

JW WOOD

COUNTY DURHAM · DARLINGTON

EST  
1910

YOUR PROPERTY GUIDE

# A Buyer's Guide to *finding home.*

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Everything you need to know about buying a property in the North East — from your first enquiry to collecting the keys. Friendly, clear, and written by people who have been doing this since 1910.

JW WOOD ESTATE AGENTS  
OPENING DOORS SINCE 1910

[JWW.CO.UK](http://JWW.CO.UK)

A WARM WELCOME

# Let's help you find your next home.

Buying a home is one of the most exciting — and, let's be honest, nerve-racking — things you'll ever do. Whether you're stepping onto the ladder for the first time, moving the family, or investing in the North East, our job is simple: to make the journey feel straightforward, well-informed, and genuinely enjoyable.

This guide sets out the whole process in plain English, with local insight we've built up over more than a century of doing this. Keep it to hand, dip in when you need to, and pick up the phone whenever you'd like a human answer to a human question.

*The JW Wood Team*

COUNTY DURHAM & DARLINGTON

## A family-owned agency with deep local roots

JW Wood has been selling and letting homes across County Durham and Darlington since 1910. Five branches, one local family, and a team that lives and breathes the villages, towns and cities we serve. We don't answer to a corporate head office — we answer to you.

### 115+ years local

More experience of County Durham property than any agent in the area.

### Award-winning service

Voted Best North East Agent five times by the Relocation Agent Network.

### Everything under one roof

Sales, mortgages, conveyancing and surveys — one trusted point of contact.

## WHAT'S INSIDE

# Your guide, chapter by chapter.

We've broken the journey into bite-sized stages so you can read the whole thing through, or jump to the bit you need right now.

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## THE JWW DIFFERENCE

# A century of moving people home.

When you're making one of the biggest decisions of your life, who you choose to walk alongside you matters. Here's what sets us apart.

## Independent, and proud of it

We're a family-owned business, not a national chain. Decisions are made locally, calls are answered by real people who know your area, and there's no corporate script. Our reputation is our livelihood — so we look after it, and after you.

## Five branches, one joined-up team

You can walk into any of our five offices and be met by someone who genuinely knows their patch — from school catchments to the quietest back lanes. Our teams across Durham, Bishop Auckland, Chester-le-Street, Consett and Darlington work together, so the right property gets put in front of the right buyer.

*"JW Wood has been the best by far. So efficient, always keeping us updated — such a smooth process. We felt genuinely cared for every step of the way."*

— CLIENT REVIEW, TRUSTPILOT

## Everything you need, under one roof

Buying a home touches a lot of corners — mortgage advice, surveys, conveyancing, removals. Because we offer all of these in-house or through trusted partners, you get a joined-up experience rather than chasing a cast of strangers. One call, one team, one smooth move.



### Recognised for excellence

Voted 'Best North East Agent' five times by the Relocation Agent Network, with a 4.7/5 Feefo rating from customers. Members of ARLA, NAEA and The Property Ombudsman.

## YOUR BUYING JOURNEY

# Seven steps, start to finish.

Every move is different, but the path from first dream to front-door key generally follows the same seven stages. Here's the lay of the land – the rest of the guide unpacks each step in detail.

01

Step

**Get your finances in order**

Work out what you can afford, save your deposit and secure a mortgage in principle. Knowing your numbers is your strongest negotiating tool.

02

Step

**Start your property search**

Register with JW Wood, set your criteria, and line up viewings as soon as homes come on the market.

03

Step

**View, view, view**

See homes at different times of day. Bring our viewing checklist, take plenty of photos, and ask every question.

04

Step

**Make an offer**

We'll help you pitch a competitive offer and present your financial position in the strongest possible light.

05

Step

**Instruct your professionals**

Appoint a solicitor or conveyancer, formally apply for your mortgage, and arrange a property survey.

06

Step

**Exchange contracts**

Searches complete, enquiries answered, deposit paid – you're now legally committed and the completion date is set.

07

Step

**Completion & moving day**

Funds transfer, keys change hands, and you step through the door of your new home. Kettle on.

## STEP 01

## Getting finance-ready.

Before you fall in love with a house, it pays to fall in love with a spreadsheet. Getting the numbers right now saves heartache later.

### Work out your true budget

Your budget is more than the asking price. Factor in your deposit, Stamp Duty, solicitor's fees, a survey, mortgage arrangement fees, removals and a contingency for the unexpected. Page 11 has a full checklist.

