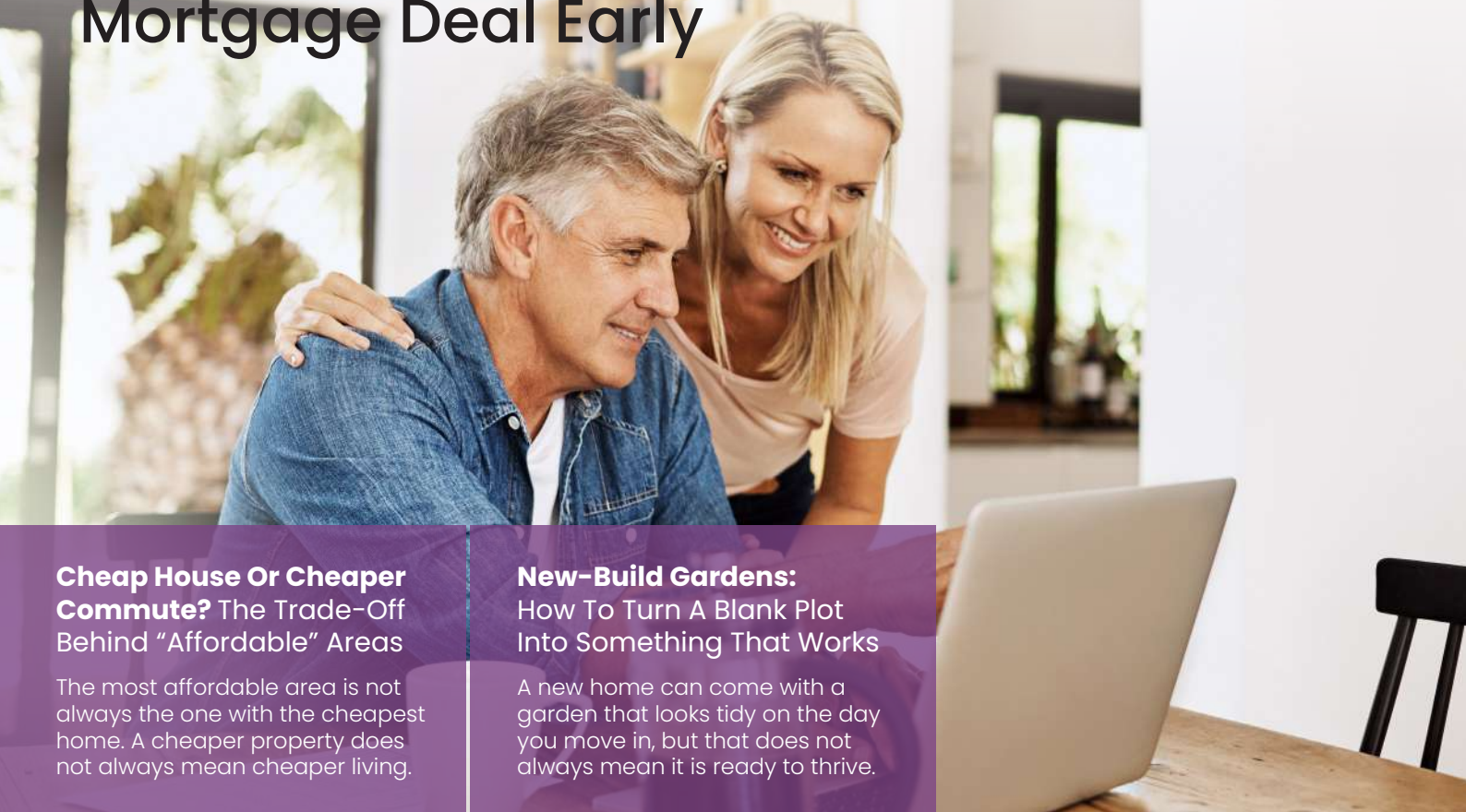




May 2026

The Six-Month Window: Why More Borrowers Are Securing Their Next Mortgage Deal Early



Cheap House Or Cheaper Commute? The Trade-Off Behind “Affordable” Areas

The most affordable area is not always the one with the cheapest home. A cheaper property does not always mean cheaper living.

New-Build Gardens: How To Turn A Blank Plot Into Something That Works

A new home can come with a garden that looks tidy on the day you move in, but that does not always mean it is ready to thrive.

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Featured **This Month**

As we move further into spring, May is a good time to see how the market is shifting.

This month we explore the real cost behind “affordable” areas, why more borrowers are securing deals early, delayed-start mortgages, new-build gardens, and what the Renters’ Rights Act means for landlords.

Working **With Us**

Welcome to our monthly newsletter! With over 30 years’ experience in mortgages and protection, we offer whole-of-market guidance to help you make confident financial decisions. Our personalised advice and ongoing support are here to ease your stress and keep you informed as your needs evolve.

