

It's also helpful to research some local information such as the nearest schools and their Ofsted report markings, how many minutes walk to the train station / bus stop, nearest supermarkets, parks etc. This all helps in selling your home as a complete lifestyle package.

**** Step 6 Hiring a solicitor/conveyancer and Reassessment if your home isn't selling. ****

Do you instruct a solicitor or conveyancer? In simplest terms, a conveyancing solicitor is fully trained in legal services but specialises in conveyancing, a licensed conveyancer is trained in conveyancing only. If your buying and selling process seems fairly simple a conveyancer will be sufficient especially if it's not the first time you've moved and are familiar with the process.

The legal process of transferring a property from one person to another in England takes on average 3 months. Find and instruct a solicitor/conveyancer at the beginning of the process so they're in place before you accept an offer. This helps speed things up and demonstrates to the buyer/agent that you're organised and serious about selling.

If after 4/6 weeks your property hasn't received offers it might be time to reassess. Talk to your estate agent and get their take on why your home hasn't sold. It may be you need to lower the price, use different marketing images or make some decor changes.

Sometimes the markets just aren't right to sell your particular property so think about withdrawing it and waiting for the market to change. It might also be that your estate agent needs to up their game. Most agents' contracts have a set notice period, take note of this and have another agent lined up with new marketing material and a fresh approach. Interestingly, almost 60% of properties sell with a second agent.

**** Step 7 Receiving and Accepting Offers ****

Your estate agent is obliged to inform you when a buyer makes an offer no matter what the offer is. Dependant on the market and your situation you don't need to accept the first offer but before dismissing it consider the time your homes been on the market, number of viewings and viewers feedback this information will usually conclude how popular the home is and therefore the actual market value.

Remember the longer a home stays on the market the more likelihood of a price reduction so think seriously about accepting an initial offer especially if its not too far away from your asking price. The first offer can be the best offer.

If you receive multiple offers instruct the agent to qualify the buyers situations consider other factors other than just accepting the highest offer such as . Is the offer subject to a mortgage or is it a cash offer . Are the buyers in a chain or first time buyers. Have the buyers sold their house and can move at the same pace as you.

The safest buyers are generally chain-free cash buyers , a buy-to-let investor who doesn't need a mortgage, or a buyer who's already sold their home and doesn't need a mortgage to buy yours.

Dependant on the market buyers will offer less than the asking price, so this is where your estate agent should earn their commission by negotiating on your behalf. This stage can be tense but be realistic and pre-think your limits such as what's your bottom line to be able to afford your next home? If an offer is not too far off your bottom line and you want to move on talk to the estate agent about the flexibility of their fee 'it's in their interest to sell your property.

To accept an offer inform the agent by phone but follow up in writing also noting any agreements as part of the sale like including certain pieces of furniture etc. So now it time to get out and go look for your dream house.

**** Step 8 Start House-Hunting ****

It's worth registering with local estate agents and property portals before you've accepted an offer on your home but due to Covid-19 and the busy market (August 20) the majority of estate agents won't allow buyers to view properties until their own property is under offer (SSTC).

Before you start viewing properties have a clear idea of what you can afford. Decide on your criteria / priorities and make a list include ideal location , type of house, number of bedrooms, garden, garage , access to transport / shops, in a certain school catchment area etc. etc. Then make a list of all the potential properties which fulfil this criteria and this is your viewing list.

Don't be too ridged as you may need to compromise dependant on budget. For example you may want a 4 bed house but do you really need a 4 bedroom house? The bigger the house the bigger the bills so be realistic. Let the estate agents know your criteria and what your looking for it will help them with a more accurate understanding of what they should offer you to view.

When you start viewings keep notes so you don't forget things you liked and disliked about each home this will help narrow down your search. Before entering a property look at the outside is it well maintained what are the other properties like? Once inside keep an open mind. This can be difficult as only a small percentage of the population has the ability to see beyond what's there and how a room could look. But remember your chances of finding somewhere that's perfect in every respect are virtually zero but you can change the inside of a home at a price but you can't change its location so if you find somewhere in the location you want but the home's not quite right have a serious think if you can make interior changes to get exactly what you want.

