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THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO BUYING YOUR FIRST HOME

Everything you need to know.
Every step of the way.

1	2	3	4	5	6
PLAN	**FINANCE**	**SEARCH**	**MAKE AN OFFER**	**LEGAL PROCESS**	**MOVE IN**
Understand your goals and budget.	Explore your options and get mortgage ready.	Find the right home that suits you.	Submit your offer with confidence.	Surveys, checks and legal steps explained.	Complete, collect the keys and enjoy!

YOUR HOME.
YOUR FUTURE.
LET'S GET YOU THERE.

Expert advice, practical tips and clear steps to help you buy with confidence.

The Complete Guide to Buying Your First Home

Buying your first home is one of the biggest and most exciting milestones in life.

It is the moment when all your saving, planning, and hard work start to feel real. But for many first-time buyers, it can also feel overwhelming at first. There are new words to learn, different professionals involved, and several stages to work through before you finally collect the keys.

That is completely normal.

The good news is that with the right advice and support, buying your first home becomes much easier to understand. This guide has been created to explain the process step by step, in simple language, so you know what to expect from the moment you start looking right through to completion day.

Our aim is to help you feel informed, confident, and supported throughout the journey.

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Why First-Time Buyers Often Feel Unsure

Buying a home is not something most people do regularly, so it is completely understandable to feel unsure at the beginning.

Many first-time buyers feel confused because:

✔ **there are lots of new terms and paperwork**
✔ **the legal process can feel unfamiliar**
✔ **there are several people involved in the transaction**
✔ **timescales can vary from one purchase to another**
✔ **there can be periods where not much seems to happen**
✔ **busy periods where decisions need to be made quickly**

This is exactly why having a helpful estate agent matters. A good agent does not just show you properties — they guide you, answer your questions, explain each stage, and help keep your purchase moving forward.

The Home Buying Journey

For most first-time buyers, the journey looks like this:

1. **Work out your budget**
2. **Save your deposit and prepare your documents**
3. **Get a Mortgage Agreement in Principle**
4. **Start viewing properties**
5. **Make an offer**
6. **Instruct a solicitor**
7. **Apply for your mortgage**
8. **Arrange surveys and valuations**
9. **Searches and legal enquiries**
10. **Exchange of contracts**
11. **Completion day**
12. **Move in and begin your new chapter**

Each of these steps is explained below.

Step 1 - Work Out Your Budget

Before you begin viewing homes, it is important to understand how much you can comfortably afford.

This is not just about the purchase price. It is also about understanding your monthly mortgage payments, upfront costs, and any extra fees involved in buying a property.

Your deposit

Most first-time buyers will need a deposit, often from **5%** to **10%** of the purchase price, although some buyers may choose to put down more.

Example:

Property price: **£250,000**
5% deposit: **£12,500**
10% deposit: **£25,000**

A larger deposit may sometimes give access to better mortgage rates, but many first-time buyers begin with the minimum required by the lender.

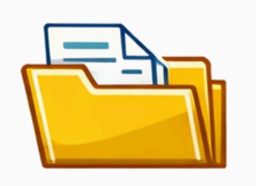
Other costs to budget for

It is important to remember that buying a home involves costs in addition to your deposit.

These may include:

✔ **solicitor or conveyancing fees**
✔ **mortgage arrangement or broker fees**
✔ **survey costs**
✔ **valuation fees in some cases**
✔ **removal costs**
✔ **buildings insurance**
✔ **where applicable, Stamp Duty**
✔ **costs for setting up utilities, internet, and moving essentials**

A common mistake first-time buyers make is focusing only on the deposit and forgetting about the rest. Having a full budget from the start helps you search with confidence and avoid surprises.



Step 2 - Get Organised

When you apply for a mortgage or go through legal checks, you will usually need to provide documents.

Getting these together early can save time later.

You may be asked for:

✔ **photo ID**
✔ **proof of address**
✔ **recent payslips**
✔ **bank statements**
✔ **proof of deposit**
✔ **evidence of savings**
✔ **details of any gifted deposit from family**
✔ **employment details**

If any part of your deposit is being gifted by parents or family members, your lender and solicitor will usually need proof of where that money came from. This is normal and forms part of the financial checks carried out during the process.

Step 3 - Obtain a Mortgage Agreement In Principle

Before making an offer, it is usually a very good idea to get a **Mortgage Agreement in Principle**, often called an **AIP** or **Decision in Principle**.

This is a statement from a lender saying that, based on an initial review of your finances, they may be willing to lend you up to a certain amount.