### Save your deposit

Most lenders want at least a 5–10% deposit of the purchase price. The bigger your deposit, the better your mortgage rate is likely to be — and the more competitive your offers will look to sellers.

### Check your credit

Lenders will look closely at your credit history. Register on the electoral roll, pay bills on time, keep credit card balances low, and avoid applying for new credit in the six months before you apply for a mortgage.

### Get a Mortgage in Principle

An Agreement in Principle (AIP) is a lender's statement of how much they'd be prepared to lend you, based on a soft credit check and your income. It's not binding, but it tells sellers you mean business — and most agents (including us) will ask to see it before viewings.

#### Talk to our mortgage team

Our independent mortgage advisers compare the whole of the market — high-street lenders, specialists and deals you won't find on comparison sites. First-time buyer or seasoned mover, we'll find the right fit.

### Help for first-time buyers

Schemes can change year to year, so ask us what's currently on the table — Lifetime ISAs, Shared Ownership, and regional support can all make a meaningful difference to what you can afford.

#### A useful rule of thumb

Most lenders will offer around 4–4.5× your annual income, though this varies by lender, deposit size and circumstances. Joint applications multiply what you can borrow — but also what you owe.

## STEP 02

## Finding the right home.

The fun bit – and the bit where local knowledge earns its keep. Good preparation turns the hunt from stressful into satisfying.

### Be clear on what you need

Before you start scrolling, write two lists: the non-negotiables (commute distance, number of bedrooms, a garden) and the nice-to-haves (a south-facing kitchen, period features). Your must-haves decide which homes to view; nice-to-haves decide between two you love.

### Register with us

Many of our properties sell before they even appear on the portals. Register with JW Wood and we'll alert you as soon as something matching your criteria comes to market – often giving you the jump on everyone else.

### Know the area

Walk the streets at different times – weekday rush hour, a Sunday morning, a Friday evening. Check school catchments, council tax bands, broadband speeds, parking and local transport. Your agent at JW Wood will gladly share everything we know.

### Your viewing checklist

- How long has it been on the market?**  
A long listing can signal pricing or survey issues.
- Why are the owners selling?**  
Their motivation shapes your offer strategy.
- What's included?**  
Fixtures, fittings, white goods, garden sheds.
- Any damp, cracks or mould?**  
Check ceilings, skirting boards and behind furniture.
- Windows and insulation**  
Double-glazed? Draughty? EPC rating?
- Boiler age and heating**  
Replacements can be £2,000+.
- Roof and guttering**  
Sagging lines or stained brickwork are red flags.
- Neighbours and noise**  
Flats above, roads, pubs, train lines.
- Mobile signal and broadband**  
Check on your phone during the viewing.
- Storage, loft, garage**  
Easy to miss – painful to lose.
- Any planning activity nearby?**  
New builds or developments can change an area.
- Has anything been altered?**  
Extensions need planning and building regs sign-off.

## STEP 03

## Making an offer.

You've found it. Now it's time to put your best foot forward. The good news: it's rarely just about who offers the most.

### How offers are pitched

Offers in the UK are made verbally (or in writing) through the estate agent — that's us. We pass every offer to the seller, and by law, we have to. We'll then help both sides negotiate until an agreed figure is reached. Nothing at this stage is legally binding; it's a statement of intent on both sides.

### What makes a strong offer?

- A sensible, well-informed price based on the market.
- A Mortgage in Principle to prove you can fund it.
- Proof of deposit funds (a bank statement will do).
- A clear position — chain-free, first-time buyer, flexible.
- A realistic timescale for exchange and completion.

### What sellers actually care about

Contrary to popular belief, the highest offer doesn't always win. Sellers weigh up certainty, speed, and the risk of a deal falling through. A well-prepared, credible offer £2,000 below another can beat it — because it's more likely to complete.

#### We'll guide you, honestly

Our agents will share what we know — recent sales, time on market, the seller's position — so you can pitch an offer that's both competitive and fair. We won't push you higher than we think the property is worth.

### What happens if your offer is accepted?

We'll confirm the agreement in writing (a Memorandum of Sale) to both parties and their solicitors. The property is marked "Sold Subject to Contract" (SSTC) and the real work — the legal and financial process — now begins.

#### A quick word on gazumping

Until contracts are exchanged, a seller can accept a higher offer from someone else, or a buyer can walk away. The best protection is speed — instruct your solicitor and apply for your mortgage the moment your offer is accepted.

## STEP 04

## The legal bit.

Solicitors, surveys and searches — the stretch where most deals live or die. A good team makes it feel effortless.

