



# Mortgage & Protection news

The bulletin from Apricot for Money

» Much has happened in the mortgage marketplace over the last year or so. Schemes have been launched to assist the homebuyer, and tighter lending rules have been introduced, meaning it may be tougher to get the loan you want. In spite of that, more money will be loaned on mortgages in 2014, than the year before, and 2015 may trump 2014. All of this occurs against the backdrop of a Bank Rate that has sat at 0.5% (at the time of writing) for well over five years. (Sources: Council of Mortgage Lenders, July 2014 projections, and figures to October 2014, Bank of England, November 2014)

## Increase on the horizon?

The signals from the Bank of England show that a Bank Rate rise could be on the cards. So if you are thinking about improving (or increasing) your current mortgage deal, looking for a new one to support a home move, securing funding for a buy-to-let property, or simply after a mortgage loan for the first time; then now could be the time to review your situation.

## Decent deals on offer

Tighter lending rules introduced in April 2014, may have contributed to a slowdown in the year on year quarterly growth. However, the benefit to the consumer is that the lenders are currently fighting for market share, resulting in a spate of decent deals on offer. (Source: Bank of England, Credit Conditions Survey, Q3 2014)



# Relax - leave it to us

Of course the strict lending rules remain, albeit the regulatory body - the Financial Conduct Authority - feels that some lenders may have been over-zealous, in certain circumstances, when applying the new affordability criteria. So do take advice. And whilst we don't have a magic wand, we operate in this marketplace day-in, day-out and once we know your circumstances and requirements, we can then identify the most suitable solution for your needs.

## Stamp duty changes

There may also be an extra benefit for you. Stamp duty, for residential properties, has been cut for 98% of homebuyers who pay for it. This was implemented with immediate effect, and the new stamp duty rules now operate on a similar basis to income tax - where each percentage rate charged will

only apply to the part of the property purchase price that falls within that tax band.

The upshot of this is if you're buying a home for less than £937,500, you will pay less stamp duty, or the same. And looking more specifically at the average help-to-buy scheme purchase price of £185,000, there would be a saving of £650 under the new rules. As for the £275,000 cost of the average family home, £4,500 would be saved. (Source: HM Treasury, Autumn Statement, December 2014)

**If you'd like to hear more about this and where we could help with your borrowing needs, along with ways to protect you (and your family), then please get in touch. You may have to pay an early repayment charge to your existing lender if you remortgage. The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate most Buy-to-Let mortgages and taxation advice.**

## Apricot for Money

Head Office: Homeleigh House, Willersey, Nr Broadway WR12 7PJ Tel: 01386 854912

**Evesham** area email: peter@apricotformoney.co.uk

**Bristol** area email: roger@apricotformoney.co.uk

**Gloucester** area email: john@apricotformoney.co.uk

**Stourbridge** area email: kevin@apricotformoney.co.uk

Web: www.apricotformoney.co.uk

■ Your property may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage.

■ Apricot for Money is an appointed representative of Stonebridge Mortgage Solutions Limited which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

**The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate some aspects of buy-to-let mortgages, bridging finance or commercial mortgages.**

■ There may be a fee for arranging a mortgage and the precise amount will depend on your circumstances. The fee will not be in excess of £895.

**Ref: Sol2224**



# Time to REMORTGAGE?

The enthusiasm to seek out a new mortgage deal whilst remaining in your home has been fairly subdued of late, but with a Bank Rate increase on the horizon that may change.

» The decision for many is to decide if it makes sense to wait until the increase occurs (and see how things pan out); or opt to act sooner when there's less of a rush and, perhaps, better deals could be on offer.

The additional element to throw into the mix is that many have sat with their existing arrangement, or on their lender's Standard Variable Rate (SVR) for a good few years assuming it might be difficult (or not beneficial) to remortgage. However, with recent house price growth, this could mean that the loan required may now represent a lower percentage of the home's value, enabling them to get access to deals, or to benefit from the better loan-to-value (LTV) ones on offer.

And there are plenty of reasons why it may make sense to remortgage, such as:

- Coming to the end of the current deal.
- Wanting to raise extra money to help

fund much-needed home renovations.

- Looking for a more suitable deal than an existing SVR arrangement.

With those issues in mind, interestingly (as reflected in a Bank of England report), there has been a price war across the last quarter of 2014, with lenders fighting for market share. And who knows, that may continue into early 2015.

*(Source: Bank of England, Credit Conditions Survey, Q3 2014)*

### Some possible benefits for you

If the current monthly payments are affordable then one route to adopt (if you secure a better interest rate deal) is to try to maintain your existing payments, enabling you to pay off your mortgage earlier than planned. Alternatively, you could use the money you've saved to invest elsewhere. Or perhaps put an amount towards the cost of insurance policies that help protect both you and your family against the unexpected.

