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### Welcome



The ratings website that's changing housing



Buying a new home is the biggest financial decision most of us will ever make. That's why we set up HomeViews in 2019 – to give renters and buyers like you the most accurate, detailed reviews possible for residential property in the UK.

Of course, you'll see reviews for developers and home builders on other sites. So, how are we different? We'll explain this in detail later in the guide, but – in short – we carefully verify reviewers to make sure they're genuine and we ask them detailed questions on every aspect of living in their home and location.

This New Build Buyer's Guide draws on thousands of these reviews to give you information you won't find anywhere else – even on our site.

We've compiled a list of the 10 things homeowners wish they'd known before buying. These include things like how to research locations, developers and property managers, what to do about snagging, how to deal with service charges, and much more.

The HomeOwners Alliance also gives its expert advice on these 10 things and how to ensure a smooth move-in.

We then look at how the HomeViews review platform is helping property hunters make informed, confident decisions on where to buy. It's as close as you'll get to being able to chat with all the neighbours before moving in!

Lastly, we reveal the ten UK developers rated highest by UK first time buyers on HomeViews, as well as the five highest rated providers of Shared Ownership properties.

Overall, owners on HomeViews rate their new build homes at 3.90 out of 5 – a much more positive picture than many news stories would have you believe. The HomeViews team and I wish you all the very best in finding the ideal new home for you.

Rory Cramer
CEO & Co-founder of HomeViews

# 10 things buyers wish they'd known before buying

When homeowners write a review on HomeViews, we ask them if there is one thing they wish they'd known before buying.

We've looked over all their responses and picked out the ten things owners most often talk about. The HomeOwners Alliance has also added its expert advice for each of these ten things.

Buying a new home can seem daunting. But understanding the issues other home buyers have faced and knowing the solutions will make sure your purchase is as smooth as possible.







### I wish I'd done more research on the developer and the property manager

If you're buying from new, the developer will help with immediate problems, but longer-term, it's the property managers who will address any issues you raise. The quality of your property manager can have a major impact on your quality of life in your home.

### **HOA** advice:

Most management companies will have at the least a Facebook page and Google reviews you can research. Ideally, they should be a Leasehold Knowledge Partnership accredited company as this means they hold the ethos that leaseholders should be making the decisions about their buildings and support fairness and straight dealing.



[I wish I'd known...] just how poor their quality and after sales are. I expected some snags but not to this degree. Also, you always read how poor after sales teams are with new build properties but I can tell you first hand that these guys are the worst. They don't want to know, they don't honor their obligations and they fob you off.

The property management company is not very reactive and the green areas should be better maintained.

Enquire more information on the property management company and what to expect from their services. As we did during the buying process.

I wish I'd known it was common for there to be numerous and serious problems with new builds and that it was so hard to get the property management/developers to sort them.





# I wish I'd known more about the parking arrangements

Parking is regularly mentioned as a problem by owners, particularly for those with more than one car or who have regular visitors. Excessive street parking can make life difficult in smaller roads where neighbours do not have enough off-street parking space.

#### **HOA** advice:

This is something to think carefully about up front to ensure you have the space you need. Don't assume you'll be allocated a space or that there is nearby parking. Check the details of the lease and discuss it with your conveyancing solicitor. There may also be an added annual fee. And if you're thinking of getting an electric vehicle, find out how charging points will be accommodated, if possible.



...try and find the properties with the right amount of parking spaces for your vehicles! You won't be able to park anywhere else as all spaces are already filled!

When you pick the plot, be sure to ask about the surrounding area in terms of allocated parking, street width and ask to see the main route from the entrance to your chosen house. It's all good and well choosing the house with the nicest garden and two allocated spaces, but if it's on a narrow street with the houses across the road only having one space and no garage, then it will completely detract from your property.

Not all homes have 2 parking spaces when each home usually has at least 2 cars, some of them with more and there is no room for visitors and guests to park. The road layouts do not allow for safe parking easily either. There really should be more space allocated for residents and visitor parking and better layout design to accommodate.





## I wish I'd known more about the quality of the garden

Many buyers mentioned problems with drainage and gardens. They said they wish they had known more about what to expect in terms of topsoil provision and the potential for flooding.

### **HOA** advice:

These are both common complaints on new build developments. Before buying, ask your conveyancing solicitor to check your property has Building Regulations sign-off for the drainage system. And get a snagging surveyor in as early as possible to check everything meets standards. The ground in the garden of new builds is often compacted by machinery and inevitably has some rubble buried beneath the turf. This does impact quality initially but can be improved by adding nutrients and organic matter.



