



## START THE NEW YEAR OFF RIGHT

MAKE HEALTH AND FITNESS YOUR PRIORITY THIS YEAR

### SPA WEEKENDS

VALENTINE'S DAY COUPLES SPA  
RETREAT WEEKENDS IN THE UK

### 2025 DÉCOR TRENDS

GET THE TOP TRENDS FOR  
DECORATING YOUR HOME

### JANUARY RECIPES

IN-SEASON VEG CAN MAKE  
FOR SOME DELICIOUS DISHES

### TENNIS GRAND SLAM

TENNIS AUSTRALIAN OPEN  
2025 PREVIEW

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## WELCOME TO THE LATEST EDITION!

A new year, a new start! That's what they say, and it is indeed a new chapter for the property market with all sorts of new opportunities to go along with it, as pages 2&3 celebrate.

We often associate the new year's new start with fitness goals, and these goals, much like many other things these days, can be achieved from your very own home, as we explain on pages 8&9. The season of spring is yet another moment that pertains to the idea of new starts, as new life blooms, which means now is the perfect time to prepare your garden for such blossoming to come, as we explore on page 6.

Perhaps it's also time to give your home an interior makeover, too. Page 7 analyses all the home décor trends that are in conversation for this year. Planning ahead will also involve

thinking about Valentine's Day next month, and on pages 4&5 we have picked what we think are the best spa retreats to consider booking ahead of the Valentine's weekend.

Pages 10&11 cover all the new and exciting TV and film to catch this month, and on pages 14&15 we preview the upcoming Masters snooker tournament and the Australian Open tennis grand slam, while on pages 12&13 we whet your appetites with all the best seasonal recipes to inspire your palate this month.

So, take a sip of your champagne cocktail to welcome in the new year, take a spot next to the fireplace, and enjoy this month's magazine!

**Daniel Evans**  
Editor

Stamp Duty Land Tax changes are coming into effect 1st April, and purchasing a new home before this date can save you thousands of pounds

Sales surge amid stamp duty increase

As we approach the April stamp duty deadline for England and Northern Ireland, potential homebuyers face a critical decision: to purchase now, or later in the year. There is no denying the bountiful benefits of buying now, not least because the average length of time it takes to buy a home in the UK currently is approximately 12 to 16 weeks (although this can be shorter depending on circumstances).

This time frame takes you thereabouts to the stamp duty deadline at the beginning of April, which, once passed, can potentially cost first-time buyers, home movers, and investors or owners of more than one property thousands of additional pounds.

### WHAT IS STAMP DUTY AND WHAT DO THE UPCOMING CHANGES MEAN FOR YOU?

Stamp duty is the tax paid on property transactions, including the purchase of land or property. The price of the property and the buyer's situation, such as whether this is their first time buying or their second home, affect how much stamp duty you pay. HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) receives the tax, which is normally calculated as a percentage of the purchase price. There are occasionally exemptions or discounts from the standard stamp duty rates, which typically range from 0% to 12%.

### FIRST-TIME BUYERS

Currently, first-time buyers in England and Northern Ireland don't pay any stamp duty on homes priced up to £425,000. Starting from April, homes between £300,001 and £500,000 will incur a 5% stamp duty rate. This means that if the purchase price of your desired home is £350,000, from April you will pay £2,500 in stamp duty, because the 5% rate will be applied to the amount that is over the starting point of £300,001. 5% of £50,000 is £2,500.



# BUYERS AND SELLERS, ACT NOW

## HOME MOVERS

Currently, home movers don't pay any stamp duty on homes priced up to £250,000. However, starting from April, homes between £125,001 and £250,000 will incur a 2% stamp duty rate, and then a further 5% if the purchase price is above £250,000 up to £925,000. This means that if the purchase price of your desired home is £350,000, you currently pay £5,000 in stamp duty, but the cost after 31st March will be £7,500 in total, because it's the 2% rate between £125,000 and £250,000 (£2,500), plus the 5% rate over the starting point of £250,000 (£5,000).

## INVESTORS OR OWNERS OF MORE THAN ONE PROPERTY

Currently, investors or purchasers who own more than one property pay 5% stamp duty on homes priced from £0 to £250,000. Starting from April, however, that 5% will apply to homes between £0 and £125,000. This means that if the purchase price of your desired new home is £350,000, the current stamp duty is £22,500, but from April it's £25,000, because it's the 5% applied to houses up to £125,000, plus the further 7% to apply to homes

between £125,000 and £250,000, plus the further 10% to go above £250,000.

Considering the obvious significant cost savings and current market dynamics at play, acting now can position buyers extremely favourably amid a generally uncertain market.

Therefore, buying a new home sooner rather than later would maximise your investment and take advantage of current climate conditions, regardless of whether you're a first-time buyer or a home mover. Below are the many other reasons, aside from the financial savings, why buying now rather than later would be your best move:

## LESS COMPETITION

Since many people would rather wait until the spring, there are usually fewer buyers in the market in January. Because there will be less competition, there will be more chances to bargain over terms and price. Additionally, properties that have been listed for a longer period of time may be more open to accepting lower offers.

## NEW YEAR MOTIVATION

A lot of people begin the year with new objectives and hopes. January is a great month to start over if you are looking to make changes in your life, career, or family. Early in the year, sellers may feel pressured to sell quickly.

## FAVOURABLE MARKET CONDITIONS

Wintertime can bring lower property prices, particularly after Christmas. Since fewer people are looking for homes, some sellers might be more accommodating with their prices in order to close a deal before spring, when prices usually start to rise again.

## EASIER MOVING CONDITIONS

Moving in the winter can be less complicated logistically than moving in the spring or summer, especially when it comes to scheduling removals. In the off-season, moving companies are frequently more available and prices may be lower.

## SETTLING BEFORE SPRING

You have more time to get comfortable in your new house before the hectic spring market if you move early in the year. By avoiding the bustle of the customary peak moving season, you can spend the slower months getting to know your new neighbourhood and house.







# BEST UK SPA RETREATS FOR VALENTINE'S WEEKEND

For Valentine's Day, couples can unwind, reconnect, and escape from everyday stressors by booking a spa retreat. In contrast to traditional ideas, a spa break blends wellness and elegance to provide a uniquely rejuvenating experience. A spa's calm atmosphere encourages connection and peace, which is ideal for fortifying relationships.

