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**The information on these pages is only provided for general guidance. If you do have a legal problem you must ensure that you obtain individual independent legal advice to protect your interests and rights**

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## ***12 Steps to Homeowner Heaven***

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### ***1. Seller puts house on Market***

The estate agent who asks the cheapest commission and suggests the highest asking price for your property isn't necessarily your best choice. What you want is an estate agent with plenty of buyers to choose from.

Buyers prefer firms which are established, courteous and efficient to those with high prices and low commissions for sellers. Estate agents who price their properties realistically are more popular with buyers.

Phone up an estate agent. See how they'd persuade you to buy a house from them. Find out how many sales staff they have. Are they competent, qualified and pleasant to deal with? Is it easy to get through or is the phone permanently engaged? Do they return your calls? If you want to sell your property, use a company that lots of buyers like and trust.

### ***2. Buyer finds dream home***

Be critical. Look round carefully and take someone else with you. Check for damp, cracks, loose tiles and leaking pipes. If problems exist, you may not find out until it is too late. Take off those rose-tinted specs and see the house for what it is.

Visit at different times. Is the garden a short-cut for local school kids, football fans or dog walkers? Does the street fill with cars or drunks at night? Are you on the flight path for Humberside International Airport?

Always remember the estate agent is on the seller's side, not yours.

### ***3. Buyer makes offer***

The estate agent may insist on you meeting their financial adviser before making an offer. You do NOT have to do so. Ask the estate agent if they'd prefer you to make your offer direct to the seller yourself.

Don't offer more than you can afford. Speak to an independent financial adviser and find out how much money you can borrow to buy your new home. Houses are expensive to maintain. Your dream home won't be much fun if you have to live on lentils to pay for it the rest of your life. Unless you're a vegan, of course.

The seller will reject your offer. That's just the way it works.

### ***4. Seller rejects offer***

### **5. Buyer increases offer and seller accepts offer**

The buyer need only increase the offer by twelve pounds in some cases. It's an established negotiating formality. It's simply not proper to accept the first offer. That would mean you think your house is rubbish and you're desperate to sell. This may be true, but it's not necessarily something you feel your buyer ought to know.

BEWARE ! No one has bought or sold anything yet - the whole thing could still fall through. Do not hand your notice in to your landlord. Do not organise the removal van for a week on Tuesday. Yes, this is still a time for cautious celebration - but leave the champagne on ice for the time being.

- The seller may decide she doesn't want to sell at all.
- The love-struck young home buyers might fall out of love.
- The surveyor may discover the house is suffering from subsidence.
- The solicitor may discover the house is built on top of a mineshaft.

If there is a chain involved, the risk increases according to the number of people in the chain

### **6. Estate agent suggests you appoint a solicitor**

This really is a vital decision. Of course, we would say that, wouldn't we - but get it wrong and you may be letting yourself in for one of life's Three Most Stressful Experiences.

If you're happy with your existing solicitor, then stay with people you trust. It may be cheaper to go elsewhere or even to do it all yourself (see further reading). More expensive is not necessarily better. But on the whole you get what you pay for.

Tens of thousands of pounds are at stake. If this whole sale goes wrong, it could go horribly wrong. Selling and buying houses isn't rocket science, but you do need to know what you're doing. Don't decide who will do your conveyancing (that word again) on price alone.

Whether you are selling or buying, arrange to see your solicitor as soon as possible. They need to know exactly what you want right from the start

### **7. Buyer tries to find a mortgage**

There are some 2500 different types of mortgage. Just because you've always had a mortgage with the Ashby Bank doesn't mean you always should. Shop around, talk to all banks and building societies. Or else get a good financial adviser. Many people think it wise to get a second or even third opinion before committing themselves.

### **8. Buyer gets a survey**

Keep your fingers crossed. This is not the same thing as the local search. Check out "survey" in our patent Dullary™

### **9. Everybody waits for everyone else**

There has to some waiting: surveys don't produce themselves, local searches are produced by local councils. Speedwise, some mortgage lenders can make a slug look like Michael Schumacher. Make sure you know exactly what your solicitor is waiting for. If you don't know, ASK.

BEWARE: anyone can still pull out at any time for any reason.

### **10. Your solicitor asks you to sign the contract**

Make sure you know exactly what you are signing for. Ask your solicitor to explain what the local search revealed, what the restrictive covenants are and the terms of your mortgage. Check the figures on the contract. Make sure the mortgage conditions are what you were expecting. Your solicitor will of course do this without being asked if you followed STEP SIX correctly.

- Have your deposit ready if you are buying.
- Decide when you would like to complete.

BEWARE: anyone can STILL pull out, even now that you have signed the contract.

### **11. Your solicitor exchanges contracts**

CELEBRATE ! CELEBRATE ! You are very nearly there. If (which is very rare) any one pulls out after exchange of contracts you should be amply compensated. The deal is as good as done. You know just when you are going to be moving house.

Start saving boxes. Book your removal van. You now know the date you will be moving house. Contact the Gas and Electricity board, the Telephone people, the Post Office. Tell the Local Council. Tell everyone apart from those you do not want to know you are moving house - come on, this is a time to celebrate. You can even risk a mother -in-law joke.

### **12. Completion date**

This is it. The big day. You are moving house. Your solicitor pays over the money and you collect the keys. You can really celebrate now. Unpack those boxes, put the kettle on, pour yourself a stiff drink, get your paintbrushes out. Do just whatever you want (well, within the law) because that dream house is now yours.