Really poor standard of garden - floods making the area unusable where the children cant use their outdoor playing area.

We found the soil quality, levels, and turf quality not very good. Our particular garden is almost impossible to dig, water collects and does not drain. So quality of top soil and ground underneath is poor.

Add £8000 to the marked price as you will need to spend this to fix the garden.

...check your garden thoroughly as we have found this to be the poorest aspect of our property. However, the fact that we received any grass and paving at all is still a step ahead of other developers.

We found the soil quality, levels, and turf quality not very good. Our particular garden is almost impossible to dig, water collects and does not drain. So quality of top soil and ground underneath is poor.





# I wish I'd known more about snagging surveys

Snagging surveys were a common topic that owners wish they'd known about before moving in. Many residents who didn't have one regretted it afterwards. Snagging was the most-mentioned topic for property buyers outside London who answered this question.

### **HOA** advice:

At the moment, most developers won't allow buyers access to the property they are buying to conduct a snagging report before completing. You can of course have a snagging survey done at any time once you have moved in, but make sure you get one done early and well before the end of the first two years, and reported to your house builder to remedy issues highlighted in the survey. You can also create a snagging list yourself but you are unlikely to spot the range of things a professional snagging inspector will identify. Find out more about DIY and professional snagging surveys

HomeOwners Alliance We paid a professional snagger and it was the best money we spent as they look at things we never knew could be an issue.

I wish I had hired a professional snagging company. I didn't know there was such a thing.

I wish we had a snagging company come in to point out our problems before we moved in.

It is a sensible idea to use a professional snagger when you move in to ensure everything is as it should be.

We didn't use a snagging company but neighbours did and identified things such as soil quality and insulation issues which we didn't think of ourselves.





# I wish I'd viewed the property at different times of the day

Visit more than once before choosing your home.
Visit at times of day to check noise levels, daylight/
night-time lighting, roads, potential flooding, mobile
signal strength, etc. Walk to local shops, bus stop, train
station and other amenities, and check security on and
around the development.

### **HOA** advice:

This is good practise whether you're buying a new or older home. No property is perfect and there is usually a need to compromise. But when viewing the area, most importantly, does it feel like you could make it your home?



View the property / site at different times of day to get a sense of traffic congestion, noise, night life, etc.

View the flat at different points of the day to see what level of sunlight you receive.

Would have thought twice if I had realised security on the development was so poor.

Trains nearby are freight trains and not commuter trains so noisy at times

There is a catering company located next door who work all through the night which can often get quite noisy

As our street is very dark it would of been nice to know that there wasnt going to be street lighting







# I wish I'd checked the terms and conditions more carefully

Check your T&Cs carefully, especially any regarding service charges, maintenance fees and management fees. Service charges – and particularly future rate increases – were something many owners said they wish they had known more about before buying.

#### **HOA** advice:

If you're buying a leasehold flat then you should ask your conveyancing solicitor to go through your financial obligations set out in the property's lease. There are three main types of charges: ground rent, service charges and administration charges. All of these can vary year on year so you'll want to talk through what the costs are now and what they could be in the future. For more on this see the HomeOwners Alliance advice Leasehold Charges – What to know before you buy



Do not accept vague responses when asking about service charge / estimated bills / additional monthly/annual costs. They really add up and need to be factored into your calculations if living in this property will be affordable.

[I wish I'd known...] that the cost of service charge and rent increases by quite a substantial amount yearly (things were not accounted for on one of our years of service charge and were given a hefty bill).

Service charges increase astronomically with no accountability or restraint. Buying a lease is like writing a blank cheque, to which they have no hesitation in adding more zeroes.

SERVICE CHARGE prices skyrocket and can increase at the discretion of the developer. I would never have purchased if I knew.

We wish we had known more about the annual estate maintenance charges and what these covered.





# I wish I'd communicated more proactively with the developer

Check options for extra features or customising the property and chase up any issues quickly. If something is important to you, make sure you have it in writing!

#### **HOA** advice:

This is the biggest financial commitment of your life, so don't assume anything or rely on what you saw in the show room. Start by asking where the specifications of your specific property are set out, what can be upgraded, for how much, and when these will be agreed. Copy in your conveyancer to ensure everything you ask for is written into your contract.



