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LANDFALL GUIDE · HOUSING

How does buying a home work in England, Wales or Northern Ireland?

THE SHORT ANSWER

You make an offer through the estate agent, but nothing is legally binding until contracts are exchanged, often months later. You'll need a solicitor or conveyancer, should get a survey, and will pay Stamp Duty Land Tax (or Land Transaction Tax in Wales). If you still own your US home, or buy before becoming UK resident, extra charges can apply.

For US citizens and green card holders moving to the UK. Build your free, personal move plan at **yourlandfall.com/plan**.

General information, not personal tax, financial, legal or immigration advice.

Buying in Scotland works differently. See buying a home in Scotland.

Step by step

1. **Get a mortgage agreed in principle** if you're borrowing.
2. **Make an offer** through the estate agent. It isn't binding on either side yet.
3. **Instruct a solicitor or conveyancer** to handle the legal work.
4. **Book a survey** to check the condition of the property.
5. **Searches and enquiries**: your solicitor checks the title, local authority records and more.
6. **Exchange contracts**: the deal becomes binding and you usually pay a deposit.
7. **Completion**: the money moves and you get the keys. Your solicitor pays the property tax.

Until exchange, either side can pull out. Sellers can accept a higher offer from someone else ("gazumping"), and buyers can lower their offer. Move steadily and keep your paperwork ready.

Property tax

Where	Tax
England and Northern Ireland	Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT)
Wales	Land Transaction Tax (LTT)

Three things that catch Americans out:

- **You still own a US home.** If you own a home anywhere in the world when you buy, **higher rates** usually apply, unless you're replacing your main home within the rules.
- **You buy before you're UK resident.** In England and Northern Ireland, buyers who aren't UK resident for SDLT purposes pay an **extra non-resident surcharge**. You may be able to reclaim it if you then spend enough time in the UK.
- **First-time buyer relief** only applies if you've never owned a home anywhere, including in the US.

Leasehold or freehold?

Most **houses** are freehold: you own the building and land. Most **flats** are **leasehold**: you own a lease for a set number of years, and pay **service charges** and sometimes **ground rent**. Check the remaining lease length carefully, because short leases are harder to sell and to mortgage.

Mortgages for new arrivals

Lenders will look at your visa, how long it has left, your UK credit history and your income. Expect fewer options and possibly a larger deposit at first. A mortgage broker who works with new arrivals can help.

What to do next

Build your move plan and choose “A home I own” if you’ll keep your US home.

See every step for your move. Answer five questions and get a free plan in the right order: yourlandfall.com/plan