For first-time buyers · Guide 03

Making an offer.

Give your offer the best chance of being accepted, even if other buyers offer too.

Includes an offer plan to compare similar homes' sold prices, and a page to log your offers.

England and Wales

November 2026

Contents

This is the third of five separate guides to buying your home.

The buying journey

01 Before you start searching: plan your money and priorities.

02 While you're searching: find, view and compare homes.

03 Making an offer: prepare and present your offer. You're reading this

04 After your offer is accepted: arrange checks and legal work.

05 Moving and settling in: prepare for moving day and your new home.

Some stages overlap, so use the guides in the order that suits you.

Inside this guide

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Look up unfamiliar words in Words you'll hear.

Follow @sifthomes on Instagram, where we share our guides.

England and Wales. Information checked 6 November 2026; sources at the end. Your mortgage adviser and conveyancer can confirm what applies to your purchase.

HOW IT WORKS

How an offer works

Knowing what happens after you offer makes waiting for an answer easier.

What happens after you offer

The agent acts for the seller, and works with you both to agree a sale.

1. Before speaking to the seller, the agent may call you to talk your offer through. That's normal: it helps them prepare for their conversation with the seller.
2. They pass your offer to the seller, usually within a day or two, and confirm in writing that they have. If you haven't had that after a day, it's worth checking.
3. The seller accepts it, turns it down or negotiates.
4. While you negotiate, the agent goes between you. Talk about the offer through the agent, not the seller, so everything stays clear and in writing.

Even once it's accepted

In England and Wales, an accepted offer isn't legally binding until contracts are exchanged. That's what "subject to contract" means, and until then either side can still change their mind.

TIP FROM TIM, A FORMER ESTATE AGENT

Suggest a time to talk your offer through.

When I was an agent, I'd call buyers before I rang the seller. An email or offer form gives the basics. On the phone, I could ask more questions and talk the offer through, so the seller got the full picture, not just the numbers. A morning call works well, as it leaves time to speak to the seller the same day.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Work through your offer checklist on the next page.

READY TO OFFER

Check you're ready to offer

A quick check now means you can offer with confidence.

The home

- [ ] It has your must-haves and most of your nice-to-haves.
- [ ] You've seen it twice.
- [ ] You know why the seller's moving, if there's a chain, and their timing.
- [ ] Your questions are answered, or you know who'll answer them.

Your offer

- [ ] You're comfortable with your price (page 5).
- [ ] The mortgage, bills and Stamp Duty or Land Transaction Tax fit your plan (page 6).
- [ ] You have proof of your deposit and an in-date agreement in principle, or proof of funds (page 8).
- [ ] You've told your mortgage adviser you're offering, if you have one.
- [ ] You've written your cover letter (page 8).
- [ ] You're ready to call the agent and email your offer (page 9).
- [ ] Optional: you have a solicitor or conveyancer in mind.

If you can't tick one yet, it's something to look into, not a reason to stop.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Put your proof of deposit and agreement in principle in one folder, ready to send.

WHAT TO OFFER · PART 1

Work out what to offer: find similar homes

What similar homes sold for gives you facts to base your offer on.

Find them on Rightmove

1. Go to Rightmove's sold prices and type in this home's postcode.
2. Set the area to "Within ¼ mile" and the date to "Within the last year".
3. Pick ones sold in the last 3 months, or 6 if there aren't many.
4. Open ones that are the same type of building, with similar bedrooms, bathrooms, condition and outside space.
5. Use only ones with a floor plan, so you compare like with like.
6. If you find fewer than three, widen the area to "Within ½ mile".

TIP FROM TIM, A FORMER ESTATE AGENT

Sort the sales by price, not by date.

Sorted by date, homes of every price are mixed together. Choose "Price desc" (highest first), so homes like this one sit side by side. Start a little above this home's asking price and work down, to see homes that sold for more, about the same and less.

Work out the price per square foot

- Divide each sold price by its floor area: £280,000 ÷ 750 = £373 per sq ft.
- Add them up and divide by how many there are, for the average.
- Multiply the average by this home's floor area, from its floor plan. That's what similar homes suggest it's worth.

Or let our free calculator do the sums: paste in each home's Rightmove link.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Write your similar homes and their average in your offer plan on page 15, in case the agent asks how you got to your figure.

WHAT TO OFFER · PART 2

Work out what to offer: set your figures

Set your figures now, and you won't have to decide on the spot.

Start with the homes you found

- Multiply this home's floor area by the lowest and highest price per square foot. That gives you a low and a high figure.
- Lean most on the homes most like this one.