Always report any issues, don't think it's too small. If it's bothering you then it needs sorting and that's their job.

I wish I had known we had more choices and upgrades to personalise our new home.

Pick up every single snag with both the house and garden. You wouldn't put up with imperfections on a car so don't put up with it on a house either - and push and push until everything is rectified.

...keep pushing to get things fixed because you don't spend thousands on a brand new property for it to be at a bad standard. Get everything sorted within the first week because after they have your money they just don't care.

Don't feel pressured to fill in the NHBC survey in until you are happy.





## I wish I'd known more about development plans in the area

Many owners said they wish they'd more carefully checked development plans in the area – especially regarding green spaces, social housing and busy roads. Find out how much work will continue on and around your development once you've moved in.

#### **HOA** advice:

It's common to buy on a partially completed development, so you'll want to ask the developer for their programme of works. But there is no guarantee there won't be delays. You can also check local area plans and planning applications for your area. Find the local planning authority and council for your new build here www.gov.uk/find-local-council Your solicitor will also carry out local searches – look at these closely when they come back. For more read our guide Local Searches



I would have liked to have known the full intentions with the land around the estate as the estate seems to be forever growing which is a little concern for the state of the traffic.

Consider the location of your plot very carefully. I really wish I didn't have to say this, but our experience here has put us off buying anywhere near housing association properties again, due to the lack of respect that some tenants have for their neighbours, property, local area and even the law.

Triple check what the plans are for the immediate green area around your property and ensure management inform you of any plans to change these before carrying out works.

Wish we had known how big the development would become, which is a total downside. As its grown so have problems/security issues and general level of the development unfortunately.

How much you'd still be exposed to the ongoing building work in terms of: noise on a weekend morning (before 8am), vehicles parked everywhere in sections which are finished, heavy duty construction traffic going through the estate almost every minute.





# I wish I'd been more careful in choosing a specific home

Owners said they'd underestimated the importance of choosing a specific home within a development in terms of its location and orientation. They wish they'd more carefully considered what level it was on, which side of the building, nearby roads, bin stores, entranceways, etc.

### **HOA** advice:

Ask if you can view a completed property identical to yours to get a feel for it. If buying off plan, scrutinise the plans closely and ask when you can view the property before completion.



[I wish I'd known...] that the road behind us would be a 50mph rather than the expected 30 [and] that the natural drainage around the property was so poor due to insufficient removal of Wealden clay.

...it would have been handy to know how close to the A11 road we would be and the noise during various times of the day.

Try and get the apartment facing courtyard therefore there will be less noise from the street.

Carefully consider the direction of the flat - south/east get glorious dawns but are cooler in the evenings; south facing flats will be hot all day, etc.

I wish I would have known the flat was on the exact same level as the train track. I would have picked either above or below.





# I wish I'd known about resident groups before moving in

Resident groups can be extremely helpful and may be on WhatsApp, Facebook, on a resident app, or in-person. You can use these to talk with other residents who've moved in before you and find out what to expect. Of course, HomeViews reviews also let you read what the neighbours are saying!

### **HOA** advice:

Speaking to existing residents is the best bit of research you can do before you buy a home. If you feel brave enough then knock on some doors. Compliment the development, say you're keen to buy and wondering how they find living there. This could be the start of a great relationship with your new neighbours.



Get in touch with your neighbours and online community, so you can influence things together. Don't wait too long before logging in a formal complaint about a persistent problem, it's sometimes an unspoken rule in these organisations that unless formal it can wait.

Having met new people up here and listening to their nightmares, I would have liked to have known their experiences.

Very much worth joining the WhatsApp or Facebook groups as there is a very supportive community there.

There is a great community being built here. We have a development Facebook group and WhatsApp group where we regularly communicate.

There is an excellent online residents support group who can usually help with any teething problems

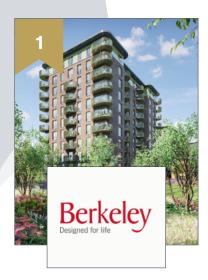
# Top 10 developers for first time buyers

We looked at ratings given by first time buyers and calculated this list of the top 10 developers according to those buyers. The rankings are based on their scores for Star Rating, After Sales Care, Delivery Quality and the percentage of owners who said they would recommend their developer.

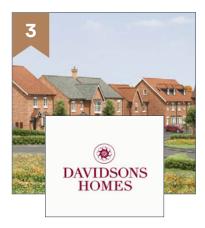
If you're looking to buy for the first time, these companies are certainly a good place to start!