Couples can strengthen their bond in a tranquil setting by taking advantage of shared activities like hydrotherapy pools, thermal rooms, and dual massages. Custom Valentine's Day packages with romantic touches like champagne, chocolates, and special treatments are available at many spas.

Furthermore, spa retreats offer comprehensive advantages for the mind and body. Couples can experience calming therapies and mindfulness training, which can leave them feeling refreshed and closer. It is a considerate technique to express love and caring because it places a strong emphasis on relaxing.

Spas are situated in beautiful locations, such as ancient towns, coastal resorts, or country estates. They also provide chances for couples to go to new places, which adds an adventurous touch to the romance. A spa retreat is the ideal Valentine's Day getaway since it combines luxury, peace, and cherished memories.



Our nation offers a variety of opulent spa resorts ideal for couples looking for romance and relaxation for a decadent Valentine's Day weekend

## TIPS FOR BOOKING

- Valentine's Day packages are in high demand, so make your reservation early.
- Look for extra romantic touches like chocolates, champagne, or upgraded accommodations.
- To improve your retreat, think about fusing spa services with regional activities like afternoon tea or strolls around the countryside.

Regardless of your preference for the allure of modern waterfront settings, rural getaways, or historic villages, these locations have something to offer every couple. Choose the ideal spa treatment for you and your significant other to turn your Valentine's Day weekend into a treasured memory.



## CARDEN PARK HOTEL AND SPA, CHESHIRE

A Twilight Spa Valentine's Evening is available at Carden Park, a beautiful location in the Cheshire countryside. Under the stars, couples can make use of interior thermal sensations including saunas, steam rooms, and outdoor hot tubs, as well as the award-winning Spa Garden. A nibbling platter for two at the on-site Elements Restaurant and a welcome glass of sparkling wine are included in the package. There are also options for overnight stays, which include breakfast and opulent accommodations. Each individual must pay £129 for the spa evening.

## CHAMPNEYS TRING, HERTFORDSHIRE

Champneys Tring offers peace and excellent facilities for a traditional spa vacation, which makes it perfect for couples. In addition to wellness programs and fine cuisine, their Valentine's Day packages offer full use of the hydro pools, steam rooms, and relaxation lounges. It is the ideal getaway from the bustle of everyday life, with comfortable accommodations and tranquil gardens for walks outside.

## THE GAINSBOROUGH BATH SPA, SOMERSET

This five-star spa hotel provides access to the area's well-known natural thermal springs and is situated in the centre of mediaeval Bath. Couple massages and thermal water bathing routines are among the restorative services offered by the Spa Village Bath. Enjoy upscale meals and opulent lodging to enhance your trip.

## RUDDING PARK HOTEL, HARROGATE

An award-winning spa with a rooftop spa garden, hydrotherapy infinity pool, and thermal cabins is combined with modern elegance at Ridding Park. Valentine's Day

packages are ideal for a wonderful weekend because they frequently include romantic dinners, champagne upon arrival, and access to the tranquil spa facilities.

## ST MICHAELS RESORT, CORNWALL

Falmouth's St. Michaels Resort provides a blend of leisure and natural beauty for couples looking for a beach getaway. The spa has outdoor hot tubs with a view of the sea, couples' treatment rooms, and hydrothermal amenities. Spa access, dinner with regional Cornish products, and optional romantic extras like champagne are all included in Valentine's Day packages.

## WHITTLEBURY HALL, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Whittlebury Hall is notable for its extensive spa offerings, which include relaxation areas, couples-specific treatment options, and heat and ice sensations. Typically, its Valentine's Day packages include spa treatments, romantic dinners, and overnight stays in classy accommodations.

## CARDIFF'S ST DAVID'S HOTEL AND SPA, WALES

This opulent hotel with a view of Cardiff Bay offers Valentine's spa packages that include thermal rooms, romantic meals at their restaurant, and relaxing treatments for those seeking a waterfront getaway. Couples find it to be a unique option because of the modern atmosphere and tranquil surroundings.

## MACDONALD BATH SPA HOTEL, SOMERSET

This ancient resort, which combines modern spa services with old-world elegance, is another great choice in Bath. Couples' treatments, elegant dining, and access to a peaceful outdoor pool area are frequently included in their Valentine's Day packages.





For a profitable garden and healthy plant growth, your soil must be ready for spring planting



# PREPARING YOUR GARDEN SOIL READY FOR SPRING

The basis for a successful garden and healthy plant growth is laid by preparing your soil for spring. Strong root development depends on adequate drainage, nutrient availability, and aeration, all of which are guaranteed by well-prepared soil. Early weed and pest removal lowers competition and stops the spread of disease.

By increasing water retention, microbial activity, and fertility, adding organic matter creates the ideal conditions for plant growth. You can prevent issues later in the season and guarantee that your plants can get the nutrients they require for a successful growing season by taking care of the pH and structure of the soil now.

## CLEAR DEBRIS

To begin, clear your garden beds of weeds, dead plants, and fallen leaves. By doing this, illnesses and pests are kept at bay during the winter.

## TEST AND AMEND THE SOIL

To determine the nutrient content and pH levels, use a soil testing kit. The majority of garden plants favour a pH between 6.0 and 7.0, which is slightly acidic to neutral. Adjust your soil as necessary. Add sulphur to lower the pH or lime to raise it. To increase fertility, add organic materials like compost or well-rotted manure.

## IMPROVE DRAINAGE

Use a tiller or garden fork to remove compacted soil. This improves aeration and water drainage, both of which are essential for root growth.

## MULCH AND COVER

Apply a layer of mulch or other organic material to control temperature, keep moisture in, and keep weeds at bay. It can break down into nutrients and preserve soil structure throughout the winter.

## PLAN CROP PLACEMENT

Crop rotation helps prevent the soil from losing certain nutrients. Plants with comparable demands should be grouped together.

Your garden will be prepared to flourish in the spring by following these procedures. Strong, robust plants and abundant yields throughout the growing season are guaranteed when preparation is done early.



# 2025 DÉCOR TRENDS FOR YOUR HOME

The 2025 home décor trends embrace a mix of comfort, sustainability, and individuality, making them perfect for refreshing your space with a modern yet personal touch

**T**his year's trends for home décor emphasise cosiness, uniqueness, and sustainability. Darker, moodier rooms with creative lighting add refinement, while earthy hues like terracotta and olive green predominate and create a warm environment. Bold patterns, complex textures, and carefully chosen, varied designs that tell individual tales are all hallmarks of the revival of maximalism.

