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Thursday, April 23, 2020 Editor Madeleine Lyons. Phone 01-6758000 email property@irishtimes.com

10 ways to prepare now for a home move

While plans to buy or sell may be on hold due to coronavirus, there are practical steps you can take that will help when the time comes

**Alanna
Gallagher**

If you're planning a home move, is it possible to progress the search and possibly get a property over the line under the current restrictions?

Those who planned to move before Covid-19 will most likely still have the same plans, and while the market may be paused people can take advantage of the free time to get market-ready. Trevor Grant, of mortgage firm Affinity Advisors and chairman of the Association of Irish Mortgage Advisors (AIMA), has seen mortgage applications completed in half the time it typically takes, down from four weeks to two weeks.

For anyone hoping to buy or sell, what can you do during lockdown to get your house in order?

Sellers

1 Get your documents in ready

Start by establishing where the deeds to the property are, says Rena O'Kelly, director at SherryFitzGerald. Talk to the bank to try to locate them, she says. "This will avoid any pitfalls to closing the sale and getting contracts signed."

If work has been done to the house, you need to be able to provide certificates of compliance for said works, she says. "If these are not in your possession then chase the builder or architect for them."

If you can't find the documents then you're going to need an architect, structural engineer or building surveyor to come view the works and, hopefully, sign off saying they comply.

You will also need to get an up-to-date Building Energy Rating (BER) certificate. These services are delayed in the current environment as they are deemed non-essential. scsi.ie; riai.ie; istructe.ie

2 Tackle the house

With so much time to examine the four walls of every room, many of us have already made mental lists of jobs that need doing. You can make a start by decluttering every room and surface, spring cleaning the house and repainting walls, ceilings and woodwork, O'Kelly says. Cull, cull, cull, is her mantra.

"Go through each room, one at a time, and clear out drawers, wardrobes and presses so that when you move you will have already discarded all your



rubbish. Make a pile for charity shops, for recycling and for the bin." Wash windows and make sure blinds or curtains are hanging correctly. If not, take them down.

3 Spruce up the garden

Now, more than ever, the garden is a major selling point, says estate agent Susan Slevin, partner at DNG. "People have realised the value of an outside space, however small."

Incentivise children to help with the jobs. Weed flower beds, rake up leaves, trim hedges, prune trees and power wash fencing, boundary walls, patios and cobblelock drives and even the exterior of the house. If you don't own a power washer, you can buy online through Woodies or ask that nice neighbour if you could borrow theirs. Many of the garden centres are shut but some, like Horkans, are selling online and doing home deliveries.

And it's still possible to order a skip. Thorntons Recycling has seen a 35 per cent spike in its online skip orders and a 42 per cent increase in phone orders in the last month, says marketing manager Brendan Kildea. M50 Skip Hire has seen similar increases. Just don't fill with hazardous waste such as paints, fridges, fridge-freezers or food waste.

Horkans.ie; Skip.ie

4 Create a longlist

As you declutter both house and garden, compile a snag list of all the jobs that need professional attention, like painting the exterior, doing the gutters, sweeping the chimney.

Start ringing around and booking these in now. This will put you at the top of the queue once restrictions lift and allow you to reschedule if the restrictions extend beyond the May deadlines currently set.

5 Get the house close-up ready

While agents can't arrange photography or videography under the current lockdown, it is worth noting that all of the big firms are offering virtual viewings—a method that shows the property in a more real condition than much of the still photography we're more used to looking at. Still shots can introduce light and Photoshop out minor flaws, such as telephone cables, electricity wires etc, making rooms more visually appealing.

"With virtual viewing there is no hiding," says Ross Killeen of Media Pro. "You have to show everything from inside the hot press to other storage spaces and all bedrooms, so all beds have to be dressed whereas in stills photography we might only photograph the best of the accommodation."

In the period from March 15th – when schools closed – to April 7th just before the Easter break, SherryFitzGerald had 944 parties attending private and open virtual viewings and received 477 offers on properties, says residential director Geraelyn Byrne. The most successful have been the one-to-one virtual viewing, she explains.

"The human connection and additional background information is still what home owners are looking for."

Buyers

1 Check your mortgage eligibility

If you have an income you can apply for a mortgage, says Grant. "Your income level will dictate lending. Lenders are lending but applying for a loan has an extra layer of observation of income levels such as payslips or a letter/email from your employer that income hasn't been affected by coronavirus or if it has how it has been affected and for how long."

If a mortgage is about to be issued, lenders will want to see the same confirmation of ability to make repayments.

If you're in a job that is as protected as it can be, Grant says it makes sense to use this time to find out how much you can borrow and see if you can get mort-



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– Rena O'Kelly

gage approval. He says it normally takes about four weeks for those completing mortgage applications to get all the necessary documentation together. Under the lockdown, he has seen this period halved to a fortnight.

Underwriting the self-employed is less straightforward. The sector that you work in will come into play and how your

earnings have been affected will also impact the decision-making process, he says.

There are buyers out there, with agents citing an increase in registered buyers since the lockdown came into effect. aima.ie; affinityadv.ie

2 Sorting life assurance during Covid-19

How will the virus affect your ability to get life assurance (mortgage protection insurance required in the event of an untimely death)?

"Some life assurance companies are now asking would-be clients if they have had symptoms of Covid-19 or have had coronavirus, with some companies deferring underwriting for three months," says David Crowley, director at IFC Finance, a personal financial planning firm that deals with life assurance policies that relate to mortgages.

"If you can't get a life assurance policy, it means you can't draw down a mortgage." lfcfinance.com

3 Is it possible to get a deal over the line?

Yes, but expect delays. "Conveyancing is an essential service and is still happening," says Michele O'Boyle of Sligo-based O'Boyle Solicitors and president of the Law Society.

"Our offices are open for

business but delivering differently. Documents still need a wet signature, that is a signature made in front of a witness."

She has clients coming to the office but observing social distance and using their own pens to sign with.

Another concern was the updating of land registry online records once services were suspended on March 30th. The Property Registration Authority says applications made before this date are now online.

With staff back in the office from last Monday, April 20th, the organisation hoped to be up to date on applications made during the three-week closure by last Monday.

Electronic services via the Land Direct portal have continued to operate as normal throughout the Covid-19 crisis. This excludes certified copy folios and certified folios with map, which require human intervention. These are posted rather than uploaded online and are currently not available.

Land Direct is also useful to check whether a property is freehold or leasehold. The online fee to view the folio is €5, with a PDF copy of the folio sent to the email address provided. landdirect.ie

4 Watch stock levels

Keep abreast of what is coming to the market, ad-

vises Susan Slevin of DNG.

"Stock levels might remain low but there will always be parties that need to buy or sell. Some motivated vendors, such as those of some executor sales that have been in the pipeline, may be willing to take a lower price for a cash buyer or someone with proof of funds." Funds, that is, that will adhere to the new, more stringent Covid-19 requirements.

5 Any deals to be had?

People who don't have to sell won't – and most vendors don't have to sell – is the opinion of one financial adviser who didn't want to be named.

He is not expecting any semblance of reality to return to the market until the autumn. In the meantime, he anticipates that buyers will be extremely cautious and those looking will be seeking a reduction on current asking prices.

"They will now be willing to pay around €350,000 for a property that might have been asking €400,000," he suggests.

Slevin believes there may be a window of opportunity over the next six to nine months.

"Buyers and sellers looking to trade up or down should keep in regular contact with their bank, broker or lending institution to make sure that they still have the funds originally available to them."

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