### 10 developers rated highest by first time buyers





















#### Inclusion criteria

Developers with 100+ Verified Owner reviews across 3+ developments in the sample data; ranking calculated by an equal agglomeration of scores for Star Rating, After-Sales Care, Delivery Quality and Owner Recommends.





# Why are these Top 10 companies so highly rated?

We take a look at a selection of buildings by some of these these top developers to see why residents rate them so highly.

As always, head to each development's page to read all the detailed reviews and to find out more.

### homeviews





Royal Arsenal Riverside, SE18 By Berkeley Homes

5th Ranked 5th out of 33 in Greenwich



4.16 (345 reviews)











Facilities Design Location Value Management



Area is safe and clean. Greenery of the compound is a great plus. Management is very responsive. Build is of good quality and I have been having a comfortable stay since I moved in.

Anonymous, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Aug 202

We have lived in RAR for over 1 year and the management, concierge, facilities are fantastic. Completely worth the price, the grounds are so well looked after and gardens always look beautiful. Parking permits are easy to obtain which is great for visitors.

Jessica, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Aug 202

Design of development and facilities very high quality – it really does feel like a village community alongside the river and once within the development it doesn't feel like you're in London. Amazing to have gym, pool, cinema on site and available, with lots of open, green spaces.

iom, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Jul 2021

### homeviews

BARRATT
— LONDON —



High Street Quarter, TW3 By Barratt London

19th Ranked 19th out of 68 in West London



4.36 (8 reviews)











Facilities Design Location Value Management



Lovely development. The designs of the building is pretty simple. Facilities include; private garden spaces, balconies and underground car park. FirstPort who manage the development are usually responsive and the general maintenance is good, communal areas are kept clean.

Juan Armond, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Dec 2021

Very nice looking block of flats, nice interior which is kept clean. Development attractive with some green spaces. Lovely flat, lots of natural light and ample storage.

Excellently sound-proofed so rarely disturbed.

I love the design and facilities at and near to the building. The building management was outstanding, always ready to help and promptly giving support.

Vanessa B, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Dec 202





Proud to be a member of the Berkeley Group of companies



Beaufort Park, NW9 By St George

5th Ranked 5th out of 12 in Colindale



**3.95** (346 reviews)











Facilities Design Location Value Management



Great place to live with an outstanding 24/7 management, very clean and well maintained communal areas. Private residents only zones like parking, little park/square, salons and shop make it even more enjoyable, making sure residents have everything they need.

Julia Ts, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Apr 202

The design is modern in and out with great management and 24 hours availability of concierge. They respect the residents and respond quickly to any concerns. The facilities of the recycling and bike storage are an advantage. Property management is perfect.

May, Verified Resident on HomeViews, May 2021

The design is immaculate, with 5\* hotel vibes in the lobby, and then the actual apartment floors is great. Building and property management is awesome especially for someone like me who tends to forget about annual checks on meters, fire alarms etc. The management teams will keep you updated on all aspects of the development even if it's not your building.

Saira, Verified Resident on HomeViews, May 2021

### homeviews





Queensbury Park, TF2 By Lovell Homes

2nd Ranked 2nd out of 7 in Shropshire



**4.12** (19 reviews)











Facilities Design Location Value Management



Overall, I am extremely happy with my new home. The building design is of a very high standard and very good value for money in comparison to many other new builds that I viewed. The sales team (Claire and Lucy) were always so helpful right from the start and all the way through to completion.

KB, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Aug 202

Our house is well built and designed, with large rooms and an attractive exterior. The fixtures and fittings are good quality and we haven't had any major snags with the house itself, including hardly any cracks. In summer it's nice and cool, and in winter it's warm, so we really notice the energy efficiency.

Victoria S, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Jul 202

We do love our house very much so. The size the plot and the garden size. We do like the layout of our house and the layout of the development too. Our house size is very big and 3 double bedrooms is a great size for any first time buyers!

Alice, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Aug 2021

### homeviews





Synergy, SE7 By Fairview New Homes

7th Ranked 7th out of 33 in Greenwich



**4.06** (22 reviews)











Facilities Design Location Value Management

### In-depth buyer profile

Sometimes HomeViews contacts reviewers to get an even more detailed account of their buying or renting experience. We spoke to Cristina, an IT engineer who bought a new home at Synergy by Fairview New Homes in Charlton. This was her buying experience.