Energy-efficient solutions and environmentally friendly materials are becoming commonplace, demonstrating the importance of sustainability. Wallpaper featuring scenic or heritage motifs, retro 70s-inspired features, and vivid colour schemes can add flair to rooms. These styles combine eco-consciousness, comfort, and creativity to create incredibly personal and useful havens in homes.

**CURVES AND SOFTNESS:** Curved sofas and scalloped rugs are examples of furniture with organic curves and rounded edges that are becoming more and more fashionable. These components soften areas and produce a warm, welcoming ambiance.

**EARTHY TONES AND MOODY INTERIORS:** Cooler greys are giving way to warmer hues like ochre, olive green and terracotta, which provide a cosy and grounded atmosphere. Interiors gain depth and elegance from darker, moodier areas that are accentuated with imaginative lighting.

**MAXIMALISM AND ECLECTIC DESIGNS:** 2025 sees a shift away from minimalism and towards complex textures and vivid, striking patterns. This method uses carefully chosen, poignant pieces to showcase individual tales.

**SUSTAINABILITY AND ECO-FRIENDLINESS:** The increasing emphasis on sustainable living is reflected in the use of solar panels, energy-efficient lighting, and repurposed materials in design.

**BOLD COLOURS AND WALLPAPER INNOVATIONS:** Bright colours like "True Joy," Dulux's Colour of the Year, and wallpaper in unusual places like ceilings give any space flair and originality.

These patterns show a move towards areas that are both practical and intensely private, promoting individuality and environmentally friendly decisions. Explore these concepts to turn your house into a sanctuary that combines design and purpose.



# FITNESS GOALS AT HOME WITHOUT A GYM MEMBERSHIP

It is completely possible to reach your fitness objectives at home without a gym membership if you have the appropriate mindset, self-control, and resources

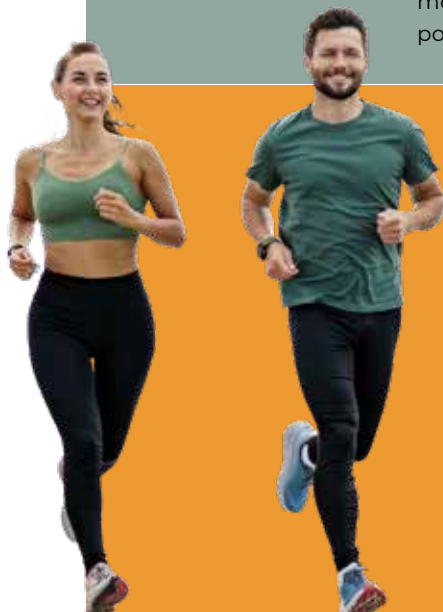
**J**anuary is traditionally the month when new gym memberships are in abundance. However, a home-based routine offers flexibility and cost savings regardless of your workout goals, be they weight loss, strength growth, or general fitness. Here are some tips to help you succeed:

## DEFINE YOUR FITNESS GOALS

Establish specific, quantifiable goals first. Are you trying to get healthier overall, gain muscle, increase flexibility, or lose weight? It is easier to stay focused and monitor progress when these goals are broken down into smaller, more manageable steps, such as learning how to perform push-ups or reducing a specific amount of weight each month.

## CREATE A DEDICATED SPACE

Although a complete gym is not necessary, having a specific space for training might improve regularity. Find a space in your house where you can walk around freely and stretch. Make sure there is enough lighting, adequate ventilation, and, if at all feasible, a motivational element such as posters or a mirror.



## LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

By scheduling rest days and keeping an eye out for symptoms of exhaustion or injury, you may prevent overtraining. In order to ensure long-lasting success, recovery is just as crucial as training.

## EXPLORE ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES

Formal workouts are not the only way to be fit. Playing with kids, cleaning, or gardening

can all increase movement and burn calories. You can reach your fitness objectives without ever entering a gym by using these techniques. Home workouts are a great choice for people with hectic schedules or limited funds since they provide flexibility and control. Your home can become the ideal setting for achieving your fitness and health goals if you are consistent, have the correct attitude, and plan ahead.



### INVEST IN BASIC EQUIPMENT

Numerous exercises can be completed with little financial outlay. A yoga mat for stability and cushioning is one useful equipment. Strength training with resistance bands.

- Kettlebells or dumbbells with movable weights.
  - Cardio via skipping rope.
  - For step-ups and dips, use a step bench or other strong furniture.
- These are space-saving, affordable, and multipurpose tools.

### USE YOUR BODYWEIGHT

Exercises using body weight are very efficient and do not require any special equipment. One example of a well-rounded practice would be push-ups (core, arms, and chest).

- Lunges (legs and glutes) and squats.
  - Variations in planks (core stability).
  - Burpees: full-body strength and cardio exercises.
  - Climbers of mountains (core and heart).
- Progress is essential; as you get better, try harder variations or increase the number of repetitions.

### INCORPORATE CARDIO WORKOUTS

Cardio is vital for burning calories and maintaining heart health. You can:

- Watch HIIT (High-Intensity Interval Training) classes online at home.
- Dance to your preferred song.
- For a high-intensity cardio workout, use a skipping rope.
- On the spot, walk or run at different intensities.

### MAKE USE OF ONLINE RESOURCES

Numerous paid and free tools are available online to help you with your at-home workouts. Videos on yoga, pilates, strength training, and aerobic exercises can be found on websites such as YouTube. As an alternative, structured planning and tracking features are offered by fitness applications like MyFitnessPal and Nike Training Club.

### BUILD A ROUTINE

Maintaining consistency is essential. Set aside particular hours each day for your workouts to create a pattern. Three to four days of strength training to gain muscle could be part of a well-rounded weekly routine.

- Cardio for two to three days to increase endurance.
- One to two days of stretching or yoga to improve flexibility and recuperation.
- This diversity keeps things interesting and focusses on various fitness facets.

### FOCUS ON NUTRITION

Reaching fitness goals requires more than just exercise; proper diet is essential. Eat a balanced diet that includes lean proteins (such as eggs, poultry, and tofu) to help heal your muscles.