### Appoint a solicitor or licensed conveyancer

Your solicitor handles every legal aspect: drafting contracts, running local searches, raising enquiries with the seller's solicitor, and transferring funds. Appoint them the same day your offer is accepted — speed now keeps the whole chain moving.



#### We can recommend one

Our in-house conveyancing team and panel of trusted local solicitors know the North East inside out. Ask us for a no-obligation quote.

### Submit your full mortgage application

Your AIP now becomes a formal application. The lender will do a detailed check of your finances and instruct their own valuation of the property. Assuming all is well, they'll issue a formal mortgage offer, usually within 2–4 weeks.

### Arrange a survey

The lender's valuation is *not* a survey — it only confirms the property is worth what you're paying. For your own peace of mind, commission an independent survey:

- **Level 2 (HomeBuyer Report)** — for modern homes in reasonable condition.
- **Level 3 (Building Survey)** — for older, larger or unusual properties, or any home where you have concerns.

### Searches and enquiries

Your solicitor orders a bundle of searches — local authority, environmental, water & drainage, and chancel repair liability — and raises any follow-up enquiries from the contract paperwork. This stage typically takes 4–8 weeks, though chains and complex paperwork can extend it.

### Exchange-ready

When the survey is clear, the mortgage offer is in, and all enquiries are answered — you're ready to exchange contracts.

## STEP 05

## Exchange, completion and moving day.

The final furlong. A little stressful, deeply exciting, and – with the right preparation – entirely manageable.

### Exchange of contracts

The moment a property transaction becomes legally binding. Your solicitor transfers your deposit (typically 5–10% of the purchase price) to the seller's solicitor, signed contracts are swapped, and a completion date is set – usually between one and four weeks later.

### Buildings insurance

From the moment you exchange, the property is your responsibility. Make sure buildings insurance is in place from the exchange date, not the completion date.

### Completion day

Your solicitor transfers the remaining funds to the seller's solicitor. Once received and confirmed, the seller's keys are released – to us or directly to the vendor – and we hand them to you. You're officially home.

### Stamp Duty & Land Registry

Within 14 days of completion, your solicitor pays any Stamp Duty Land Tax to HMRC and registers the property in your name at HM Land Registry. You'll receive your Title Deeds soon after.

### Moving-week checklist

- Book removals early**  
Good firms get snapped up. Quote 3+ weeks ahead.

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- Redirect your post**  
Royal Mail's redirect service runs from 3 to 12 months.

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- Tell the council**  
Council tax, electoral roll, waste collection.

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- Move your utilities**  
Gas, electric, water, broadband, TV licence.

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- Update addresses**  
Bank, DVLA, GP, dentist, employer, insurance, subscriptions.

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- Take meter readings**  
Gas, electric, water – both at the old and new home, on the day.

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- Change the locks**  
Standard good practice on a new home.

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- First-night box**  
Kettle, mugs, tea, toilet roll, chargers, bedding, takeaway menu.

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*The moment the kettle boils for the first time in a house that's genuinely yours is one of life's quiet pleasures. Enjoy it.*

## BUDGET CONFIDENTLY

# The real cost of buying.

Beyond the asking price, here are the moving parts to factor into your plan. Some are fixed, some depend on your purchase — but none should come as a surprise.

<b>Deposit</b> ON PURCHASE	Typically 5–25% of the purchase price. A larger deposit generally unlocks better mortgage rates.
<b>Mortgage fees</b> LENDER ARRANGEMENT	Arrangement, booking and valuation fees vary — commonly £0–£2,000 depending on product and lender.
<b>Solicitor / conveyancer</b> LEGAL FEES	Usually £850–£1,800 plus disbursements (searches, Land Registry, bank transfers).
<b>Property survey</b> INDEPENDENT INSPECTION	Level 2 HomeBuyer Report from around £400; Level 3 Building Survey from around £630+.
<b>Stamp Duty Land Tax</b> ON COMPLETION	Calculated in bands on the purchase price. Paid within 14 days of completion — see next page for current rates.
<b>Removals &amp; first costs</b> ON MOVING	Removals £400–£1,500+, plus new utilities, insurance, and any early essentials for the home.
<b>Buildings insurance</b> FROM EXCHANGE	Required from the moment you exchange contracts — not from completion. Budget £150–£400+ annually.
<b>Contingency fund</b> FOR THE UNEXPECTED	A modest buffer — 1–2% of the purchase price — to cover surprises that crop up on moving in.