Even if you feel you may struggle to remortgage, there could be good news through the 'transitional arrangements' under the Financial Conduct Authority's rulings. This means that as long as the borrower does not increase the mortgage amount (unless it's for essential repairs) and has a good payment history, an affordability assessment may not be required. Whilst the decision will ultimately sit with the lender, it may enable the borrower to move to a better deal.

### Interest-only

According to the Financial Conduct Authority there are around 2.6m interest-only mortgages still in place.

*(Source: Financial Conduct Authority, August 2013)*

Should those in this group want to remortgage, then they may have to revert to a costlier repayment mortgage, which delivers the discipline of paying off both the interest and part of the capital amount each month. However, the chart below shows that the increased payments may not be as much as possibly thought, particularly if an SVR of 4% (or greater) is being compared to some of the better rates currently on offer.

**If you're interested to see how remortgaging may work for you, then do get in touch.**

**You may have to pay an early repayment charge to your existing lender if you remortgage.**

## Mortgage Calculator

Here's how to use the mortgage payments calculator: A £100,000 mortgage over 25 years, charged at a 2.5% interest rate would cost 100 x £4.49 (for Repayment) = £449 per month.

### Monthly payments for a mortgage per £1,000 borrowed over 25 years

Interest rate %	Interest-only* £	Repayment £
1.00	0.83	3.77
1.50	1.25	4.00
2.00	1.67	4.24
2.50	2.08	4.49
3.00	2.50	4.74
3.50	2.92	5.01
4.00	3.33	5.28
4.50	3.75	5.56
5.00	4.17	5.85
5.50	4.58	6.14
6.00	5.00	6.44
6.50	5.42	6.75
7.00	5.83	7.07

\* Excludes any payments to a separate savings scheme, to help pay off the capital amount borrowed.

This calculator only provides a guide to monthly payments and does not guarantee eligibility for a mortgage. The actual amounts that you may have to pay may be more or less than the figures shown. Please contact us for a personalised illustration.

## The TYPICAL borrower

Opting for the security of a fixed rate mortgage seems to be the route that many are taking these days. Back in 2010 fixed rate deals accounted for 50% of all mortgage loans, by volume. In 2014 (up to September) around 90% are fixed.

And, pretty much all deals (almost 95%) are on a repayment basis - where both the capital and interest are being repaid.

As for the purpose of the loan, the vast majority in the first nine months of 2014 (69%) have used it for house purchase, resulting in remortgaging accounting for 31% of new loans.

A far cry from 2008, when the share was largely reversed, where 63% of all loans were applicable to remortgaging.

*(Source: Council of Mortgage Lenders, data to Sept 2014)*

■ Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage.



# Healthy living

Life cover and health protection need not be products that you sign up for and file away, as there may be some incentives on offer, along with the peace of mind it delivers.

» Life is complicated enough in the current climate, if you're healthy and have a regular income. So imagine what it might be like if you (or your family) had the additional financial and emotional problems that death, a major illness or long-term injury may bring?

That's why it's important to try to protect yourself against these events - with the various insurances on offer such as life cover, critical illness (which pays out if you suffer from a range of specified serious illnesses) and income protection (which pays out a regular income should you be ill or injured and off work from beyond a certain period).

## Incentivising you

Whilst ill-health or early death could hit anyone, the insurers are also aware that those who live a healthier lifestyle may shift some of the odds in their favour.

It's for that reason that some plans on offer these days are far more innovative with a decent degree of encouragement to live more healthily, by providing support in areas such as health checks, incentives for gym membership, or a host of offers to help get you out and about.

## But, is it a grudge purchase?

Unsurprisingly, some of the most grateful (and gratifying) testimonials an adviser will see are from clients who took their advice, ensured they had suitable protection cover in place - and then sadly had to make a claim as a

consequence of a death or ill-health.

Yet it's remarkable how few actually have this type of cover in place. Industry research showed that only 37% of those surveyed had life cover, 11% had critical illness, and 7% had income protection. *(Source: The Syndicate, January 2014 release)*

However, it's not as if most people don't understand the benefits that having insurance cover can bring to their lives; such as claiming for a dent in the car, a burst pipe, a lost mobile, a travel claim, or a sick pet. Whilst it doesn't lessen the importance of being covered for those outcomes, it does demonstrate that less tangible events, like a critical illness, may be way down the list of priorities - until it unfortunately occurs!

## So, is it the cost?

When asked about expected life cover costs, the same research showed that among 18-24 year olds, in particular, they felt life cover would cost £105/month, on average (the overall mean was £66). But, more specifically, if an 18-24 year old took out £150,000 of life cover over 25 years the average premium would have been under £10 a month!