- Energy-dense complex carbs (such as sweet potatoes and healthy grains).
- Nuts and avocados are good sources of healthy fats for general health.
- Vegetables and fruits for minerals and vitamins.
- Drink lots of water throughout the day to stay hydrated.

### TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

Keeping track of your accomplishments keeps you inspired. Utilise a fitness app or journal to note:

- Body dimensions and weight.
- Strengthening benchmarks (e.g., increasing push-ups, lifting heavier weights).
- Increases in endurance, such as longer training sessions.
- To keep the enthusiasm going, acknowledge little victories.

### STAY MOTIVATED

Finding ways to stay motivated when working out at home might be isolating.

- Work out in person or virtually with a pal.
- Participate in online fitness communities to find motivation and support.
- Establish little incentives for achieving goals, like purchasing new exercise equipment.

### OVERCOME CHALLENGES

Distractions, a lack of motivation, and boredom are typical barriers. To address these:

- To keep your regimen interesting, switch things up.
- Listen to upbeat music or watch live exercise classes.
- Set limits with family members when it comes to exercise.





# TV SHOWS STREAMING THIS MONTH

January promises to be another thrilling month for home streaming, with the newest TV series being released for home streaming



## MISSING YOU

Harlan Coben's gripping Netflix series *Missing You* revolves around Rosalind Eleazar's character, Detective Kat Donovan. Kat finds her fiancé Josh's (Ashley Walters) profile on a dating app eleven years after he abruptly vanished. This startling discovery draws her into an investigation that reveals long-forgotten secrets and reopens the unsolved death of her father. Suspense, emotional turns, and a parallel storyline of betrayal and love are all interwoven in this story. The series, which is set in Manchester and the North West of England.

***Missing You* premieres 1st January on Netflix**

## AMERICAN PRIMEVAL

The brutal six-part Netflix limited series *American Primeval* will offer a realistic portrayal of life on the American frontier in the 1850s. The narrative centres on Isaac (played by Taylor Kitsch), a man tormented by his past who is trying to find atonement amid the hardships of wilderness survival. Violent cultural conflicts, theological tensions, and the hardships of different groups—such as Mormon settlers, trappers, and Native American factions—against the unforgiving frontier are all explored in the series.

***American Primeval* premieres 9th January on Netflix**

## PARADISE

*Paradise*, which is set in a beautiful, private enclave for the world's elite, reveals the dark secrets hidden behind its peaceful exterior. The narrative turns into a high-stakes inquiry when a startling murder upends the tranquilly, and a Secret Service agent finds himself at the centre of the intrigue. This drama, which stars James Marsden and Sterling K. Brown, examines truth, deceit, and power. Dan Fogelman's *Paradise* combines emotional depth with suspense.

***Paradise* premieres 28th January on Disney +**



# MOVIES TO SEE AT THE CINEMA

Several incredible films will be released in January that cater to all tastes



## NOSFERATU (horror, fantasy)

The classic silent horror movie from 1922 is reimaged in Robert Eggers' 2025 remake of Nosferatu. The plot, which takes place in Germany in the 19th century, is centred on a tormented young woman and the evil Transylvanian vampire who falls dangerously in love with her. In its aftermath, this obsession unleashes terror and destruction.

**In UK cinemas from 1st January**

## BABYGIRL (erotic thriller)

Nicole Kidman plays Romy in Babygirl, a powerful CEO whose tightly controlled life falls apart when she starts a passionate relationship with her much younger intern, Samuel (Harris Dickinson). Her family and profession are in jeopardy as the relationship devolves into a perilous game of desire, control, and self-destruction.

**In UK cinemas from 10th January**

## HERE (drama)

Adapted from Richard McGuire's graphic novel, Robert Zemeckis' film Here is a singular investigation of time and memory. It focusses on a single place in New England and chronicles the lives of its residents across several generations. Using cutting-edge cinematic methods, the film traverses the past, present, and future while fusing intense moments of love, grief, and connection.

**In UK cinemas from 17th January**

## PRESENCE (horror thriller)

Steven Soderbergh's suspenseful horror-thriller Presence explores a mystery supernatural presence that haunts a suburban home. The film explores the eerie interplay of psychological dread, suspense, and solitude, with a cast lead by Chris Sullivan, Julia Fox, and Lucy Liu. Soderbergh, who is renowned for his skill at telling compelling stories.

**In UK cinemas from 24th January**



# WINTER ROOT VEGETABLE SOUP

A warming soup perfect for cold days, this recipe highlights carrots, parsnips, and leeks, all in season during January.  
**Serves: 4**

## INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp olive oil  
1 large onion, chopped  
2 leeks, washed and sliced  
3 medium carrots, peeled and chopped  
2 parsnips, peeled and chopped  
2 medium potatoes, peeled and cubed  
1.2 litres vegetable stock  
1 tsp dried thyme  
Salt and black pepper to taste

## METHOD

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and leeks, cooking until softened.  
Stir in the carrots, parsnips, and potatoes.  
Cook for 5 minutes.  
Add the stock and thyme. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 25–30 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender.  
Blend the soup until smooth using a hand blender or in batches with a jug blender.  
Season with salt and pepper to taste.  
Serve with crusty bread.



## METHOD

Preheat your oven to 200°C (180°C fan/gas mark 6).

Toss the cauliflower and chickpeas with olive oil, smoked paprika, cumin, salt, and pepper. Spread on a baking tray and roast for 25–30 minutes, turning halfway through.

In a small bowl, mix the lemon juice, tahini, and honey to make a dressing. Add a little water to thin.

Arrange the salad leaves on a platter, top with the roasted cauliflower and chickpeas, and drizzle with the dressing.





## ROASTED CAULIFLOWER AND CHICKPEA SALAD

### INGREDIENTS

1 medium cauliflower, cut into florets  
 1 tin (400g) chickpeas, drained and rinsed  
 2 tbsp olive oil  
 1 tsp smoked paprika  
 1 tsp ground cumin  
 Salt and black pepper to taste  
 100g mixed salad leaves  
 Juice of 1 lemon  
 1 tbsp tahini  
 1 tbsp honey

## APPLE AND RHUBARB CRUMBLE

Rhubarb comes into season in January, and when paired with apples, it creates a classic British dessert.