## £ Ask us for a personalised breakdown

Your JW Wood agent can put together a bespoke cost estimate for any property on our books — from the stamp duty you'd owe, through legal fees and removals, to the mortgage payments you'd be looking at. No obligation, and free of charge.

## STAMP DUTY · 2026 RATES

# What you'll owe the taxman.

Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) applies to property purchases in England and Northern Ireland. It's paid in bands — you only pay the higher rate on the portion of the price within each band. Your solicitor handles it on your behalf within 14 days of completion.

**STANDARD BUYER · MAIN RESIDENCE**

Portion of purchase price	Rate
Up to £125,000	0%
£125,001 — £250,000	2%
£250,001 — £925,000	5%
£925,001 — £1,500,000	10%
Above £1,500,000	12%

**FIRST-TIME BUYER RELIEF**

Portion of price	Rate
Up to £300,000	0%
£300,001 — £500,000	5%

**ADDITIONAL PROPERTY (SECOND HOMES)**

Portion of price	Rate
Up to £125,000	5%
£125,001 — £250,000	7%
£250,001 — £925,000	10%
£925,001 — £1,500,000	15%
Above £1,500,000	17%

**i A worked example**

Buying a £250,000 home as a standard buyer, you'd pay 0% on the first £125,000 and 2% on the next £125,000 — a total of £2,500. As a first-time buyer, you'd pay nothing at all.

**! Things to know**

First-time buyer relief is withdrawn entirely on purchases over £500,000. Non-UK residents pay an additional 2% surcharge on top of standard rates. Scotland (LBTT) and Wales (LTT) have their own separate systems. Always confirm the exact figure with your solicitor and verify at gov.uk before completing.

## PLAIN ENGLISH

# The words you'll hear, explained.

Buying a home comes with its own vocabulary. Here are the terms you're most likely to meet, in the order they'll usually appear.

**Agreement in Principle (AIP)**

A lender's indication of how much they'd be prepared to lend you, based on a soft credit check. Not binding, but proves you're serious.

**Chain**

When your purchase depends on the seller's purchase, which depends on theirs, and so on. Chains can slow things down; chain-free buyers are attractive.

**Completion**

The day you legally own the property, funds transfer and you collect the keys.

**Conveyancing**

The legal process of transferring ownership of a property from seller to buyer.

**Deeds**

The legal documents that prove ownership of a property. Now held digitally by HM Land Registry.

**Disbursements**

Costs paid by your solicitor on your behalf — searches, Land Registry fees, bank transfer fees and so on.

**EPC**

Energy Performance Certificate. Rates a property's energy efficiency from A (best) to G.

**Exchange of contracts**

The point the sale becomes legally binding on both parties. Deposits change hands and a completion date is fixed.

**Fixtures and fittings**

Fixtures are attached to the property (kitchen units, radiators). Fittings are movable (curtains, freestanding white goods). The TA10 form sets out what stays.

**Freehold**

You own the property and the land it stands on outright. Most houses in the UK are freehold.

**Gazumping**

When a seller accepts a higher offer from a different buyer after already accepting yours — legal, until contracts are exchanged.

**Land Registry**

The government body that holds the official register of property ownership in England and Wales.

**Leasehold**

You own the property for a fixed period, but not the land. Common for flats. Ground rent and service charges may apply.

**LTV (Loan to Value)**

The size of your mortgage as a percentage of the property's value. Lower LTVs usually mean better rates.

**Memorandum of Sale**

The document the agent issues once an offer is accepted, confirming the agreed price and the parties' details.

**SDLT**

Stamp Duty Land Tax — a government tax paid on most UK property purchases. See page 12.

**Searches**

Checks your solicitor runs against the property — planning, drainage, environmental and more — to uncover anything that might affect your ownership.

**SSTC**

Sold Subject to Contract. An offer has been accepted but contracts haven't yet exchanged.

**Survey**

An independent inspection of the property's condition, commissioned by you. Different from a lender's valuation.

**Vendor**

The person selling the property.

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# When you're ready, *we're right here.*

Five branches across County Durham and Darlington, each staffed by people who live and work in the community they serve. Pop in for a coffee, book a free valuation, or just ask us a question – whichever helps most.

## Durham (Sales)

0191 386 9921  
durham@jww.co.uk

## Durham (Lettings)

0191 383 0184  
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## Chester-le-Street

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This guide is intended as a general introduction to buying residential property in England. It is not financial, legal or tax advice. Stamp Duty rates and buying schemes are subject to change; always confirm current rules with your solicitor and at gov.uk. JW Wood Estate Agents is a trading name of JW Wood Ltd.