*(Source: The Syndicate, January 2014 release)*

If you recognise the peace of mind protection cover could bring, and want to identify an affordable route for your needs (which may even deliver added benefits), then do get in touch.

**As with all insurance policies, terms, conditions and exclusions will apply.**

## Help-to-Buy

The two Help-to-Buy schemes have now been with us for a while and have delivered a decent degree of support, largely for the first-time buyer sector of the marketplace.

Over this period, first-time buyers represented 45% of all house purchases, but across the two schemes they accounted for more than 80% of take up - a reflection of the smaller deposit that's required to get onto the property ladder (from as little as 5%).

Help-to-buy already accounts for around 6% of all house purchases, where the schemes have been used almost exclusively to buy moderately priced homes in all regions of the UK, with no undue focus on any particular area or price bracket.

*(Source: Council of Mortgage Lenders, Help-to-Buy release, Treasury and DCLG data, September 2014)*



However, these schemes won't be the only option to consider, and in some cases there may be more suitable deals elsewhere. That's why it makes sense to have a chat with us to identify what's out there for you.

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# Protect the FAMILY

In spite of healthier lifestyles and improving medical know-how, on average, almost 47 adults, aged 18-44, die every day.

(Source: Office for National Statistics, 2013 figures)

» If the unthinkable happened and the breadwinner died, would the family be able to cope financially, quite apart from the emotional turmoil? It's possible that there may be life cover in place to help pay off the mortgage. But what if the partner left behind has children and needs to provide for everyday items such as food, clothes, utility bills, childcare, or other expenses like holidays and birthdays?

If you think this may not add up to much, then consider the findings from an LV= survey that looked at the cost of raising a child to the age of 21. This stands at over £227,000 - equating to more than £200 per week! It's a pretty sobering figure should an income stream end due to an untimely death.

(Source: LV=, *Cost of a Child report, January 2014*)

## Family Income Benefit

If you're a parent with children, then it may make sense to have in place a specific plan to help meet the needs of the children, in addition to any general life cover you may have.

In which case, Family Income Benefit may be one of the better



value protection plans on offer. Rather than delivering a lump-sum should you die, it provides a regular, tax-free, monthly (or annual) payment for the dependants - from the time of the claim to the end of the plan term.

That's why it's well-suited to those with young families, as the idea is that it should be arranged to pay out until the children have grown up, so it's often taken out over a 10 to 20-year term, or whatever is appropriate in your circumstances. Although, please note that this type of policy has no cash-in value at any stage.

## How it works

Say you took out a 20-year term, which was set up to pay out £20,000/year and it was claimed against after one year, then the family would receive £20,000/year for the next 19 years, equating to a total payout of £380,000 (if there was no index-linking).

However, if for the same plan, there wasn't a claim until 18 years into the policy term, the total payout would be £40,000. And if, fortunately, there was no claim at all within the 20-year period, then the policy simply runs the whole term without any payout.

Consequently, the resulting lower premium cost (because the potential payout decreases the further through the policy you get), could make the difference between you being able to afford the insurance or not.

## Why not talk to us to find out more.

**As with all insurance policies, terms, conditions and exclusions will apply.**

## How to afford protection cover

You might feel you're already stretched to the limit to find the money to pay for protection.

However, it may be easier than you think when you consider all those little items we may take for granted, like the odd drink or a magazine. In fact, you might be surprised to find out how quickly it all adds up.

Treats	£ Cost/unit (estimated)
Soft drink	1.00
Snack	1.00
Magazine	1.75
Coffee	2.50
Pint of beer or lager	3.50
Glass of wine (175ml)	3.50
Taxi	5.00
Cigarettes (pack of 20)	7.00
Take-away meal	7.00
<b>Total =</b>	<b>£32.25</b>

We don't expect you to give up all of life's little luxuries. But, by keeping an eye on your spending, you could afford to set aside a little extra to improve your financial security.

For example, if you **cut out just one unit each week** of the above items, then you could **save around £140** across a month. And, in many cases, that'll be more than you need to cover the cost of your protection policy.

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**There may be a fee for arranging a mortgage and the precise amount will depend on your circumstances. The fee will not be in excess of £895.**

■ The contents of this newsletter are believed to be correct at the date of publication (December 2014).

■ Every care is taken that the information in *The Mortgage & Protection News* publication is accurate at the time of going to press. However, all information and figures are subject to change and you should always make enquiries and check details and, where necessary, seek legal advice before entering into any transaction.

■ The information in this newsletter is of a general nature. You should seek professional advice tailored to your needs and circumstances before making any decisions.

■ **We cover mortgages, insurance and protection products along with a number of other financial areas, so do contact us if you'd like to discuss your financial needs: All area contact details are on the front page and can also be found on our website: [www.apricotformoney.co.uk](http://www.apricotformoney.co.uk)**