**Serves: 4**



### INGREDIENTS

300g rhubarb, chopped  
 300g cooking apples, peeled and sliced  
 100g granulated sugar  
 1 tbsp plain flour  
 For the Crumble Topping:  
 150g plain flour  
 100g butter, cubed  
 75g demerara sugar

### METHOD

Preheat your oven to 190°C (170°C fan/gas mark 5).

Toss the rhubarb and apples with the sugar and plain flour. Place in a baking dish.

Rub the butter into the flour until it resembles breadcrumbs. Stir in the demerara sugar.

Sprinkle the crumble topping over the fruit and bake for 35–40 minutes, until golden and bubbling. Serve with custard or cream.

# SNOOKER MASTERS

The Johnstone's Paint-sponsored 2025 Snooker Masters will be held at London's Alexandra Palace from January 12–19



The top 16 players in the world will compete in a single-elimination format for the prized Paul Hunter Trophy in this esteemed invitational competition. Up until the final, which will be a best-of-19 matchup, matches will be best-of-11 frames.

Ronnie O'Sullivan, who defeated Ali Carter 10–7 in 2024 to win his eighth Masters championship, comes in as the reigning champion. The beloved O'Sullivan will try to continue holding the title of most successful player in Masters history. Along with strong competitors like Judd Trump and Selby, current world champion Kyren Wilson, who is ranked second, will also want to leave his imprint.

There will be exciting fights at the event, and O'Sullivan's form will be a hot topic. His unmatched skill and mental toughness are

highlighted by his continued domination at the age of 49. Wilson and Zhao Xintong, two younger talents, might try to upend the status quo and give the rivalry an unforeseen edge.

Alexandra Palace serves as the tournament's renowned backdrop as always, creating an electrifying environment for snooker fans. Live coverage of the action is available to fans on the BBC, Eurosport, and streaming services like Discovery+.

The Masters is a highlight of the calendar as the snooker season heats up, offering top-tier competition and life-changing experiences. The setting is set for another exciting chapter in Masters history, regardless of whether O'Sullivan continues to rule or a new champion steps forward.





# TENNIS AUSTRALIAN OPEN

## 2025 PREVIEW

Melbourne Park will be the scene of thrilling action during the 2025 Australian Open, which takes place for January 12-16

**B**oth the men's and women's draws are expected to feature intense rivalries and exciting players.

Jannik Sinner, who won the event last year, is the defending champion and world number one in the men's singles division. He will have stiff opposition from well-known opponents like Daniil Medvedev, Novak Djokovic, and Carlos Alcaraz. Alcaraz hopes to win his first Australian Open after having an incredible 2024 season that included Grand Slam wins at Wimbledon and Roland Garros. Ten-time Melbourne winner

Djokovic is still a strong player and is vying for an 11th crown.

Aryna Sabalenka is the leading candidate in the women's singles, looking to win the Australian Open for the third time in a row following her recent victories. The dependable world number two, Iga Świątek, will try to surpass her best performance in Melbourne, which was a 2022 semi-final finish. Together with former champions like Naomi Osaka and Elena Rybakina, up-and-coming talents like Coco Gauff and Zheng Qinwen provide the competition substance.

With high expectations for impressive achievements in the year's first Grand Slam, British fans will be watching the development of players like Emma Raducanu and Cameron Norrie.

The Australian Open continues to be a fantastic tennis arena, setting the tone for another exciting season with its fast-paced hard courts and lively atmosphere. Live coverage of the matches will be available in the UK on Eurosport and Discovery+.



Melbourne House, Bailey Street, Castle Acre

OIRO £535,000



Recently sympathetically refurbished throughout to a high standard, retaining many features providing a character finish. The property has much to offer with three double bedrooms, kitchen/dining room, utility room, ground floor shower room, bathroom, garden, parking and double glazing. CHAIN FREE!

SWAFFHAM - 01760 721389 - [info@longsons.co.uk](mailto:info@longsons.co.uk)



Swaffham - 01760 721389

Watton - 01953 883474

CALL US TODAY FOR A FREE NO OBLIGATION VALUATION

## Chantry Lane, Necton, Swaffham

OIRO £550,000



WOW! Stunning, detached four/three bedroom character cottage, situated in the sought after village of Necton. This superb property has undergone a recent extensive refurbishment. The property boasts a triple garage and a double garage, kitchen/family room, two reception rooms, and so much more...

SWAFFHAM - 01760 721389 - [info@longsons.co.uk](mailto:info@longsons.co.uk)

## Glebe House, Hillside, North Pickenham, Swaffham

Offers Over £750,000



Absolutely fantastic, three story detached five bedroom period property situated in the Norfolk village of North Pickenham. This superb property boasts three reception rooms, log burner, garage, gardens, parking and much more. Viewing highly recommended to fully appreciate. Available CHAIN FREE!

SWAFFHAM - 01760 721389 - [info@longsons.co.uk](mailto:info@longsons.co.uk)



School Road, Necton, Swaffham

Guide Price £525,000 to £550,000



Spacious, detached well presented four bedroom bungalow set within generous grounds approaching approximately half an acre (subject to survey). Two reception rooms, log burning stove, utility room, garage, workshop, gardens, parking.

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Ketts Hill, Necton, Swaffham

£525,000



CHAIN FREE!

Detached character cottage situated in the well serviced, popular village of Necton. This superb property oozes character, with en-suite, utility room, ground floor shower room, luxury bathroom, large double garage, gardens with covered seating area, parking for several vehicles!

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Swaffham - 01760 721389

Watton - 01953 883474

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## Back Lane, Castle Acre, Kings Lynn

**£600,000**



Extremely well presented detached four bedroom house situated in the sought after historic Norfolk village of Castle Acre. This superb property boasts lounge with multi-fuel burning stove and study area, modern conservatory with glass roof and en-suite shower room. Viewing highly recommended.

SWAFFHAM - 01760 721389 - [info@longsons.co.uk](mailto:info@longsons.co.uk)

## Church Road, Ovington, Thetford

**OIRO £725,000**



Georgian style detached four bedroom house situated centrally to a half acre plot (STMS) in the popular village of Ovington. The property boasts three receptions including garden room, beautifully fitted kitchen/breakfast room, utility, en-suite, well maintained gardens, garage parking and much more!