#### Find out more

I decided to live in Synergy by Fairview new Homes because of the great location. And because I couldn't find anything better in the market in terms of flat layout and space – this had the best finishing and details, especially the kitchen!

I chose Charlton as an area because I spent most of my time in the UK in East London, and the past few years in Bermondsey, South East London. This area is growing a lot and my partner lives just 10 minutes away. It's also very well connected and there's a shopping park five minutes away.

I viewed other homes in Peckham, which is a little bit closer to the centre, and another new build in Deptford. But they were not quite ticking the boxes like Fairview, because of cost, finishing and layouts. At those developments I would have had to get a one bedroom flat, whereas here I could afford a two bed.

I used HomeViews reviews to look for my new home. I came across the website and looked at some of the reviews left by people who were already living in Synergy. It was great to hear that the neighborhood was so great to live in.

I didn't really know Charlton, apart from the shopping Park and that we're close to IKEA. It was nice to read that there were no big problems and there was a community of neighbours who were helping each other.

I work in IT so for me choosing a new product is always best! You get a 10-year guarantee on appliances. It comes with a new kitchen, you have no historical problems from anyone else living there.

The other reason was that I was able to apply for Help to Buy. I was not going to rent anymore. I just wanted to buy a flat. This was the first result of my research and when I saw it, I just fell in love with it.

One thing I wish I'd known before buying was that when you contact the solicitor they charge you every time you call them. I called them so many times I probably got overcharged!

# **Top 5** housing associations for Shared Owners

For this Top 5 list we looked at reviews from buyers who had used the Shared Ownership scheme. These housing associations are ranked according to their scores for Star Rating, After Sales Care, Delivery Quality and the percentage of owners who said they would recommend them.



### 5 housing associations rated highest by Shared Owners











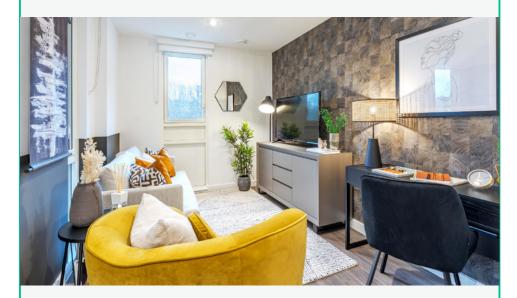
#### Inclusion criteria

HAs with 30+ Verified Shared Owner reviews across 3+ developments in the sample data; ranking calculated by an equal agglomeration of ratings on HomeViews for Star Rating, After-Sales Care, Delivery Quality and Owner Recommends.



### homeviews

L&Q



### L&Q at Acton Gardens Shared Ownership, W3

By L&Q

2nd

Ranked 2nd out of 11 in Acton



3.84 (18 reviews)











Facilities Design Location Value Management



I am now living in the Habington House development. I like the layout the best because it is in a nice rectangular shape that allow maximum use of space. The white goods provided by L&Q are of good quality and reputable brands.

C K Ong, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Apr 202

I moved into Acton Gardens in June 2019 and been living here ever since. The flat is well built, with good insulation to noise and heat. The standard of white goods was ok and the finish standard for this price range. There have been no major problems with the flat, and very few snagging issues were found.

Perdu, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Apr 202

Building design is great – internal fixtures well designed and clean looking. Walls do mark easily but can be painted etc. Landscaped parks/garden to front and rear are well kept and great for warmer days.

Matt T, Verified Resident on HomeViews, Apr 2021

# How can HomeViews help me find my home?

Every developer will tell you how great their homes are. But...



Imagine being able to talk with the neighbours before choosing your new home.



Imagine knowing exactly what to expect from the building and the developer.



**Imagine** having advice from thousands of buyers across the UK.

### That's how we can help.

HomeViews is the only review site dedicated to helping buyers like you find your new home.

We're independent and our reviewers are carefully checked so you can trust they're genuine. And our reviews are the most detailed you'll find anywhere.



Can't I just use
Trustpilot or Google
Reviews?

