

A guide to property searches

Property searches help you to discover additional information about the property you plan to purchase. The risk of buying the property subject to undiscovered defects rests with you but prior to exchanging contracts you can freely withdraw from the transaction if you discover something about the property you do not like. Therefore searches help you to establish whether the property is suitable for your purpose. If you are obtaining a mortgage then they are unavoidable, however if you are a cash buyer they are not required but highly recommended. Searches will help you to build up a complete picture of the property you intend to buy.

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There are 3 usual searches that are carried out. These are the Local Authority Search, Water and Drainage Search, and the Environmental Search. There are also searches that you may be required to carry out depending on the locality of the property you wish to purchase. The most common example of this is a coal mining search and this is particularly relevant to our local clients as all properties in South Yorkshire, where our office is based, will require a coal mining search. If you would like information about these additional searches please see our other presentation.

Local Authority Search:

The Local Authority search usually takes the longest to be carried out because your search provider will make an appointment with the Local Authority to search the records of the property you wish to purchase. This search is essential because it can reveal a lot of important information. The key points are:

- Planning permission and building control – if the property has had any alterations or extensions then the seller may have obtained planning permission and/or building regulation consent. This search will reveal any consent and alert us to the fact that there has been work carried out at the property. However you should be aware that if the search reveals no planning permission or building control, it does not necessarily mean that the sellers have not had any work carried out and you should inform us of any extensions/alterations not mentioned in the search.
- Smoke control order – your property may be in a smoke controlled area. This means that if there is an open fire at the property you must only burn smokeless fuel.
- Adopted highway – The search will reveal whether or not the road affronting your property is adopted by the Local Authority. This is particularly important because if the search reveals that it is not adopted then we will need to make enquiries as to whether or not you have the necessary right of way granted to you.
- Listed building – The search will reveal whether or not the property is a listed building. It is important to note that various types of works to listed buildings may require consent in addition to normal planning permission and it is a criminal offence to carry out works to a listed building without the necessary consent. Therefore if you are wishing to make any alterations to the property once you become the owner then a listed building may not be for you.
- Conservation area – If the property is within a conservation area then there will be various requirements and restrictions on what you can or cannot do in relation to the appearance of the property.
- Tree preservation order – If there is a tree preservation order registered in relation to the property then you must ensure that you comply with the terms of the order for the trees within and around the boundaries of the property.
- Radon – the local search will also reveal whether or not the property is located within a radon gas area and what level they estimate it to be at.

Water and Drainage Search:

The Water and Drainage search obtains information about the sewer connections and water supply to the property. This search is usually made with the company which is responsible for providing water and drainage services in the area where the property is located.

The main points that the search reveals are:

- Whether or not foul water from the property drains into the public sewerage system. If it does not then the property may have a septic tank and we will need to raise enquiries with the seller's solicitor as it will become your responsibility from completion.
- Whether or not surface water from the property drains into the public sewerage system. If it does not then we will make enquiries as to how the water drains away to ensure that there is adequate soak away.
- We will also check whether or not there are any public sewers located within the boundaries of the property. This is important because if there is a public sewer within the boundary then we will check that that the sewer has not been built over and that no permanent structure has been placed over the sewer. If it has been built over then we will need to make sure that there is a buildover agreement in place which gave them permission to do so.

Environmental search:

An environmental search contains information on a variety of environmental issues that may affect your choice to proceed to purchase the property. Key examples are contaminated land and the flood risk of the property. This search may also recommend further in-depth searches that you may wish to order such as a flood risk report. We are not able to advise you in relation to this search so you will need to read it carefully and make sure you are happy to proceed based on the information provided.

If you have any questions about searches please contact us and we will be happy to help - 0114 249 6926 or email info@pmpl.co.uk.