WATTON - 01953 883474 - [info@longsons.co.uk](mailto:info@longsons.co.uk)



Dereham Road, Watton, Thetford

Guide Price £700,000 - £735,000



Longsons are delighted to present this beautifully presented 3/4 bedroom detached house located in the popular town of watton. The property boasts approx 2500 sq ft living accommodation, lounge with multi fuel burner, kitchen, dining room/family room, ground floor shower room and much more.

WATTON - 01953 883474 - info@longsons.co.uk

Richmond Road, Saham Toney, Thetford

£350,000



Well presented, detached three bedroom bungalow, situated in the popular village of Saham Toney. The property has much to offer, including garage, utility room, garden room, garden office/studio, gardens, parking and UPVC double glazing. Viewing highly recommended.

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Dereham Road, Watton, Thetford

£725,000



Absolutely stunning! Individual, spacious, detached five bedroom chalet-style house situated just on the outskirts of Watton. This superb property has been finished to a high standard throughout and has plenty to offer including two en-suites, vaulted ceilings, double garage and much much more!

WATTON - 01953 883474 - [info@longsons.co.uk](mailto:info@longsons.co.uk)

Swaffham | Watton

# MEET OUR TEAM...



**Gary Long**  
Director

01760 721389  
gary@longsons.co.uk



**Kevin Wilson**  
Director

01760 721389  
kevin@longsons.co.uk



**Kyle Clarke**  
Manager

01760 721389  
kyle@longsons.co.uk



**Imogen Walker**  
Senior Negotiator

01760 721389  
imogen@longsons.co.uk



**Chloe Hardy**  
Junior Negotiator

01760 721389  
chloe@longsons.co.uk



**Larry Faircloth**  
Senior Lettings Advisor

01760 721389  
larry@longsons.co.uk



Swaffham - 01760 721389

Watton - 01953 883474

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**Kerrie Blowers**  
Administrator

01760 721389  
kerrie@longsons.co.uk



**Sharon Pascoe**  
Lettings Administrator

01760 721389  
sharon@longsons.co.uk



**Amber Wilson**  
Digital Marketing

01760 721389  
amber@longsons.co.uk



**Luisa McGowan**  
Office Administration

01953 883474  
luisa@longsons.co.uk



**Andrew Wilton**  
Valuer

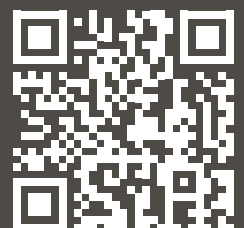
01953 883474  
01760 721389  
andrew@longsons.co.uk



**Ryan Herring**  
Sales Negotiator

01953 883474  
ryan@longsons.co.uk

HOW MUCH  
**IS MY**  
PROPERTY  
WORTH?



# Present your house for sale by de-cluttering...

Maximise your home's potential and create spacious rooms enticing potential buyers – simply by de-cluttering!

“ De-cluttering allows you to... maximise your space, emotionally prepare you to move, and will allow you to focus your buyers on what is important ”

If you are looking to sell your house, or have had your home on the market for a while now, then you probably want to get the maximum sale price in the quickest time. There are a few things you can't control – but the one thing that is in your control, is the look and feel of the interior and exterior.

While it's worth spending time fixing and cleaning your house before potential buyers come and view, it's also important to de-clutter. This creates spacious rooms and also allows you to decrease and organise your personal items before you move yourself. Of course it's understandable that you don't want to spend money, time and energy on a home you are about to leave, however, a lot of people are looking for a house in which they can move straight into. Maintaining your

property might even save you thousands of pounds; it could even reduce added expenses of living in your home whilst waiting for a sale. And it might even help avoid possible reductions in the asking price.

The main reason in which people move house tends to be because they lack space in their current home. They want a home that is spacious and in which they can grow into. If a potential viewer comes to your home and sees that there is lack of space, then this will turn them away.

De-cluttering allows you to remove any unnecessary items in an untidy or overcrowded place. It will help maximise your space, emotionally prepare you to move, and will allow you to focus your buyers on what is important.





## SO WHERE SHOULD YOU START?

You need to create a great first impression and focus on the rooms themselves. You will notice that the first things you see in each room are personal items. Where possible you want to create the look of a

them into things you want to keep and things you want to get rid of. You may even find that you have collected a cupboard full of paper work. Get yourself organised! Don't just throw it all away, but file it and go through it thoroughly. This will also make it easier when you move.

De-personalising can also be a great way to de-clutter. Too many personal effects can be distracting to buyers. They want to see a house in which they can make their own memories rather than seeing yours. Again, personal items can be stored away. Remember

“ Where possible you want to create the look of a lifestyle that the potential buyers want ”

lifestyle that the potential buyer want. This usually has a 'show home' feel, rather than a 'lived in' feel. Minimising your things is the quickest way to do this: you want to ensure that potential buyers can do simple things, like, open any doors easily, ensuring that there are no obstacles.

So, what do we mean by clutter? There are two types: genuine clutter, and items that you want to keep but don't work for the sale of your property.

### GENUINE CLUTTER:

You need to go through the space and sort out each item, categorising

You also want to focus on little things like DVDs, books and trinkets. These items may have some small value so sell them or donate them to charity. Get rid of any old shoes and coats that are lying about in your porch or hallway. You might want to hide away the coats and shoes you do currently wear. Store them in your wardrobe while you have viewings.

### ITEMS THAT YOU WANT TO KEEP BUT DON'T WORK FOR THE SALE OF YOUR PROPERTY:

You may want to consider putting some items in storage while you sell your home. Sometimes items are too large or even too small for some spaces and can make the room look odd. If you want to keep these particular items, then store them until you move into your new home.

that this is only a temporary way of living and hopefully it won't be for long! If you find you are keeping more things than you are throwing out, then think about whether or not it's in the right room or do you even need it now?

As previously mentioned, you can attempt to sell some of the things you have acquired over the years. Use sites like eBay, Gumtree and social networking sites to try and sell items. You may want to even hold a house sale for the remaining items that you can't sell. Failing that, why not donate to charity.

The end goal is still the same and it's important to help potential buyers envision your house as theirs. So remember, de-cluttering will make your home more spacious and entice potential buyers!

# Top Tips!



If you are throwing away paperwork, shred anything that is confidential



De-clutter before agents come and take photos of your property. This will help attract more potential viewers online and get that first good impression



Don't spend too long on certain items and don't get distracted. Keep yourself motivated and race against the clock!



