

Viewing checklist

It's easy to fall in love with a property and forget to be practical. However, by keeping your wits about you and asking yourself and the agents direct questions, it's possible to avoid problems

Our expert Kate Faulkner says that you should view a property three or four times at different times of day. Spend 15 to 30 minutes looking around the property and then at least half an hour walking around the general area. Find out what it's like at

rush hour, when the pubs close, at weekends and on a weekday. Try to drive from the property to work or school during rush hour to check the commute. In England and Wales, ask to see the home information pack, or, if one has been done,

the home condition report; in Scotland, from December 2008, ask for the home report (see 'Hips need a shake-up', p20, April 2007). Below is a list of questions that you should ask yourself or the estate agent when you look around a property.

WHAT YOU SHOULD LOOK FOR:

Stand on the opposite side of the road and check the outside of the house and the roof. Also check from the back of the garden.

EXTERIOR BRICKWORK

- Is it worn or cracked? YES NO
- Is there any render or finish? How old is it? YES NO

ROOF

- Are there any tiles missing? YES NO
- Are the chimneys straight? YES NO
- Is the flashing secure (this is usually lead and makes external joins waterproof)? YES NO
- Are the drains and guttering new or old? YES NO
- If it's raining are they leaking? YES NO
- Are the fascias (the wooden section under the roof) in good condition? YES NO

WINDOWS

- Are they double glazed? YES NO
- Do the window frames look secure? YES NO
- Do they need painting? YES NO

SECURITY

- Are there good door locks? YES NO
- Are there good window locks? YES NO
- Is there a working alarm system? YES NO

INSIDE THE HOUSE (EACH ROOM)

- Is there any condensation? YES NO
- Are there any exposed wires? YES NO
- Are there any cracks big enough to put the edge of a 10p in? YES NO
- Is any decoration required? YES NO
- Do any rooms need new flooring? YES NO

- Are there enough power sockets? YES NO
- Where are the phone points? _____
- Is there enough storage? YES NO
- Are any rooms overlooked? YES NO

FOR THE BATHROOM:

- Does it have an electric shower? YES NO
- Does it have power and is it earth bonded? YES NO
- Is there a shaver socket? YES NO
- Is there any mould? YES NO

WHAT TO TEST:

- Do the taps work and how long does it take for the hot water to come through? YES NO
- Do the light switches work? YES NO
- Do the windows open and close easily? YES NO

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE OWNER OR ESTATE AGENT:

- Where is the boiler, how old is it and when was it last serviced? _____
- Is there loft access and can I see into the loft? YES NO
- Do any chimneys work? YES NO
- When was the consumer unit or fuse box last checked? _____
- Are there smoke alarms? YES NO
- Has any work been done on the property? YES NO
- If yes, what guarantees are there on the work? _____

EXTRA QUESTIONS FOR FLATS:

- Is it leasehold or freehold? _____
- If it's leasehold, what's the length? _____
- What access is there to the garden? _____
- What services are shared eg drainage? _____
- Who pays for roof repairs? _____
- If there's a flat above, what are the noise levels like? _____

You can print a copy of this checklist at www.which.co.uk/propertychecklist. Once you've made an offer and a contract has been drawn up, read it carefully to find out exactly what you're buying, and don't sign until you are happy.