Then look at this home

- Where it's better or worse, such as condition, outside space or parking.
- Any work it needs. The asking price may already allow for this.
- For a flat, the years left on the lease.
- How long it's been for sale, and any price drops.

Set your three figures

- **Top price:** the most you'd pay before you'd rather keep looking, if the monthly cost, cash and tax fit your buying plan. If it's above your high figure, the lender may value it lower.
- **First offer:** one you can explain from the homes you found.
- **Next step:** what you'd offer if your first is turned down.

TIP FROM TIM, A FORMER ESTATE AGENT

Leave room in your first offer, but keep it serious.

When I was an agent, buyers who started a little below their top price had room to move. A sensible first offer was taken seriously, and could beat one that started very low and went up.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Write your three figures in your offer plan on page 15, and keep it to hand when you call.

BESIDES PRICE

What sellers look at besides price

Sellers want a buyer who'll see the sale through, so more than the number counts.

What sellers often ask the agent about you

- Your position: whether you have a home to sell first, or are in a chain.
- Your money: your deposit, and whether a lender has agreed in principle.
- Your timing: when you'd like to move, and whether that suits them.
- How you come across: organised, decisive and clear about what you want.

Keep in touch with the agent

If you've kept in touch and sent what they asked for, the agent can describe you to the seller with confidence.

Show you love it

A quick second viewing, and saying clearly that you love the home, shows you're serious. It goes alongside your checks, not instead of them.

TIP FROM TIM, A FORMER ESTATE AGENT

The highest offer doesn't always win.

When I was an agent, a lower offer often beat a higher one, because of the buyer's position, their confidence and how they'd handled things. It's the offer as a whole that counts.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Write your position in one line, ready to tell the agent.

Your position

PREPARE

Prepare your offer

Nothing holds your offer up when everything’s ready to send.

Have these ready to send

- Proof of your deposit, such as a screenshot of your savings, or a letter from your bank or adviser.
- Your agreement in principle, still in date. Most last 30 to 90 days.
- If family are giving you money towards your deposit, say so.

Share it safely

- Cover your full account number, but leave your name, bank and balance showing.
- Send it to the agent’s work email, from the listing or their website.

Good to know

- You don’t need a solicitor yet, but having one in mind shows you’re ready. If you’ve chosen one, tell the agent.
- If you’re buying with someone, agree your top price together before anyone calls.
- Ask what’s included in the price, such as curtains, appliances or a shed.

TIP FROM TIM, A FORMER ESTATE AGENT

Send a short letter about yourselves with your offer.

When I was an agent, I told buyers to write one. Keep it friendly, with no numbers or dates: what you do, why you love the home and the area, and what made it feel like home.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Write your letter now, so it’s ready to send with your offer.

PRESENT

Present your offer

A quick call, then an email the same day, gives the agent everything to put your offer to the seller.

Call the agent

Say the amount, the address and your position. The agent will often ask:

- How you got to your figure.
- About your deposit and agreement in principle.
- Whether you have a home to sell, and when you'd like to move.

You could say:

> "I'd like to offer £285,000 for 12 Elm Road, subject to contract. I'm a first-time buyer with nothing to sell. My agreement in principle and proof of deposit are ready, and I'll email them today."

Then email the same day

- The amount and the address, "subject to contract".
- Your position, and when you'd like to move.
- How you got to your figure, in a line or two.
- Your proof of deposit, agreement in principle and letter, attached.
- A request to confirm it's reached the seller.

TIP FROM TIM, A FORMER ESTATE AGENT

Be ready to say how you got to your figure.

When I was an agent, I asked every buyer the same thing, whatever they offered: how have you arrived at that figure? Similar homes' sold prices made their offer much easier to explain to the seller.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Call the agent with your offer, then send your email the same day.

OTHER OFFERS

If there are other offers

When other buyers offer too, knowing how it usually works helps you decide calmly.

How it usually goes

- The agent tells you there are other offers, though not usually how much.
- The seller may ask everyone for their “best and final” offer by a set time.
- Some agents ask for sealed bids instead, opened together. They’re not common outside Scotland.
- Nothing is binding yet, and the highest offer doesn’t always win.

What to send by the deadline

- Your figure, in writing.
- Your position, proof of deposit and agreement in principle again.
- Your letter, if you haven’t sent one.

If you feel rushed

A deadline is normal, and you can ask for more time. Under their code, agents can’t press you to offer quickly or raise your price.

TIP FROM TIM, A FORMER ESTATE AGENT

In a best and final, offer a figure you won’t regret.