You can, but only HomeViews gives you:

### **Trusted**

Reviews that are helping the industry to improve standards

### **Verified**

Reviewers carefully checked to be genuine residents

### **Detailed**

homeviews

Ratings and reviews that cover every aspect of a building

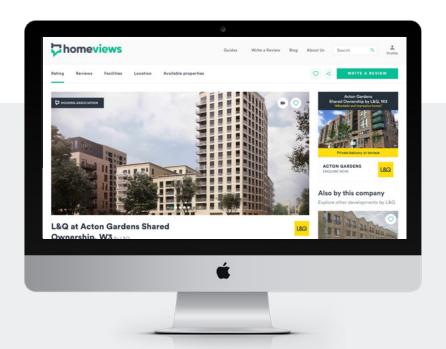
### **Accurate**

All residents are invited to write reviews, giving a balanced perspective

### How do I use HomeViews?



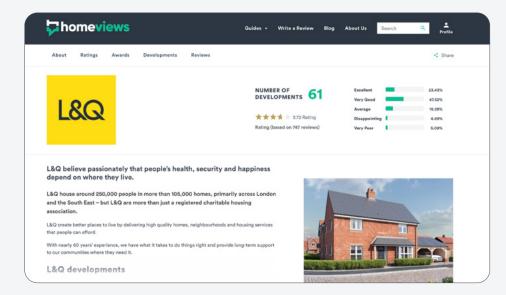
Read ratings and reviews for individual developments





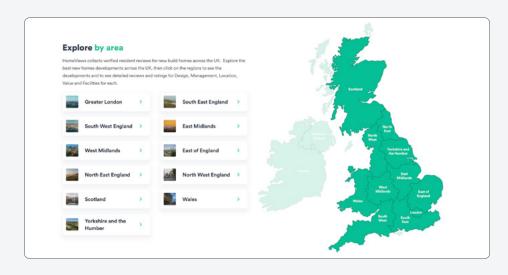


### Read ratings and reviews for developers





### Find the best buildings in any city, county or region





### 10 Steps to buying a home

01

### Get your finances in order.

Work out how much you can afford, taking into account costs like stamp duty and removals. You'll need a deposit put aside of at least 10%, plus a reservation fee if buying off-plan. Get a mortgage agreement in principle so you have a formal indication of how much you can borrow.

02

### Find a property.

Decide where you want to live and set alerts on Rightmove and Zoopla to find properties coming to market. Register with new build developers in your chosen area.

03

### Get viewing and make an offer.

If buying a brand new home, visit the showhome, but also have a walk around the site and ask if you can see recently completed properties. Before making an offer, do your research first.

04

### Appoint a conveyancer.

You'll need a property lawyer on your side to process the legal side of your purchase. Don't just opt for the one recommended by the developer or estate agent.

05

#### Searches.

Your conveyancer will conduct local searches which will supply information relating to proposals for new roads, rail schemes or planning decisions that could affect the property.

06

#### Check the tenure.

Is the property freehold or leasehold? There are often conditions attached to a leasehold property. Ask your conveyancer to check what you can and can't do. You may also be liable to pay ground rent, service charges and administration charges.

07

### Exchange, deposit & completion.

When you exchange contracts you become legally committed to buying the property. You'll have to pay a deposit on exchange, a few weeks before completion. If buying off-plan, get a 'long stop' completion date which means the builder is liable to pay you compensation if they don't finish the work by a given date.

08

### Moving in.

Shop around for and book a removals firm. Arrange a new home demonstration from your developer and make sure you have all the key documents, manuals and guarantees.

09

### Snagging.

You have two years to identify and fix problems in your home, so get an independent snagging survey booked and completed as soon as possible after moving in, or before you complete if your developer allows it.

10

### Check your warranty.

Your new home should be covered for structural issues for 10 years. But as with any legal document, check what is and isn't included.

#### For more expert advice on buying, visit:

www.hoa.org.uk/advice/guides-for-homeowners/i-am-buying



# What is the HomeOwners Alliance?

The HomeOwners Alliance (HOA) is a property advice website that provides expert help and services for all the key moments of buying, selling or owning your home.

They are on your side to guide you on your home owning journey with information to help you make smart choices and get a better deal. Alongside free expert advice, they have all the services you need under one roof. You can shop around and compare quotes without leaving the HOA site.

But they don't just get you a better deal by providing a range of services. They also campaign on a raft of issues and report on homeowner trends and homeowner's greatest concerns.

They're pushing for changes by speaking out to the media, industry and government and publishing data. Visit them at **www.hoa.org.uk** to see how they can help you.







When you're buying a home you're going in blind. With HomeViews I'm able to understand the transparent strengths and weaknesses of living in the property. You just don't get that from estate agents. It's good to have an independent, candid view of what's good and what's bad.

Pete, 31 – Owner at Walthamstow Gateway by Solum