If you have any queries, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Cheap House Or Cheaper Commute? The Real Trade-Off Behind “Affordable” Areas

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The Six-Month Window: Why More Borrowers Are Securing Their Next Mortgage Deal Early

New-Build Gardens: How To Turn A Blank Plot Into Something That Works

New-Build Gardens:

How To Turn A Blank Plot Into Something That Works

A brand-new home can come with a garden that looks tidy enough on the day you move in, but that does not always mean it is ready to thrive.

Many new-build owners start with the same sort of plot: a strip of lawn, a paved area, fencing and not much else. It may look neat from the back door, but still feel exposed, bare and a little lifeless. Under the surface, there can also be issues that are less obvious at first. The RHS says new-build gardens often have disturbed soil, compacted ground and variable-quality topsoil, which can make planting harder than many buyers expect [1].

That is often why these gardens feel disappointing in the early months. It is not just about design. In many cases, the ground itself needs work before the garden can really get going.

Look At The Plot Before You Start Buying Things

It is easy to rush into buying plants, pots and garden furniture. In practice, the better first step is to look properly at the space you have got. The RHS advises checking how the garden behaves before making big decisions, including whether water sits anywhere after rain, how well the turf has been laid, and what the sun, shade and wind are like across the plot.

That can save money and frustration later. A corner that looks ideal for a seating area may turn out to be windy all afternoon. A spot that seems perfect for planting may stay soggy for days after rain.

Watching the garden for a little while usually tells you more than making quick decisions in the first weekend.

The Soil Matters More Than Most People Expect

If there is one part of a new-build garden worth tackling early, it is the soil. The RHS notes that topsoil is often stripped back during construction, while machinery can compact the ground underneath. In some cases, leftover debris may also be buried below the surface. That can leave plants struggling before they have had much chance to establish.

Improving the soil may not be the exciting part, but it usually makes the biggest difference. Digging over compacted areas, clearing out rubble and adding organic matter can all help create a much better base to work with.

Decide What The Garden Needs To Do

A good garden does not need to be ambitious. It just needs to suit the people living there. For some households, that means a lawn with enough space for children. For others, it means a seating area, some privacy and a few borders for colour. Some will want herbs or raised beds. Others will want something simple that looks good without becoming hard work.

That is why it helps to think first about how the space will actually be used. Once that is clear, it becomes easier to decide what deserves priority and what can wait.

Focus On Shape, Privacy And Planting

Most new-build gardens do not need lots of features. They need a bit more structure.

That can come from simple things such as planting around the edges, adding a small tree, creating some screening or giving the seating area a more settled position. The RHS recommends choosing plants that suit the actual conditions in the garden, whether that means dry soil, shade, wind or poor drainage.

That matters because a garden that feels stark in year one can look completely different after a couple of seasons if the right framework is in place.

Do It In Stages

Perhaps the most useful thing to remember is that you do not need to finish it all at once. New-build gardens usually improve most when they are tackled in stages. Get the soil right, work out the layout, add the main planting, and then build on it over time. That approach often leads to better decisions and a garden that feels more settled in the long run.

A blank plot may not look like much at first, but with some patience and a clear plan, it can become one of the most enjoyable parts of a new home.

Source Data

[1] RHS – New-Build Gardens



First Payment Pressure: Delayed Start Mortgages

For first-time buyers, most of the attention goes on the deposit. Fair enough, it is usually the biggest hurdle. But getting over that line does not mean the expensive part is done.

In many cases, the first few months are when the pressure really bites.

There are legal fees to settle, moving costs to cover, and often a run of immediate spending on the property itself. That might mean a washing machine, flooring, basic decorating, beds, curtains, or simply all the dull but necessary bits that add up once you move in. Even buyers who have planned carefully can find that their cash cushion looks a lot thinner by the time completion has happened. MoneySavingExpert notes that buying costs beyond the deposit can easily run into the thousands, including mortgage fees, valuation costs and legal work^[1].

That is what makes this newer mortgage feature interesting. It is not about making a home cheaper to buy. It is about easing the pressure at the exact point when many buyers feel most stretched.

A Newer Product Built Around A Familiar Problem

One example is the delayed-start mortgage. The idea is simple enough. Instead of making your first mortgage payment straight after completion, you can push that first payment back for a short period. Skipton Building Society expanded this type of mortgage in February 2026, allowing buyers to choose a one, two or three-month delay

before repayments begin. It also widened access to include its shared ownership and 100% Track Record ranges^[2].

The appeal is obvious. Buying your first home often empties savings faster than expected, and the first payment can arrive before everything has settled down. A short gap at the start gives buyers a bit more room to get through that opening stretch. That does not mean it will suit everyone. But it speaks to a real issue rather than an invented one.

