

## Preparing your home for a sale



First Step

**First Step's helpful guide to selling your home and moving...**

**With check list at the end.**

So, you have decided to sell up and move on for usually, major reasons or life decisions. It can be any reason, more room, less room, schools, shops or the dreaded commute, fell in love, fell out of love.

What is true for everyone in your position is that they now have some big decisions to make, all of which can affect the move. A long procession of links in a chain of events to get you to your new home.

It is rumoured that planning a holiday and moving home are THE two most stressful things that can happen in your life. Both usually involve agents at some level, organisation, transport, and often, kids, pets and cars, vans and taxi's but mainly lots of your lovely hard earned money and hopefully a medium to large glass of wine at the end of it.

Unfortunately moving home also involves solicitors and often removal men and a lot less Beaujolais than your average Holiday. We know everyone has heard the moving horror stories "of mice and strange men" (next door) but we hear lots of lovely, happy stories about seamless transitions to our area and performed with ease and a smile in the breeze. So we decided to proffer some of our experience and expertise into the fray with a 'this is how it should go' guide to moving.

## 1. A very important decision. How to choose an estate agent?

Unfortunately, not all estate agents are created equally and it helps to have a strategy for finding the estate agent that will put you and your interests first. Here are a few things you can do to help find an estate agent you can trust.

1. Ask family & friends or search the internet for recommendations – an endorsement from someone who has actually used the estate agent is a pretty powerful gauge of what kind of customer service standards you can expect from that agent.

2. Try [www.allagents.co.uk](http://www.allagents.co.uk) to search for the estate agent by their company name. This site provides reviews for Agents in most postcodes directly from their customers and will help you to get a feel for the Agents on your shortlist. **(is this a good idea as it takes people away from our long awaited website)**

3. Check out an estate agent's social media accounts – social media is a free form of advertising, so why aren't all estate agents using it? Social media is a very public forum and those estate agents with poor reputations do not want to risk having it exposed. Estate agents who are honest about their services and want to show that they are approachable, knowledgeable and available have embraced social media. First Step have an active Facebook account and often post relevant news, issues and political property posts.

4. Get Surfing - Using the internet is a great way to comparison shop at arm's length. Not only can you look at an agent's social media, you can check out their Rightmove, Zoopla & Prime Location listings as well as their own website. You can get a feel for the quality of their photography and marketing.

5. Mind the GAP - Grammar and Photography at First Step. We are very proud of our photography and our property descriptions, we take time to deliver a carefully considered and informative write up that contains simple phrases and descriptive information regarding location, history and local points of interest, this coupled with spanking good photography & will always show a property in its best light. Our Printable details will always be only two pages and include the floor plan and EPC and photography.

6. Look them in the eye. In the end, nothing beats meeting an agent face to face. That is why we offer free, no obligation valuations. We realise that sometimes your choice of estate agent comes down to who you feel comfortable with (we are not the usual bad fitting stripy suit type of people) Plain and simple. The choice is yours. Come and meet us.

7. Fees. Are you happy with the fee quoted? Most local agents start the price negotiations with you at 1.25% ex VAT to sell your property to see if they can get away with charging you more. First Step offer a 0.9% inclusive of VAT (0.75% ex vat) Sole Agency Sale Fee and we do not compromise on service for the fee.

We feel that the high street estate agents with lots of shops have to charge you more because the high street is an expensive place to rent and in the next few years they will start to disappear too, in today's world and we are testimony to this with having offices in a more rural picturesque location that we can sell property very effectively and being located where we are we can afford to pass on this saving to you. So yes we market and advertise houses via the internet (just like all the other high street agents) but in an old fashioned way we meet all our/your potential purchasers at

**your property Monday through to Sunday (if that's convenient to you) because that's a very big part of what you are paying us for, which is our property skill and expertise in front of your purchasers to achieve what you want.**

**Not as important to some people but it is for us we like to give back to our local community because we don't have a large marketing budget and we are very fortunate with the hard work we put into each sale that we get a lot of testimonials thanking us and with word of mouth we have grown from strength to strength to this end we heavily sponsor lots of our local groups such as the local kids youth clubs, bowls clubs, kids soccer teams and one of our biggest local education centres Etonbury Academy.**

### 3. Prepare for Marketing

**Deep cleaning your house** can really add to your home's appeal, as well as enhance the buyer's first impressions. Give your home a top to bottom clean. Make sure windows are washed to let in light and carpets and flooring are deep cleaned.