Why this matters

✔ **it helps you understand your realistic price range**
✔ **it shows sellers you are serious and ready to proceed**
✔ **it can make your offer more attractive**
✔ **it helps avoid disappointment later**

An AIP is not the same as a full mortgage offer, but it is an important first step. Many buyers arrange this through a mortgage adviser, who can help them compare lenders and products.

Step 4 - Start Viewing Properties

Once your budget is clear and your **AIP** is in place, you can begin viewing properties.

This is often the most exciting stage, but it is important to look beyond the decoration and think carefully about the property as a whole.

Things to think about when viewing:	**Viewing tips:**
• The general condition of the property • The location and transport links • Nearby schools and amenities • Shops, parks, and lifestyle • Whether work is needed now or in the future • Future resale value • Energy efficiency and running costs	• View more than once if possible • Visit the area at different times of day • Ask about service charges or ground rent if leasehold • Ask whether there is a chain involved • Think practically about storage, parking, and layout • Do not rush into a decision just because a property looks attractive online

Buying your first home is emotional, but it is also a major financial decision. It is worth taking the time to look carefully.

Step 5 - Making An Offer

When you find the right property, you can make an offer through the estate agent.

Your offer should normally be based on:

✔ **the asking price**
✔ **the local market**
✔ **the condition of the property**
✔ **the seller's position and urgency to move**

The seller may:

✔ **accept your offer**
✔ **reject your offer**
✔ **negotiate and ask for a higher figure**

If your offer is accepted, the property is usually marked as:

Sold Subject to Contract (SSTC)

This means the sale has been agreed in principle, but neither side is legally bound yet. The legal process must still be completed before the purchase becomes binding.

Step 6 - Instruct a Solicitor / Conveyancer

Once your offer is accepted, you will need a solicitor or conveyancer to handle the legal work.

Their role is to protect your interests and make sure the purchase is legally sound.

Your solicitor will usually:

✔ **receive and review the draft contract**
✔ **check title and ownership details**
✔ **order property searches**
✔ **raise legal enquiries**
✔ **review mortgage conditions**
✔ **handle the transfer of funds**
✔ **complete the legal work needed for exchange and completion**

It is a good idea to choose a solicitor who is responsive, experienced, and easy to contact, because communication can make a big difference to the overall experience.

Step 7 - Apply For Your Mortgage

After your offer is accepted, you will normally move from an Agreement in Principle to a **full mortgage application**.

Your lender will then review your finances in more detail and decide whether to issue a formal mortgage offer.

This usually involves:

✔ **checking your income and outgoings**
✔ **reviewing your credit history**
✔ **confirming your deposit source**
✔ **carrying out affordability checks**
✔ **arranging a valuation of the property**

It is very important not to make major financial changes at this stage. For example, avoid taking out new credit, financing a car, or making large unexplained transactions, as these can affect your mortgage application.

Step 8 - Valuation and Surveys

Many first-time buyers confuse the mortgage valuation with a survey, but they are not the same thing.

Mortgage valuation

This is arranged by the lender to check that the property is worth the amount being paid and suitable security for the loan. It is mainly for the lender's benefit.

Consider arranging your own survey

You may also choose to arrange your own independent survey for peace of mind.

Common options include:

Home Survey / HomeBuyer-style Survey

Often suitable for many modern or standard properties.

Building Survey

Usually recommended for:

✔ **older properties**
✔ **listed buildings**
✔ **unusual construction**
✔ **homes needing renovation**
✔ **properties where you want a more detailed inspection**

A survey can highlight issues such as damp, roof problems, movement, outdated electrics, or repairs that may be needed. In some cases, buyers use the survey results to renegotiate or ask further questions before proceeding.

Step 9 - Searches / Legal Enquiries

Once your solicitor is instructed, they will begin carrying out legal checks on the property.

Property searches

Searches help identify whether there are any hidden issues that might affect the property. Typical searches include:

🔎 **Local Authority Search**
Checks planning permissions, building regulations, road schemes, and local authority matters.

🔎 **Environmental Search**
Checks for e.g. flood risk, land contamination, and environmental concerns.

🔎 **Water and Drainage Search**
Confirms whether the property is connected to mains water and drainage.

🔎 **Land Registry checks**
Helps confirm ownership and title details.

🔎 **Mining Search**
Used in some areas where historical mining activity may affect the property.

Search results often take around **2 to 3 weeks**, although this can vary depending on the local authority and area.

