



**GETTING A BETTER
DEAL ON YOUR
HOME**

Buying a house is the biggest purchase most of us will ever make, yet we sometimes spend less time researching it than we would if we were buying a new TV!

Going with your gut feeling is all well and good – you may get the ‘right feeling’ from a house, but it is important to make sure the feeling stays ‘right’ when you visit it at different times of the day.

Every person’s house buying experience will be different. For some it will be exciting, others start to shake at the very thought. But the basics are the same whatever your feelings towards moving home.

In this guide I want to show you how to get a better deal from your house move. I am going to teach you how to get the best from your estate agent – remember you are always the only one that’s ‘on your side’. I’ll also tell you what key areas to watch out for when choosing a house and,

how to keep costs down on the extras such as removal men and insurance.

I also want to help minimise the stress of moving house by explaining how some of the processes work. What are sealed bids? How do you stop yourself being gazumped? Knowledge is a very powerful tool.

Buying a new home should be a fantastic experience that lets you dream about how your life will feel once your furniture and taste has been imprinted on the house. I hope this guide will help it become just that.

Happy house hunting!



Ann Maurice



SELLING VIA ESTATE AGENTS

You have three options when you sell your house.

You can sell through an estate agent, at an auction or privately via the internet and personal marketing. The more you sell your house for, the more commission the estate agent receives, so technically you should all be working on the same team. But before you sign up:

1 DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Visit a number of agents in your area and ask them to give you a valuation. Find out how they intend to market your property.

2 SHOP AROUND

Choose an estate agent that specialises in your type of property, not just the one giving the best price. The danger of choosing one that valued your property the highest, is they may quickly encourage you to drop the price back to a more 'realistic' level.

3 WHAT WILL YOU PAY?

What commission are they charging? Typically there will be two rates – one for sole agency and one for joint, where you give the selling opportunity to more than one estate agent.

4 HAGGLE

Don't be afraid to negotiate them down.

5 STAY PROTECTED

Make sure they are a member of the National Association of Estate Agents (NAEA), as they must abide by a code of conduct. You also get access to the Ombudsman for Estate Agents (OEA) should things go wrong.

6 BE WARY

How long do you have to sign up for? Make sure you sign up for either 'sole agent' or 'joint agency', not 'sole selling rights' which means they can claim commission even if you sell privately.

7 HIDDEN COSTS

Is the cost of a Home Information Pack (HIP), which is now mandatory for all properties with three or more bedrooms, paid up front or added onto their fees? Do you have the option to shop around for a cheaper HIP provider?



SELLING AT AUCTION

If you sell at auction you can set a minimum price, called the reserve price and provided it is reached you will have the security of knowing your home is sold. Anyone buying via auction must put down a deposit (usually around 10%), and it's important to note the transaction will be legally binding – there is no 'subject to contract'. The terms of the deal are set down beforehand and completion typically takes place within 28 days.

1 UNDER THE HAMMER

Contact a few auctioneers to find out their areas of expertise. They will be able to advise whether your property is suitable for auction.

2 HIDDEN COSTS

Find out the costs associated with the sale. Do you have to pay extra for marketing?

3 SOLICITOR

You will need to appoint a solicitor to get all the searches, conditions of sale and Title Deeds together ready for the sale.

4 LEGALLY BOUND

You are legally bound to sell your property once the hammer falls so make sure you have alternative accommodation in place!



SELLING PRIVATELY

More people are rejecting estate agents and choosing to sell privately. A whole host of websites have sprung up letting you advertise your home for just a few hundred pounds, rather than thousands. Before you do that though:

1 SEVERAL VALUATIONS

Get an idea of the value of your home by asking several local estate agents to give you a valuation.

2 SALE DETAILS

Are you happy to prepare all the sale details yourself and deal with all enquiries? You will also have to be available to show potential buyers round your home.

3 ADVERTISING

Will you just advertise on the internet? You can also have your own 'for sale' sign printed and use local papers and magazines.

4 'SOLE SELLING SALES'

You can have your property on the books of local estate agents as well – but won't have to pay them commission if you sell privately provided there is no 'sole selling rights' clause.

5 ARRANGE FOR A 'HIP'

You may need to arrange for a HIP to be produced, if your home has three bedrooms or more.



VIEWING A HOME

You should always view a number of properties even if you fall in love with the first one. You might find a home that is even better or looking at others may simply confirm that you've made the right choice.

In any case, remember that the sale might fall through so always keep your options open.

1 STAY OBJECTIVE

Remember to remain objective when you look around a house, even if you love it.

2 INVESTIGATE

Look behind pictures and move furniture to make sure they are not hiding anything nasty. Make sure windows and doors open and close properly for the same reason. Look carefully for evidence of cracks – particularly at door and window lintels as this might be an indication of subsidence.