Make it fun! Play some music or watch TV while you de-clutter





# Your step-by-step guide to the conveyancing process

Once a sale has been agreed and is in the hands of your solicitor, it will go through the following stages. Sometimes additional work will be needed – for example, if the property is leasehold or is yet to be registered with the Land Registry. It is also important for buyers to discuss the availability of their deposit with their solicitor early in the transaction, and we strongly recommend that you contact your solicitor regularly so that they can keep you fully up-to-date with the progress and the latest timescales.

## Seller's solicitor's steps

- Obtain a copy of the Title Deeds (or office copies if the title is registered)
- Obtain a copy of the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) (if applicable)
- The seller(s) will return a completed Property Information Form and a Fixtures, Fittings and Contents Form to the solicitors
- Copies of the above documents, plus a draft contract – this is known as an 'Information Pack' – will be sent to the buyer's solicitor
- Answer the buyer's solicitor's additional enquiries (for example, specific questions about fixtures and fittings) and obtain copies of any planning consent documents
- Agree the contract and arrange for the sellers to sign it in readiness of the exchange (below)
- All parties agree completion dates and the contracts are exchanged

## Between exchange and completion

- Obtain redemption figures from the mortgage lender and reply to requisitions on title
- Approve the transfer and arrange for the seller(s) and buyer(s) to sign
- Receive the agent's fee account and seek the seller's consent to settle this out of completion funds

## Completion date

This is the date the ownership of the property passes from the seller to the buyer, and it follows the successful transfer of funds. It's the date that the whole process works towards.

## Upon completion

- Receive completion funds and (only when this has been completed) instruct your estate agent to release the keys to buyers. Redeem mortgage and forward the financial statement. Forward any surplus funds (unless these are being used to fund an onward purchase). Ensure all outstanding bills are paid
- Forward transfer documents and deeds to the buyer's solicitors
- Forward evidence of 'discharge of mortgage' to the buyer's solicitors



## Buyer's solicitor's steps

- Obtain the Information Pack, including a copy of the EPC (if applicable) from the sellers' solicitor and raise any additional queries
- Initiate any specialist searches (for example: a coal search). Submit local, environmental and water searches and a chancel check. This takes about 10 working days in total, and enquiries are then usually raised from the results
- Approve the contract when all enquiries are satisfactory and complete. (At this stage, a mortgage transfer deed will need to be signed and witnessed)
- Receive a mortgage offer and instructions from the lender and deal with any conditions set out by them. Make sure that life cover and buildings insurance is being arranged
- Request the deposit, report back to the buyer, and arrange for the contract to be signed. Place buildings insurance and life cover in force
- All parties agree completion dates and the contracts are exchanged

## Between exchange and completion

- Raise 'requisitions on title' and prepare the draft transfer deed
- Report on title to mortgage lender and obtain funds for completion, including Stamp Duty (if appropriate)
- Prepare accounts, obtain signature to mortgage deed and undertake final Land Registry and Land Charges searches

## Completion date

This is the date the ownership of the property passes from the seller to the buyer, and it follows the successful transfer of funds. It's the date that the whole process works towards.

## Upon completion

- Forward to the seller's solicitors the balance of funds – it is only then that they can authorise the release of the keys. Receive from the seller's solicitors, the transfer document deeds
- Stamp the Transfer Deed, register the buyer's ownership with the Land Registry and forward the deeds to the lender or client (where appropriate)

**Contract** - The agreement that sets out the main terms that have been agreed – for example: price, address, names, etc. Two copies are drawn up, and each party signs one in readiness for the exchange of contracts.

**Deposit** - The part of the purchase price (usually 10%) which the buyer pays on exchange of contracts.

**Exchange of contracts** - The swapping of signed contracts by the solicitors (together with the buyer's deposit). After this, the contract is binding.

**Energy Performance Certificate** - This contains information on energy use, energy performance, carbon dioxide emissions, and fuel bills.

**Land Registry** - The Government department that records who owns what land, and under what conditions.

**Local Authority Search** - A list of questions that are specific to the property and intended, for example, to discover if there have been any planning applications on the property, if the road to the house is maintained by the council, etc.

**Mortgage Redemption Figure** - The amount required to repay the outstanding capital/ interest of a mortgage.

**Property information form/fixtures, fittings and contents form** - Standard forms about the property that the seller answers for their solicitor (for example: what will be left behind, details of guarantees, etc.)

**Title Deeds** - Legal documents that prove ownership of land/buildings, and the terms on which they are owned.

**Transfer of Title** - The document that passes the ownership from the seller to the buyer.

**Stamp Duty for buy to let investors and second home owners** - An additional tax, paid by the buyer purchasing an additional property that is not their main residence. It includes buy to let landlords and those buying second homes and holiday homes. The higher rates will be 3 percentage points above the current rates of duty shown below.

**Requisition on title** - An enquiry relating to the completion arrangements.

**Seller's Pack** - This comprises a Property Information Form, a Fixtures, Fittings and Contents Form, a copy of the title deeds and the draft contract.

**Stamp Duty** – Currently, the Stamp Duty threshold for residential properties is £250,000. For first-time buyers you can claim a discount and won't pay Stamp Duty up to £425,000 on the purchase price and after that you will pay only 5% between £425,001 to £625,000.

However, how much you pay is also dependent on whether you already own another property or if you're a non-UK resident.



# Moving house?

From meter readings to removal companies, there's so much to remember when moving house. Here's our checklist of what to do and when

**F**irst of all, congratulations on your new home! The excitement has probably now kicked in but moving home can also be one of the most stressful and emotionally draining things you can do. However, careful organisation and planning can help decrease the stress and anxiety of moving. This comprehensive and essential checklist will help you do just that.

## Eight weeks - Research

Ideally, you want to start packing away any non-essential items as early as possible. This includes any items stored away in the loft, garage and shed. If you are not using it, pack it. Looking into your new area is also important, try to do this around eight weeks before you move. You might need to think about transferring your children to different schools and ordering new uniforms too. At this point, ensure you are also documenting all your important information away: that includes contact details, dates, contracts and information regarding your solicitor.

## Six weeks - Removal companies or do it yourself?

Now would be the perfect time to decide on a local removal company. Or if you don't have too much to move, you may want to do it yourself. You could even look into different van hire companies. At this point you've probably started packing away some bits, but if there is anything you decide not to take, then look into selling these items or donating them to charity. This will also give you an idea on the volume of items you have to move.