Consider renting a steam cleaner if you have carpeting (we have a man called Cliff if you haven't), particularly if you have pets. It will help to make your home smell and look fresher, giving the impression of a very well kept home. It's always a good idea to give your front door a good clean or even a coat of paint, first impressions matter.

**Declutter.** Less is definitely more when it comes to selling your home. Store personal items and pack up everything that isn't absolutely essential. If you find you have things you don't need anymore, consider listing the extra items on Ebay, selling them at a car-boot sale or giving them away to a charity shop or we have another man who will take items for very little money.

Contact your local council, who may be able to collect large items for you. Not only will the lack of clutter help to sell your home faster, but it will also make moving day easier. An alternative if you just want to clear some space without giving items away, is renting a storage space. They are inexpensive, and can be used to store excess furniture and other personal items.

**DIY.** If there are areas in your home that need attention it is best to get them fixed before you start showing your home to potential buyers. These could be the smallest of jobs, such as replacing a light bulb. If you have any large repairs on your home that need fixing – such as broken roof tiles or a leak – it is advisable to get them fixed straight away and in time for marketing (we know another man for this). They could detract from your homes appeal and will not impress buyers.

**To Paint or not to Paint.** If your budget allows it, then do it. A fresh coat of paint can make a room look brand new. Try to stick to light neutral colours like whites and creams and stay away from darker colours such as blacks and browns or very bright colours. If the money is tight then maybe freshen up your showcase rooms, Reception, kitchen or master bedroom. Silly as it sounds paint or clean your front door, first impressions and all that we may have said that before.

**Pongs & Songs.** Flowers and coffee smell nice, your old runners don't so keep them hidden, a bit of mood music "turned down" won't hurt. Maybe not's and forget me not's

**Undertaking major renovations??** You might be considering a complete kitchen renovation or adding a bathroom to add value to your home before you put it on the market. However, it might be that you won't see enough return on your investment to make major renovations worthwhile.

This is where our local knowledge is extremely helpful. At your valuation we can tell you what buyers in your area are actively looking for and what they are willing to pay for it give or take a few pounds, so that you don't start ripping down walls and replacing bathroom suites before you find out that it didn't add as much value to your home or maybe your buyer will have plans of their own. Sometimes a vase of fresh flowers can be just as effective at a fraction of the cost.

## 4. The Paperwork Aaagh... Useful Documents & Information

Checklist of Documents to Collect to Help Your Sale Go Smoothly.

Here is a checklist of some of the documents we recommend you provide us with or have on hand. Print this page or tick off each box on your screen:

**Building Regulations Certificates** - If alterations and extensions have been carried out on your property, it will help your sale to proceed more smoothly if you can show at the outset that these have been added legally and with approval.

**Service Charges and Ground Rent Bills** – (if you are selling an apartment and or have communal parking areas where you pay fee for the upkeep of the parking area, gates, outside lights etc)

**(EPC) - An Energy Performance Certificate** - An EPC gives a property an energy efficiency rating from A (most efficient) to G (least efficient) and it is valid for 10 years. If your property has been built or bought after August 2007 then it should already have an EPC, you can visit [www.epcregister.com](http://www.epcregister.com) to search for your EPC free of charge.

If it doesn't exist, then we can arrange to have an EPC produced for you for approximately £90 including VAT. (Contact First Step for more details).

Under the Money Laundering Regulations 2003 estate agents are obliged to obtain evidence of your identity and residence. You will need to provide original copies of one document from List A and one document from List B to your Estate Agent.

**List A** – Evidence of Identity – One of;

Full Valid Passport

Full Driving Licence

A Valid Identity Card (HM Forces, Police warrant card, prison officer, Government/Local Authority issued)

Birth Certificate/Marriage Certificate

**List B** – Evidence of Residence – One of;

Inland Revenue tax notification, self-assessment statement.

An original utility bill less than three months' old

An original mortgage statement for the mortgage accounting year just ended

An original statement for either your current bank or building society account or credit card account.

Also handy are copies of bills which are ideal so that potential buyers can estimate running costs.