When I was an agent, I told buyers to offer the most they were completely comfortable with. Losing a home over £5,000 is hard: that’s about £28 a month over 30 years at a typical 5.37%. But don’t stretch so far that you’d worry about the payments.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Before the deadline, check your figure against your offer plan on page 15.

THE REPLY

When the agent replies

Every reply has a next step, and deciding yours in advance makes the call easier.

Accepted

Well done. Page 12 covers what happens next.

A counter-offer

The seller names a figure. You can accept it, offer something in between, or stay where you are. Check it against your top price first.

Turned down

You can offer again, up to your top price, or walk away. It’s fine to ask what would make a difference to the seller.

No answer yet

Call to check your email arrived. If you’ve heard nothing a day later, a friendly call or email is fine.

Someone else’s offer was accepted

Keep looking, and ask your agents to tell you about similar homes, even before they go online.

TIP FROM TIM, A FORMER ESTATE AGENT

Chase in a friendly way, about a day later.

When I was an agent, a buyer who checked in politely showed they were keen. One who went quiet for days could seem less interested.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Note each offer and reply in Your offers on page 16.

ACCEPTED

Once your offer is accepted

It’s a big step. The home isn’t yours until contracts are exchanged, and a few things help keep it on track.

What happens now

- The agent sends a memorandum of sale: the agreed price and who’s involved, for both sides’ solicitors.
- The agent checks your ID. It’s a legal requirement once an offer is accepted.
- You may hear from a sales progressor, who helps keep the sale moving.
- Ask whether viewings will stop. It’s the seller’s choice, and if marketing carries on, the agent tells you in writing.

Until contracts are exchanged

- Nothing is legally binding, and some sales fall through. Keeping things moving helps.
- If the seller accepts another offer, which is called gazumping, the agent tells you promptly.
- Keep in touch with your other agents until you exchange. Then tell them you’ve found your home, so the calls stop.

What comes next

Choose your solicitor or conveyancer, apply for your mortgage and book a survey. Our guide to what happens after your offer is accepted covers each step.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Get our free guide to what happens after your offer is accepted.

NEW-BUILD AND MORE

New-build, shared ownership, Wales and auctions

Some homes follow a different process, so check which applies before you offer.

If you're buying a new-build home

- Prices are often fixed, and builders may offer extras instead, such as paying some of your costs.
- The builder tells your lender about any incentives.
- Builders on the New Homes Quality Code can't claim other buyers are interested if they aren't.

If you're buying through shared ownership

- You apply to the housing provider, rather than making an offer through an agent.
- A free check with a mortgage adviser sets how big a share you can buy.
- Where there's high demand, homes go first come, first served.

If you're buying in Wales

- Offers work the same way as in England.
- Land Transaction Tax applies on the part of the price above £225,000. There's no first-time buyer relief.

If it's at auction

- You usually pay a 10% deposit on the day, and the rest within 28 days.
- Read the legal pack and get a survey before you bid.

YOUR NEXT STEP

If you're buying through shared ownership, see which schemes could help with our first-time buyer schemes tool.

YOUR RIGHTS

If something doesn’t feel right

If something about your offer doesn’t feel right, you have rights, and a free way to raise it.

What agents can’t do

- Make passing on your offer depend on using their mortgage adviser, solicitor or surveyor.
- Treat you less well because you’d rather use your own.
- Invent offers or other buyers, or mislead you about them.
- Press you to offer quickly, raise your price or skip the survey.

If it happens

1. Raise it with the agent in writing, and keep their replies.
2. Agents in The Property Ombudsman reply to a complaint within 15 working days.
3. If you’re still unhappy after 8 weeks, or after their final reply, take it to the agent’s redress scheme. It’s free.
4. You can also report pressure to use an agent’s services to Citizens Advice.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Keep the agent’s emails about your offer, in case you ever need them.

KEEP TO HAND · WORKING NOTES

Your offer plan

Fill this in before you offer. It’s for you, so keep it to yourself.

This home

Address

Asking price

Floor area (sq ft)

Similar homes’ average price per sq ft

Similar homes sold nearby

	Similar home 1	Similar home 2	Similar home 3	Similar home 4
Address				
Sold price				
Date sold				
Floor area (sq ft)				
Price per sq ft				
How it compares				

Sold prices are on GOV.UK’s Search sold property prices, or Rightmove; the newest take up to 2 months to show. Floor area is on each energy certificate, in square metres: multiply by 10.76 for square feet.

Price per sq ft is the sold price divided by the floor area. The average, times this home’s floor area, is a guide, not a valuation: type, condition, layout and the street all make a difference.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Write your three figures. Your top price stays with you.

