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A guide to winning sealed bids

Boost your chances of winning and securing your dream home

By Francesca Steele



A vendor's selling agent will instigate a process of sealed bids if a property has several interested buyers (in Scotland this is standard for property sales). Each buyer puts in a blind offer by a set date and the vendor chooses the winner.

"Sealed bids are the quickest, cleanest — and the most brutal — way to sell," says Jo Eccles, director of Sourcing Property, the buying agent.

At the height of the boom, a quarter of London properties were sold through sealed bids. Now they are making a comeback, but what can buyers do to ensure success?

1 Make sure you understand the process. You will normally be given a set marketing period within which to view the house (anything from a day to several weeks). A deadline will be given, before which you must submit your offer. You will usually be told within a day after the deadline whether you have won.

2 "Be as open as possible in your bid," Lindsay Cuthill, of Savills, says. Tell the vendor about your mortgage, your lender, your broker, etc. Anything significant will come out eventually anyway, which could be a problem if you win as . . .

3 . . . sealed bids are not legally binding. Remember that either party can pull out before contracts are exchanged.

4 Make yourself attractive to the vendor by finding out what they want (a buying agent can help). Are they price-driven or do they want to sell quickly? Let them know if you are happy to fit in with their plans.

5 Include everything that could endear you to the vendor, Eccles says. “We once had very close bids where the vendors chose the sellers they knew were American, like them. Selling a house can be surprisingly emotional.”

6 Don’t overdo it. Taking your kids to the house to play with the vendor’s children might work on some people, but many sellers are wise to this kind of tactic and will be put off, Cuthill says.

7 Richard Marsh, of Property Vision, another buying agent, says: “Try to gain access to the property to conduct a pre-emptive survey before the the bidding gets under way. It may be a waste if you don’t emerge as the winner, but it will also position you as a serious buyer.”

8 Do not make offers such as “I will bid £20,000 higher than the top bid”, Eccles says. “It makes vendors feel that you are sneaky — and no one trusts a sneaky buyer.”

9 Always offer an odd number of pounds and pence. If bids are close, that extra 50p could make all the difference.

10 How much you should bid depends on how much you want the house. A buying agent can help you but sometimes you have to go with your gut, says Cuthill. “If you really want the house — and have the money — it’s important not to walk away with regrets, as losing a sealed bid can be quite heartbreaking.”