They could include:

Council Tax Bill for Banding

Utility bills, optional

Buildings and Contents Insurance Bills, optional

Service Charges and Ground Rent Bills – this is also optional but our signed terms will require this exact information for marketing details.

## 5. Why photography is so important

We need to really make your home stand out, the internet is now your shop window, the high street Estate Agents are smartening up or dying off as fees tumble and the internet replaces the shoe leather in property searches.

85% of people in the UK start their property search online. They say a picture speaks a thousand words and the fact is that if your property has not been photographed properly it will attract fewer buyers.

- Remove any clutter and store it out of sight –for example remove toiletries from around the sink or bath, stow away cleaning products, put small appliances in cupboards, remove or hide anything stored under beds, store children’s toys or pet paraphernalia. If you want to go the extra mile to make your home stand out from the crowd, try these tips:
- Fresh flowers look attractive in photograph well and add colour to the photography and can also hide plug sockets or unsightly marks when strategically positioned.
- Freshly plumped cushions on the old sofa and on the bed can add colour and a sense of luxury – they don’t cost much so it might be worth investing in some new ones. An attractive new throw may enhance an old chair or bed.
- Fluffy towels in the bathroom create a fresh and inviting atmosphere
- If the grouting in your bathroom has seen better days, give it a once over with a grout reviver product, available at DIY shops.

There are lots of simple things you can do to make your home look good in photographs. You want to make sure the photos of your home do it justice and help the buyer picture themselves living in the space.

- Tuck electrical cords out of the way
- Make sure all curtains and blinds are open to let in the most light
- Ensure your garden is clutter free – stow away children’s toys, rubbish bins or washing
- Ideally park your car out of the way while exterior shots are taken, if you can’t then make sure it is cleaned and presentable.

Move your large bins from outside your home where you can and have a word with your friendly neighbour’s about doing the same for a few minutes’ while we snap away.

If you are not sure what your home really needs to make the best impression on buyers, please ask the First Step professionals. We look at properties day in and day out and we know what buyers are looking for and what makes a particularly good or bad impression.

When you have decided to put your home on the market with First Step, our trained photographic team will arrive at a prearranged time to help you to make sure every room of your home looks its best for photography.

No one knows your home better than you do, so we would more than welcome your suggestions for the best angles and advice on features of your home that you feel might be the most appealing to buyers.

## **6. Conducting viewings & the First Impressions**

**Give the front door and access area, driveway and really good clean**

**Make sure the locks on the front door are well oiled and working properly and First Step has only the CORRECT keys they need.**

**Tidy up, clear away dishes and sweep the floors or vacuum. Make sure the garden or outside areas are tidy. If you live near a road or wooded area, clean your railings and fences of cobwebs and dirt.**

**Make sure all doors to the outside or balconies, terraces are clear to access and have a key in them, near them or with us.**

**Do you have a secure parking space or garage? buyers may want to see this, even if it is a large rectangular patch of tarmac with a number 28 on it, they may still want to have a look, really. So try and make sure access is readily available.**

**If you do have a parking space, maybe try to park your car somewhere else, allowing the viewer and agent to use yours. This will add to their experience. Especially when parking is a problem locally.**

**Leave pets with your friendly neighbour or family member if possible.**

**Turn on heating during the colder months, especially if you have timers. In the winter potential purchasers want to feel how warm your house is likewise in the summer they like to look where the best place is in the garden for a bbq.**

**Turn your house lights on beforehand particularly when using energy efficient bulbs as these take time to warm up in bathrooms or any rooms without windows.**

**Air out the house by opening the windows the day before if necessary.**

**Ensure that you have not smoked or cooked anything with a strong smell prior to a viewing. Light a scented candle and put a fresh pot of coffee on or plug in an air freshener or even bake some bread, yes the old tricks work best.**

**These small details make a huge difference to a buyer's viewing experience. It all helps. It is so important to make a viewing memorable and eventful for the right reasons.**

## 7. All that glitters is not sold! What if your property is not selling?

All that preparation and no offers, perish the thought.

If you've been marketing your property for some time and have not yet had any offers, what should you do?

First Step will be keeping you up to-date with regular feedback from viewings and the numbers of people viewing your property. We monitor your listing on property portals such as Rightmove and Zoopla. We can advise on click through rates, CTR's, details downloaded from major websites and give you hard facts based on this data. This should help you to build a picture of what potential viewers are thinking about your property.