After you have viewed a number of properties usually between 4/6 most buyers start to have favourites so at this stage its ideal to book second viewings. On a second viewing check out items like the water pressure in the shower, number of power points, heating/boiler. Find out what items if any the seller is going to leave.

Once you've found your new home you'll have to decide what price you will be prepared to pay. Judge the offer based on the asking price of the property in comparison to what else is available to buy in the area and what you may know have sold. You can ask for items to be included in the price and you can also make clear any conditions you would want such as being able to move in by a certain date. At this stage everything is up for negotiation. Once your offer is accepted the sale goes into the progressing stage.

**** Step 9 Keep the sale on track ****

Unfortunalty hundreds of home sales collapse every day. A failed sale can have huge repercussions financially, practically and emotionally. A majority of sales collapse due to buyers changing their mind , finding a different property or not having their finances in order . On the sellers side a failed sale is mainly due to broken chains if they too are buying.

So how can you keep your home sale on track and give it the best chance of succeeding? If you understand the buying and selling process, you'll in a much stronger position to make sure everything goes according to plan. The faster you get to exchange the better. After exchanging the sale is legally binding

One reason that buying and selling a house is right up there in the top five life stress factors is that people don't prepare. So having everything ready before you start the buying and selling process is key.

If your selling make it very clear at the beginning exactly what you situation is in regard to your move , what's included in the sale price, including fixtures and fittings and establish possible dates for exchange and completion.

If buying make sure you know exactly what your budget is and if required have an up to date mortgage offer in place when you make an offer on a home. Most agents will require this to confirm any offer you make on a property.

In both buying and selling choose a solicitor or conveyancer early get this done before you put your house on the market or make an offer. Remember communication is key throughout the sale. If you're going on holiday, make sure everyone knows, including your conveyancer and estate agent.

Check in with your solicitor and estate agent regularly to make sure you know what is going on and if there's anything they need from you. A weekly update will also make sure everyone is working on the same page and continuing to move the sale forward.

If there's any aspects of the sale or purchase that you don't understand, ask - that's what you're paying your solicitor and estate agent for.

I can't stress how important communication is its key to a successful sale/purchase so pick up the phone! but with any legal transaction follow up with a summary e-mail of your conversation so everything is crystal clear.

**** Step 10 and final Exchange and Completion ****

So we finally come to the last stage . Exchange is point at which the buyer pays a deposit and the sale becomes legally binding.

On completion the balance of the payment for the property is passed over to the seller's solicitor and ownership transfers to the buyer.

Exchanging contracts is a key milestone when selling it's the moment when your buyer pays a deposit usually 10% of the price and things become legally binding. Neither the buyer or the seller can now back out without major penalties.

On exchange the solicitors will agree a completion date. Completion dates are often two weeks after exchange, but this is a guideline. Setting a completion date will largely depend on how many properties are in the chain and each buyer's and sellers circumstances. Two weeks gives time to confirm dates with a removal company, pack your home up etc.

The day of completion is the moment you've been working towards, when you've have finally sold your home. You'll need to move all your possessions out promptly and drop the keys off at the estate agent's ready to give to your buyer.

On completion day as a buyer its a tense wait for a phone call from the solicitor/conveyancer confirming that your mortgage and deposit have been transferred to the seller and completion has taken place.

Once you've receive this call you can collect the keys from the estate agent and start moving in as soon as the seller has vacated the property and its as easy as that !

In general in England this antiquated process takes approx 3 months. There are talks of the UK government looking at ways to use technology to speed the process up but these are probably a few years off yet.

I hope you found this Step by Step Guide to Buying and Selling a home in England useful. For information on how Home Style House can support you in your home buying and selling journey please visit www.homestylehouse.com or e-mail info@homestylehouse.com

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