First offer

Next step

Top price

KEEP TO HAND · WORKING NOTES

Your offers

Note each offer and reply, so you always know where you stand.

The home

Address

Agent

	Offer 1	Offer 2	Offer 3	Offer 4
Date				
Amount				
Sent by				
Reply				
Next step				

Sent by: a call, an email or both. Reply: accepted, a counter-offer, turned down or no answer yet.

YOUR NEXT STEP

If you'd rather keep it online, Sift keeps your agent emails organised in one place. Sign up free at sifthomes.com.

FOR REFERENCE

Words you'll hear

Plain meanings of words you may hear while making an offer.

Word	What it means
Agreement in principle	A lender's estimate of how much it might lend you. It isn't a mortgage offer.
Best and final	When the seller asks every buyer for their highest offer by a set time.
Chain	A line of sales that depend on each other.
Conveyancer	Does the legal work when you buy. It can be a solicitor.
Counter-offer	A figure the seller suggests in reply to your offer.
Energy certificate	A home's energy rating, A to G, and its floor area. Also called an EPC.
Exchange	When you and the seller swap signed contracts, and the sale becomes legally binding.
Gazumping	When a seller accepts a higher offer after accepting yours, before exchange.
Memorandum of sale	A note of the agreed sale, sent to both sides' solicitors.
Position	Your buying situation, such as how you're paying.
Redress scheme	Where you can take a complaint about an agent, for free.
Sales progressor	Someone at the agent's who helps keep a sale moving.
Sealed bids	Offers sent by a deadline and opened together.
Subject to contract	Agreed, but not binding until contracts are exchanged.

GO FURTHER

Our free tools

Each one helps with a step in our guides, for your own situation.

- **How much can I borrow for a mortgage?**
  Your top price, from what a lender might lend and what you can comfortably pay.
- **How much do you need to buy a house?**
  Your deposit, Stamp Duty and every other cost, added up.
- **Stamp Duty calculator**
  Stamp Duty in England, with first-time buyer relief, or Land Transaction Tax in Wales.
- **Mortgage repayment calculator**
  Your monthly payment and what a higher rate would cost.
- **Lifetime ISA calculator**
  Your bonus by the time you buy, and the £450,000 price limit.
- **First-time buyer schemes**
  Which government schemes might suit you, with your own figures.
- **Get mortgage ready**
  What lenders check, what to sort out first, and the documents to gather.
- **Estate agent email**
  Register with every estate agent in one email.

YOUR NEXT STEP

See all our tools, and new ones as we add them, at sifthomes.com/tools.

FOR REFERENCE

Sources

Where the facts in this guide come from, and when we checked them. Rules change, so check again before you rely on them.

RULES ON THE WAY, AS OF NOVEMBER 2026

Home buying changes not yet in force

- Offers that become binding once accepted, after sales information packs come in. No date yet.
- More use of reservation agreements, where buyer and seller each pay a deposit to commit.
- A code of practice for estate agents.

Agents and offers
legislation.gov.uk: Estate Agents (Undesirable Practices) (No. 2) Order 1991; The Property Ombudsman: Code of Practice for Residential Estate Agents; National Trading Standards: Statement on conditional selling (15 July 2025); The Property Ombudsman: How it works. Checked 6 November 2026.

When an offer becomes binding
GOV.UK: Buying a home; MHCLG: How to buy a home; MoneyHelper: Buying a house or flat in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; MHCLG: Home buying and selling reform roadmap. Checked 6 November 2026.

Sold prices and floor area
GOV.UK: Search sold property prices; HM Land Registry: About the Price Paid Data; GOV.UK: Find an energy certificate. Checked 6 November 2026.

Mortgages, deposits and ID checks
MoneyHelper: What happens when I get a mortgage in principle?; MoneyHelper: How to apply for a mortgage; legislation.gov.uk: Money Laundering Regulations 2017, regulation 4; HMRC: Estate agent business guidance (AMLG2200); Bank of England: Quoted rate, 2-year fixed mortgage at 90% loan to value (IUMB482), September 2026. Checked 6 November 2026.

Stamp Duty and Land Transaction Tax
GOV.UK: Stamp Duty Land Tax: residential property rates; Welsh Government: Land Transaction Tax rates and bands. Checked 6 November 2026.

New-build, shared ownership and auctions
New Homes Quality Board: New Homes Quality Code, version 2; UK Finance: Lenders' Handbook: disclosure form; GOV.UK: Shared ownership homes; Homes England: Capital Funding Guide: shared ownership. Checked 6 November 2026.

Keep agent emails, viewings and alerts organised with Sift.

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