Information is power to an agent but also as a vendor, so don't cherry pick your facts to suit your purposes, are other properties selling locally in less time.

What is important is Marketing, Grammar and Photography, as always with any sale or purchase the price is important. Are you aiming too high?

During your conversations with First Step:

- Ask why they think it isn't selling, get an opinion. What is the most common objection that the viewers are raising about your property? If the objection is something you could correct, then do it.
- Could the marketing for your property be refreshed? Would a premium listing on one of the property portals help?
- Do you need to reduce the price? Price is a very important factor in marketing and it is so important to get it right. We try our best to make sure we judge the marketing price correctly with all the current and relevant financial pricing information we have but sometimes we have curve balls which can suddenly change a market place such as stamp duty changes on buy-to-let properties or Brexit which has given the property market an amount of uncertainty currently. We don't make up and put an unrealistic price on your property just to gain your business, most properties bought in our area are by purchasers who require a mortgage so it is very important that the price can be passed by a mortgage surveyor. We work very closely with all of our local RIC's (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors) surveyors to make sure we understand all the new relevant criteria when valuing properties this is how we can determine the most saleable price for your property and we strongly believe that surveyors have to be challenged on property prices.

**BUT**

There is a very old property adage that if something is not selling, taking viewings or having offers made on it

'It's Price'.



## 8. Offerings What happens when you start receiving offers?

Hoorah! When you receive an offer, or even multiple offers, First Step will advise you and help by negotiating to make sure you get the best deal and the most reliable buyer for your property.

Selling your home is more than just going with the highest offer. You may want to consider the following:

- Is the buyer paying cash? If so, you won't have to wait for a mortgage approval and there is not the added risk of the property being down-valued. First Step always require proof of funds such as a bank statement or solicitors letter to qualify cash offers.
- Is the buyer using a mortgage, the buyer should already have a mortgage agreed in principle? First Step will always verify this mortgage offer through the buyer's mortgage broker or lender. We will also ask for proof of deposit like a bank statement.
- Is the buyer in a "chain"? That is, do they have to sell their own property first in order to purchase yours? Chains can complicate the sales process so first time buyers, investors or those people who don't need to sell their own property to buy will be a lower risk.
- Can the buyer work to your timescales? Will the buyer move as quickly as you need? Part of First Step's service is to "qualify" the buyer by verifying their financial position and financing as well as finding out about their chain situation and timescales. Armed with all this information you will be in the best position to make the right decision for you.

## 9. You've accepted an offer! You need Legal Aid

### Instructing a solicitor

You will need to instruct a solicitor or licensed conveyancer to handle your sale for you. Here's how to go about it:

First Step work with a selection of recognised Mortgage Advisors and Conveyancers and we are happy to pass their details to you under no obligation. First Step will recommend solicitors with whom they have good relationships and who they know will help the sale proceed to completion smoothly.

1. Alternatively you can get quotes from several solicitors. You could ask family or friends whom they have used to get a balanced view.

2. Keep in mind that the cheapest quote is not always your best option. You want to make sure you find a solicitor who will work to your timelines, returns calls and has an excellent customer service record. For instance, some solicitors don't like email and prefer a nice letter with a stamp and the two-day breather letters allow, some don't take calls, some don't return calls. Make sure you research your chosen sword; your sale may well depend upon it.

4. Be clear with your solicitor when you want the sale to exchange and complete so that they work to your timelines. Not all people appreciate that one of the most crucial jobs an estate agent undertakes on your behalf is "sales progression" – First Step will keep in regular contact with your solicitor to ensure your sale is progressing, to provide any outstanding paperwork for the solicitor and to continue to give you feedback on the sale of your home. This is a time consuming and often frustrating part of our work. It requires patience and most importantly experience. Knowledge of previous sales and their many twists and turns is invaluable during the process. You will definitely need our support and expertise during this process and very often our experience and interest in the successful completion of the sale are the crucial ingredient that holds the many parties together throughout the process as you will see by our testimonial pages.

