

We've produced a simple guide to help you prepare before viewing a potential new home.

The guide should give you a good idea of which questions to ask during a viewing and includes some important observations to make.

Arriving at the property

Before knocking, take a few moments to observe your first impressions.

Note any parking facilities or restrictions.

Take note of the neighbours - Do they have overlooking views? Do they have pets, or caravans that may end up being a nuisance?

Accept a tour by the owner or agent. If you wish to be left alone to view in your own time, don't be afraid to ask after you've had the tour.

Preliminary observations.

Ask about the cost of council tax and utilities with the seller.

Are there any guarantees not held with the title deeds? i.e. damp and timber reports, planning consents for alterations and extensions.

Has the owner made any improvements? Do you have the relevant warranties?

Does the property require much regular maintenance? Can you do it yourself or afford to get a professional?

How much ground rent/service charges do you pay? (Leaseholds)

How secure is the property, does it have an alarm? Has it ever been burgled?

Ask about the neighbours. How long they been there and have there been any disputes?

Internal observations.

Does the property have central heating? If so, check when it was installed and last serviced.

Check the plumbing and wiring. Has it been re-plumbed or rewired? If so, ask to see any certifications or guarantees

Look for cracks, uneven floors or doorways and any signs of water damage. If remedial work is required ask the owner if they have had any quotes. If so, be bold and ask to see them.

Imagine each room empty. Will your furniture fit or will you need to redecorate as a result?

Make note of any fixtures and fittings. i.e. carpets and curtains, wall lamps, etc.

Check for built-in appliances. They should be included in the sale.

Check out the view from all floors - Don't be afraid to open curtains, they may be hiding something.

Find out what else is included in the sale. Particularly furnishings and fittings, i.e. carpets & curtains.

External Observations

Ask to see the garden and the garage.

Are there any garden features such as statues? Will they be staying? - Don't leave it to chance!

Check that no shrubs or plants will be removed - Believe us, it does happen!

Check all window frames and the brickwork - Look for signs of cracking, or ill fitting/rotten frames.

Gain an advantage view point of the roof - Does it bow or are there any tiles missing?

Are there signs of any glass being recently replaced or damage to external doors? Possibly indicating signs of break-in. If so, ask how they were damaged or why replaced.

Some of this will be covered by your conveyancer should you negotiate a purchase but it's always good to find out prior to agreeing the sale.

Location, location, location.

What local amenities are there?

What are the local schools like? - A good school catchment area may effect property value.

Which way is the property positioned? East facing rooms will receive more sun in the morning; West-facing rooms will be brighter in the afternoon.

Compare the property with surrounding properties.

Vital questions to ask the seller or agent.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Gaining as much information about the reasons for the sale and the condition of the property will pay dividends later when making an offer. They may well end up saving you £1,000's.

Excluding the property itself, do not forget to ask about:

What's the reason for selling?

Knowing why the owner is selling is a significant factor in helping to decide what kind of offer you may be prepared to make. So make sure you get the facts. This may reveal other factors that will not appear on any formal search. It may also give you a good indication regarding the seriousness of intent to sell. If the seller is vague then may be they're not so serious or perhaps just testing the market.

How long has the property been on the market?

Remember, good value or rare properties don't stay on the market for very long. Excluding market conditions, if the property has been on the market for some time there may be a problem with the property or its price. Don't be afraid to be direct and ask the owners and the agent for their opinion. You may not get a straight answer, but at least the owner and agent will be aware that you know the score. This will prove handy at the time of making an offer.

How quickly does the owner want to move and what's their current position?

This is a key question that may end up saving you £1,000's. There are many reasons why a seller may want a quick sale. For example, if they have found their new home, check whether they're in a chain or in a hurry to exchange contracts. Try to find out as much information as possible, it could be that they've taken out a bridging loan on their next home, experiencing financial difficulties or there's a pending repossession. Regardless of any reason the bottom-line is; If a seller wants a quick sale for any reason and you're in a position to move fast, then you have a good footing when considering any price negotiations.

Have there been any previous offers and what happened to the sale?

Having had a previous buyer does not necessarily indicate that there is a problem with the property, but it does require investigation. Ask the owner or agent why the sale collapsed. If you are not happy with the answer, investigate further or walk away. If you want to continue, find out if the previous buyer had completed the searches or any survey. If so, your solicitor may be able to purchase these from the buyers solicitor which will save you waiting for the searches to be carried out by the local authority and possibly save money at the same time