Legal enquiries

Once the solicitor has reviewed the contract papers and search results, they may raise enquiries.

These are questions asked to the seller's solicitor about anything that needs clarification before you commit.

For example, enquiries might relate to:

✔ **boundaries**
✔ **alterations or extensions**
✔ **guarantees or certificates**
✔ **planning permission**
✔ **rights of way**
✔ **service charges and lease terms**
✔ **disputes or notices**

This is a very normal part of the process and one of the reasons property purchases can take time.

Step 10 - Understanding a Property Chain

Not every purchase is chain-free. In many cases, your seller may also be buying another property, and that seller may be doing the same.

That creates a chain.

Example:

You buy from Seller A
Seller A buys from Seller B
Seller B buys from Seller C

This means all transactions often need to move forward together.

Chains are very common, but they can affect timescales because the whole chain usually needs to be ready before exchange and completion can take place.

One of the key roles of a good estate agent is helping keep communication flowing across the chain so that delays are identified and resolved as early as possible.

Step 11 - Mortgage Offer and Final Legal Work

As the process moves forward, your lender may issue the formal mortgage offer.

At the same time, your solicitor continues checking:

✔ **search results**
✔ **replies to enquiries**
✔ **mortgage conditions**
✔ **the contract**
✔ **title documents**
✔ **leasehold paperwork, if applicable**

Once everything is in order, your solicitor will report to you and explain what you are signing and what funds are needed.

This is the stage where the transaction starts to feel more real, because the legal work is moving towards the finish line.

Step 12 - Exchange of Contracts

Exchange of contracts is one of the most important points in the whole transaction.

Before exchange happens:

✔ **the legal work must be complete**
✔ **the mortgage offer must be in place**
✔ **search results and enquiries must be satisfactory**
✔ **the deposit must be ready**
✔ **all parties in the chain must be prepared**
✔ **a completion date must be agreed**

At exchange:

✔ **both buyer and seller are committed**
✔ **the agreed deposit is transferred in readiness**
✔ **the completion date is fixed**
✔ **the purchase becomes legally binding**

Before exchange, either side can usually withdraw. After exchange, there are legal consequences if either side fails to complete.

This is the point when you can usually begin making firm moving arrangements.

Step 13 - Completion Day

Completion day is the day you officially become the owner of the property.

On completion day:

✔ **your solicitor sends the purchase funds**
✔ **the seller's solicitor confirms safe receipt**
✔ **the estate agent is authorised to release the keys**
✔ **you can collect the keys and move in**

This is the day all the hard work pays off!

🎉 Congratulations — you are now a homeowner.

After Completion

Even after completion, there are still a few legal steps your solicitor will handle for you. These may include:

✔ **paying any Stamp Duty due**
✔ **registering your ownership with the Land Registry**
✔ **registering the lender's charge against the property if you have a mortgage**

You do not usually need to do much at this stage, but it is good to know the legal process continues briefly behind the scenes.

Common questions first-time buyers ask

How long does it take to buy a home?

A purchase often takes around 8 to 12 weeks, but every transaction is different. It can be shorter or longer depending on the chain, mortgage, searches, and enquiries.

Can I pull out before the exchange?

Yes. Before exchange, either party can usually withdraw. That is why nothing is fully secure until contracts are exchanged.

What is the difference between freehold and leasehold?

A freehold property usually means you own the property and the land it stands on. A leasehold property usually means you own the property for the length of the lease, but not the land, and there may be ground rent, service charges, and management rules.

Do I need a survey?

Not always, but many buyers choose to have one for reassurance. A mortgage valuation is not the same as a full survey.

What is a gifted deposit?

This is when part or all of your deposit is given to you, usually by a family member. Your lender and solicitor will normally need evidence of this.

How we help first-time buyers

Buying your first home can feel like a lot to take in, but you do not have to work it all out alone.

We support first-time buyers by:

✔ **explaining each stage clearly**
✔ **answering questions in simple language**
✔ **helping you understand what happens next**
✔ **liaising with solicitors, brokers, and other parties**
✔ **helping keep the purchase progressing**
✔ **supporting you from first viewing through to completion**

Our aim is to make your first home purchase feel exciting, manageable, and far less stressful.

Final advice

Take your time. Ask questions. Do not feel embarrassed if something is unfamiliar. Buying your first home is a big step, and it is completely normal to need guidance along the way. With the right support, good communication, and clear advice, the process becomes much easier to understand — and much more enjoyable. We are here to help you every step of the way.

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