## 10. The documents you will need to provide for your chosen solicitor

1. Provide original copies of the ID that you provided for your estate agent to fulfil money laundering requirements.
2. Complete a detailed questionnaire on the property, covering things like who owns the boundaries and whether you have had any disputes with neighbours. You must answer these questions truthfully.
3. Answer any further queries or provide any other requested supporting documents as quickly as possible. It is best to hand deliver these documents or alternatively send them by registered post.
4. Complete a fixtures and fittings form. There is no law that specifies what Fittings should be left in your home and what should be removed. Legally you are not obliged to leave any fixtures and fittings in the house, but you must clarify what will be taken as it could relate to the value of the property; fittings can add up to thousands of pounds in value and will make a big difference to the worth of a property. When we initially list your property we will ask you what you want to leave and will then ask you to read the property description as we must be very careful not to misrepresent your property.

If you do not provide an inventory upfront, it is generally assumed that fixtures will be left and fittings will be removed. Below is a list of items that we recommend for each category:

### Fixtures:

- Light fittings
- Boilers and radiators • Built-in wardrobes
- Bathroom suites
- Kitchen units
- Paintings and mirrors
- Carpets
- Curtains and curtain rails
- Free-standing ovens, fridges, dishwashers and washing machines
- Beds, sofas, other free-standing items
- Lampshades
- Television aerials and satellite dishes

**Exchange of Contracts Completion** - Exchange of contracts is the point when signed copies of the contracts are exchanged between the buyer's solicitor and the seller's solicitor. At exchange of contracts the buyer (nor indeed the seller) can pull out of the sale without financial penalty. When you exchange you will also be asked to place a deposit with your solicitor to exchange which generally is 10% of your purchase price please discuss this with your solicitor so you don't have any last minute panic attacks.

A date for completion is usually set for two weeks at least from the day after exchange of contracts to give both parties time to organise moving or indeed have a longer period between exchange and completion if your buyer is ready and able to wait.

On the day of completion, your solicitor will call First Step to tell them when the buyer's money has arrived so that the keys can be released to the new owner. When you receive your solicitor's final statement, check it carefully to make sure all is correct and is in line with your original agreement. Our fees will be paid by your solicitor from the proceeds of your sale and should be detailed in your solicitor's final statement.

## **Our Tips for when “You need to move on”**

Once your home is sold, it is time to pack up and get moving. The process can be stressful but here are some tips to make it go more smoothly.

- Use a professional moving firm; do not try to move everything yourself in a rented van. Movers are trained professionals, and will do all of the work for you. Ask us for our recommendations, or ask friends and family what companies they have used in the past.
- Take meter readings (Gas, Electric & Water) on your property the day you move out.
- Ensure that the Royal Mail redirects all of your post.
- It could be some time before you have internet in your new property; download anything you may need for the new home from the internet before you move or stick it in a cloud
- Leave a note of anything important for the new owners. This can include things like alarm codes, manuals for appliances being left behind, where the water and other meters are, and sockets.

### **The history checklist, who to tell you've left the property:**

All Home Bills  
Banks  
Credit Card Companies  
Council Tax Department, give them the date you moved out also  
Water Company  
Gas Company  
Electricity Company  
Telephone Provider  
Mobile Phone Provider  
Royal Mail, arrange redirect  
Cable/Satellite and Internet Service Providers  
TV/Video Rental Companies TV Licensing  
DVLA  
Vehicle Registration  
Vehicle Insurance  
Milkman  
Newsagent  
Doctor  
Dentist  
Memberships and subscriptions

### **The future checklist, who to tell you've arrived at new Residence.**

When you move out, it is best to ensure that you tell everyone about your new address. This will hopefully ensure nothing important goes to the wrong place, and that no one is forgotten, take a look at our checklist below and start:

Banks  
Credit Card Companies  
Council Tax Department, give them the date you moved in also

**National Savings and Premium Bonds**  
**Your Employer**  
**Insurance Companies**  
**Pension Companies**  
**Inland Revenue**  
**Social Security**  
**Solicitor**  
**Magazine or membership subscriptions**  
**Friends and Relatives**  
**Newsagent**  
**Library**  
**Schools/College**  
**Doctor**  
**Dentist**  
**Optician**  
**Vet**  
**Water Company**  
**Gas Company**  
**Electricity Company**  
**Telephone Provider**  
**Mobile Phone Company**

Enjoy your new home

**First Step Team**



**First Step**