## Four weeks - Notify utility companies

This would be a good time for you to notify utility companies and inform them about your move to switch over. This includes gas and electricity, council tax, internet, phone rental and TV. You should also consider changing any car insurance, tax, memberships, phone contracts and inform your bank about the move. Now's the time to also arrange a date to have your new house cleaned before you move





“ It will be worth packing a night bag each to help everyone settle in, which means you won't have to rummage through everything to find your toothbrush! ”

in, and start ordering any new furnishings for your new property. Start packing away more items, that being, out of season clothes, books, DVDs and even bulky items, like TVs that aren't used often.

### Two weeks - Confirm all details

Confirm your move with your removal company or van hire, estate agents and schools. If possible, try to organise someone to look after your pets and children for the day of your move, as this can also be a stressful time for them too. If your removal company doesn't disassemble any furniture or sort out the un-plumbing for the washing machine, then now would be the ideal time to organise these. Remember to also cancel any local services you receive: this could be window cleaners, gardeners and newspaper deliveries. You should now also think about re-registering to vote and getting your post re-directed after your moving date. Continue packing away more furnishings, kitchen appliances and crockery that you won't be using for the next couple of weeks.

### 24 hours - Final check and walk round

You now have only 24 hours before you move, so double check that everything is packed away and ready for transit. It will be worth packing a night bag each to help everyone settle in, which means you won't have to rummage through everything to find your toothbrush! You may want to create an inventory of your boxes and

furniture to help you keep track of what you have and to help you ensure it doesn't go missing.

### Moving day

Today is the day! You need to be ready for when your removal company comes. Ensure that you let them know if there are any fragile boxes that need extra care when handling. If you're moving yourself, then pack up your car or van and work out how many trips it may take. Before you leave, also take note of your final meter readings and send these off to your provider. Don't forget to leave your keys for the new owners!

### You have arrived at your new home!

Give your removal company instructions of which boxes go in which rooms and make sure you are happy with everything that has arrived. Ensure you check for any damage before the movers leave. Read your new utility meters and send your readings off to your supplier. Taking photos of them will also ensure you have the correct reading if you need them again in the future. Unpack your essentials such as bed linen and clean towels. Don't worry about the rest, it isn't going anywhere! Order a takeaway, have a cup of tea and enjoy your first night with your family.

Right, so now you're all moved in, it's time to settle down, unpack and enjoy your new place. Remember, planning is essential to ensure your move runs stress free.

## Checklist

### Eight weeks

- Pack non-essential items
- Research your new area (transfer schools and order new uniform)
- Keep all important documents

### Six weeks

- Decide on a local removal company
- Clear out any unwanted items
- Keep packing

### Four weeks

- Notify utility companies
- Start preparation for your new house
- Keep packing

### Two weeks

- Finalise all details
- Organise pet and child care
- Cancel local services
- Keep packing

### 24 hours

- Check every room and ensure everything is packed
- Pack a night bag so everything is to hand
- Collect your new keys
- Make sure your phone is fully charged so you can get in touch with the estate agents or removal company

### Moving in

- Prepare for the arrival of the removal company and give them directions/ your contact details
- Ensure everything is ready to move
- Record meter readings

### On arrival

- Give removal company instructions of what goes where
- Check for any damage before they leave
- Read your new utility meters and send them off to your supplier
- Check if the previous owners have left anything behind
- Unpack essentials
- Order a takeaway and sit back and relax!



Want to treat yourself to a proper removal company for your next move or are you prepared to do it yourself?

# Removal company or brave it yourself?

**Y**ou're excited about your new home and location but the process of packing, organising and actually moving all of your items is something no one really ever looks forward to. Not only that but you also have to contact utility companies, maintain a job, keep your children happy and clean your entire house. You do have super powers, right?

## Removal companies

Unless you live in a small property or flat, it could be worth hiring a professional removal company to help relieve some of the stress on the day. They have many skills and experience and some of the services they can provide include packing and

unpacking, dismantling and assembling furniture, loading your belongings quickly and securely, including those fragile and specialist items. They can even supply you with packing materials.

Hiring a removal company will also allow you the time to collect the keys to your new home. You also won't have to worry about the exhausting physical side of things, that being carrying boxes back and forth. Some services are great if you don't have much time to plan and get these done yourself; however these do often come at a premium and may not be suitable for those on a budget. When choosing a removal company

You also won't have to worry about the exhausting physical side of things, that being carrying boxes back and forth





it's key to look at those which have good recommendations and reviews, as you need a company you can rely on. You can use comparison sites, such as [comparemymove.com](http://comparemymove.com) and [reallymoving.com](http://reallymoving.com), to help find you the best deals.

### Getting quotes

You should aim to get at least three quotes from removal companies, preferably from firms which will come out to your property rather than those who just estimate the cost over the phone, as you don't want any nasty charges later on. Plus it will give the company an accurate idea of any restricted areas in your home, if they can park a van or lorry, and how many

items you have. You should also ask for the price to be broken down so you can see just how much you are paying for when it comes to certain aspects like insurance, packing, an hourly rate, mileage and any storage costs.

Once you have found a removal company, it can be useful to send them a briefing sheet that includes information about any items which need to be specially packed, any difficult or large items, plus any carpets and curtains which need moving. Finally, it can also be helpful to send them a floor plan of the new property so they can unload efficiently.

## Top tips for packing

When packing, ensure you don't overload your boxes with heavy items, as these will be difficult to lift and could cause a back injury.

Fill any empty gaps using old newspaper, clothing, socks or even tea towels. This will help secure any items when they are being moved.

Create an inventory and label all your boxes and write the contents on each box with a marker. That way you will know which room each box is to go in. And if you are super organised, you could even colour code each room!

Pack heavier boxes on the bottom. This might seem like common sense but it will ensure that any of your fragile items won't break.

Pack a survival box. These are the things that you will need first and should include paper towels, bin bags, cutlery, the kettle, some mugs, tea, coffee, milk, sugar and finally, some toilet paper!



HOW MUCH  
IS YOUR  
*property worth?*



The property market is thriving, and your home could be worth more than you think! Whether you're just curious or considering selling, now is the perfect time to uncover your property's true value. Our local experts offer free, no-obligation valuations to help you make confident decisions about your next steps.

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