

Top online resources for the smart property buyer

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By PrimeResi

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As Knight Frank rolls out its clever mypropertygenius.co.uk tool, buying agent Rachel Johnson surfs through some other useful resources available to today's internet-savvy buyers...

Once upon a time, the requirements for an extensive property search were a good map, and some seriously robust shoe leather

At Stacks, we have always warned against spending too much time online. Property simply isn't a 'virtual' commodity. The impression you get from pictures and descriptions may vary dramatically from the real thing. So by all means start your search on the internet, but get on the phone, talk to the agents, and go and see as much property as you possibly can. Online is an aid, not a substitute for an exhaustive property search.

But, beyond the property portals, there are a vast array of websites and apps that can help you assess your shortlisted properties. Here we point you in the direction of some of the most useful online resources (many of which will point you to a corresponding app) to help you with everything from commuting times to flight paths and local schools.

While we think these are incredibly useful sites, when information really matters, don't rely on website/desktop information alone – adopt a belt-and-braces approach, double checking vital information in a non-virtual manner.

- **Can't believe your eyes?**

Has clever photography succeeded in cropping out busy roads and eyesores next to, or opposite, that beautiful property? Google Earth and Google Streetview is your friend. Have a good look around from the comfort of home to find out the things that the agent might prefer you not to know.

- **Schools**

Goodschoolsguide.co.uk is a wonderful online schools information resource, from an initial search telling you what's where, through to the minutest detail on individual schools. We have no idea what people who needed to find out about schools did without it! (In-depth reviews only available with subscription).

Ofsted reports are available free on reports.ofsted.gov.uk

Nappyvalleynet.com has a great school catchment area finder for SW London.

- **Why is my house shaking?**

This map shows you where the tubes run in relation to streets, so traintimes.org.uk/map/tube/ is a handy resource for anyone worrying about subterranean rumblings.

- **Broadband**

Type in a postcode to broadbandspeedchecker.co.uk and it will show you what speeds are available in the area from which providers. Very useful tool, but if broadband speed is vital to you, we would strongly suggest a proper road test.

- **Flight paths**

A fascinating (and slightly terrifying!) mashup of Google Maps and aircraft flight data, flightradar24.com allows you to zoom in to the area you're interested in, and watch the planes come and go in almost (slight delay) real time. Utterly compelling, you may become something of an anorak, but also very useful if you're checking out a new area.

- **Flooding**

Information on what the flood risk is in a particular area or postcode is available at a click on environmentagency.gov.uk. Click on the map and find out whether the risk is very low, low, medium or high. (It's worth noting that this site won't give you information on flash floods).

- **Crime stats**

Speedy access to an overview of crime statistics in a specific postcode: ukcrimestats.com/

- **Planning**

Worried about planning applications in an area? Or do you want to know about a local council's planning policy? Most district councils now have a good online resource. You should be able to look at current and historical planning applications on the planning register (check more broadly than your immediate street), and check their status. And also view current planning policy.

- **Mortgage calculator**

There are plenty of these, but moneysupermarket.com is easy and very useful, offering a range of mortgage types (re-mortgage, new home, BTL etc), and an easy device for putting in property value, loan required, timescale, and coming up with specific deals from an enormously wide range of providers.

- **Stamp duty calculator**

Stamp duty becomes more and more complicated. stampdutycalculator.org.uk has an easy device for finding out what duty is payable, whether it's a first or additional property.

- **Leaving London?**

A huge range of forums, e-guides and articles aimed at property buyers leaving London and heading into the country can be found on lifeafterlondon.com.

- **House prices**

The Land Registry website landregistry.data.gov.uk is a useful resource, as is nethouseprices.com and zoopla.co.uk is very user-friendly. Sold prices (historical and recent) and current value estimates are easy to find. (Remember that they don't know if improvements/extensions have taken place between sales). A good way of looking at prices for the property you're looking at, and others in the area.

Our advice would be to ignore countrywide and even street-centred 'averages' which are meaningless for most individual buyers. But track your preferred area well in advance of looking seriously.

- **Getting around London**

It used to be a matter of trial and error for new Londoners. Buses were always a mystery! But tfl.gov.uk plans you a journey from anywhere to anywhere, giving you options for all different types of transport (including walking), and allowing you to select your preferences.

Walkit.com provides walking directions via a journey planner, giving you 'direct', 'less busy' and 'low pollution' alternatives. (Also gives you calorie burn, step count and carbon saving).

- **Warts and all...**

Finally, propertydetective.com promises a 'warts and all' report of what a property, street, or neighbourhood can offer them and their lifestyle. Basic information is free, but a more in depth report comes at a price.

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