3 TRY TO VISUALISE

Look beyond the décor if you don't like the vendor's taste – try to visualise it with your own choice of decoration.

4 VISIT SEVERAL TIMES

Visit your chosen property on several occasions, at various times of day to check noise and traffic levels.

5 NOISY NEIGHBOURS

Find out what the neighbours are like as noisy or unpleasant neighbours are one of the biggest complaints of home owners. Visit the local pub and say to the locals that you are thinking of moving to the area – you might get some very honest responses!

6 TAKE A WALK

Take a walk around the neighbourhood to get a feel for it.



VIEWING A HOME

7 RESEARCH BUYING AREA

Research the area as much as possible using local information and websites.

8 LOCAL SCHOOLS

If you have children, what are the local schools like? Check to see whether the locality is prone to flooding (you can do that on the Environment Agency's website). Try to find out also if there is a history of subsidence in the area – the local council's planning department might offer information.

9 LOCAL DEVELOPMENTS

You can also find out from the planning department whether there is development proposed locally that might have an impact on the outlook and traffic levels.

10 INSURANCE QUOTES

Get an insurance quote for different properties you are looking at. A higher than expected premium might suggest a history of local burglaries or subsidence, for instance.



TOP TEN TIPS TO MAKING AN OFFER

Once you've found your dream home, it is time to make an offer.

1 CASH BUYERS

Cash buyers, those with a mortgage offer in place, and people with no chain will be most attractive to vendors.

2 HOW LOW TO GO

Don't insult the vendor by putting in a ridiculous offer. The estate agent should be able to give you a steer as to how low to go.

3 STAMP DUTY

If you are on a stamp duty threshold then you may be able to come to some arrangement for fittings and furniture that suits both you and the vendor. Be careful though, as the taxman could query why you are paying £10,000 for curtains if he believes it to be excessive.

4 SET YOUR LIMIT

Set your limit and don't go above it. You have to be prepared to walk away if the price gets too high. If you don't like haggling just tell the vendor it is your final price and see if it's acceptable. They may not like the process any more than you do.

5 GAZUMPING

Gazumping can be rife in a seller's market. Ask for the property to be taken off the market for a week or two once your bid has been accepted to allow you to get the survey and legal work done. This should reduce the chance of someone gazumping you with a counter offer.

6 SEALED BIDS

Houses in demand often go to sealed bids – whereby each interested party puts their highest price in an envelope and the vendor chooses who will buy their house based on these. This is the standard practice in Scotland.



TOP TEN TIPS TO MAKING AN OFFER

7 DON'T SKIMP ON THE SURVEY

Especially with older properties! The minimum you should invest in is a homebuyers report, and ideally a full structural survey. Don't just rely on the mortgage valuation survey as this will only tell you the property is worth more than the value of the mortgage. It won't tell you if major repairs are needed to the roof, for instance. You can get help from AA Legal Services on getting a survey done.

8 EXTRA COSTS

Don't forget all the extra costs of moving such as mortgage, survey and legal fees, removal costs and stamp duty.

9 JUDGE YOUR VENDOR

With some sellers, letting them know how much you love their home could swing the deal in your favour. If they have an emotional attachment to the home they are leaving they might prefer a buyer they empathise with. Be careful though, some sellers could use this to push for the highest price possible.

10 NEGOTIATE

Don't be afraid to negotiate money off the price if the survey reveals faults that will cost you money to put right.



BUYING INSURANCE

You will need to insure your home from the date you exchange contracts, as you are then legally bound to buy it.

1 MORTGAGE PROVIDER

Don't take out home insurance from your mortgage provider unless it is the most competitive. You are under no obligation to take the mortgage provider's insurance although they will require confirmation that you have buildings cover in place to protect their investment in your home.

2 BUILDINGS AND CONTENTS

Buying both buildings and contents from the same provider may work out cheaper than buying separately – but not always. Get quotes for both joint and separate cover.

3 BEST PREMIUMS

Go to a broker such as AA Home Insurance who will find the best premiums for you from their panel of insurers.

4 SECURITY

Having good security and belonging to a Neighbourhood Watch scheme will help reduce the cost of cover. The insurer may also, for example, insist that the front door has a BS3621 five-lever mortise lock or key operated window locks so check that the house you are buying meets the insurers requirements.

5 POLICY THAT SUITS YOU

Make sure the policy covers your needs. Do you have expensive garden furniture and will it be covered? Do you need cover for possessions away from the home which can get you cheaper travel insurance? What about accidental damage cover? What is the value of your contents? The AA's home insurance website has a useful calculator to help you assess what your contents are worth.