What The Feature Actually Does

This is where buyers need to be clear. A delayed-start mortgage does not give you free months. It simply delays when the repayments begin. Interest still builds from day one. Skipton states this plainly in its product information: borrowers can delay repayments for up to the first three months after completion, but interest still accrues from the start, so they will pay more interest overall and their later monthly payments will be slightly higher than if they had started paying straight away^[3].

That is the trade-off. So this is not really a “saving money” product. It is a cash-flow product. It

helps at a point when cash may be tight, but that flexibility has a cost attached to it.

For some buyers, that will still be worth it. If the first few months are likely to be awkward financially, a short delay may be genuinely useful. For others, especially those who still have a decent buffer after completion, starting repayments immediately may make more sense.

Why It May Work For Some First-Time Buyers

The strongest argument for this kind of mortgage is not hard to see.

A buyer may have spent heavily just getting through the purchase. They may be moving out of rented accommodation and dealing with overlap between costs. They may be walking into a property that needs work before it feels properly liveable. Or they may simply want to avoid being left with almost nothing in reserve the moment they move in.

That is where a delayed first payment can help. It gives some breathing space during a period that is often front-loaded with costs.

It also reflects something broader about today's first-time buyer market. Affordability is not just about whether someone passes a lender's calculations. It is also about whether life still feels manageable once the purchase has gone through. A mortgage can look affordable on paper and still feel tight in real life if all the early costs hit at once.

Helpful In The Right Circumstances, But Not A Shortcut

That said, this is still a niche feature, and probably will remain one. Most buyers will still be looking first at the rate, the product fee, the size of deposit needed and the monthly payment once the deal is up and running. Those things matter more in the long term than a short delay at the start.

And a delayed-start mortgage will not rescue a purchase that is already overstretched. It can smooth the first few months. It cannot fix the wrong mortgage or make a buyer's budget stronger than it is.

That is why the feature is best seen as a practical option rather than a clever solution. For some first-time buyers, it may be a useful way to take the sting out of moving costs. For others, it will be an unnecessary extra that simply increases the overall cost of borrowing.

Still, it is a notable development because it is built around a real part of the buying process that often gets ignored. Completion day is not the end of the spending. In many homes, it is the start of a new round of it.

If you are buying your first home, it may be worth looking not just at the deposit and headline rate, but at how the first few months are likely to look in practice – and whether a little more flexibility at the start would genuinely help.

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

Source Data

[1] MoneySavingExpert – First Time Buyers' Mortgage Guide 2026

[2] Mortgage Solutions – Skipton BS Extends Delayed Start Offer To Shared Ownership And 100% Track Record

[3] Skipton Building Society – Delayed Start Mortgages



The Renters' Rights Act Is Now In Force:

What Landlords Need To Know

The New Rules Are Now Live

For landlords in England, the Renters' Rights Act has now moved from policy into practice. Since 1 May 2026, the first major phase of the new system has been in force, bringing changes to tenancy structures, possession rules, rent increases and some everyday letting practices^[1].

The main point is straightforward enough: landlords now need to operate under a different set of rules. The end of Section 21 has had most of the attention, but the changes go further than that and affect how tenancies are handled from the outset, how rent is increased and how some routine decisions are made.

Section 21 Has Gone

The biggest change is the abolition of Section 21 no-fault evictions in the private rented sector in England.

That means landlords can no longer use Section 21 to recover possession. Instead, if they want to regain a property, they now need to rely on a valid legal ground under the Section 8 route. The government says the possession grounds have been reworked so landlords can still act where there is a clear reason, including serious rent arrears and anti-social behaviour.

For tenants, the change is just as significant. Most private tenancies now move onto the new assured periodic tenancy model, which means tenants can stay until they choose to

leave or until the landlord uses a valid possession ground. Tenants can generally end the tenancy by giving two months' notice.

Fixed Terms Have Been Replaced By A Rolling System

This is one of the biggest practical shifts for landlords who have been used to the old assured shorthold tenancy structure.

The government's phase one reforms say the vast majority of new and existing private rented sector tenancies become assured periodic tenancies from 1 May 2026.

That means the old fixed-term setup is no longer the default in the way landlords have known it. A tenancy does not simply end because an initial term has run its course. If a landlord wants the property back, they now need a proper legal ground rather than relying on the calendar doing the job for them.

Rent Increases Are More Structured

Another change landlords need to get right is rent rises. Under the new rules, rent increases are limited to once a year, and landlords must use the revised Section 13 process, giving at least two months' notice before the increase takes effect.

That creates a more standard system, but it also leaves less room for informal handling. For landlords, the practical message is that process matters more. If

rent is going up, it needs to be done in the correct way and on the correct timetable.

Letting Practices Have Tightened Up Too

The changes are not just about possession and tenancy structure. They also affect the way a property is marketed and let.

From 1 May, landlords and letting agents cannot ask for, encourage or accept bids above the advertised rent. They also cannot request more than one month's rent in advance.

The Act also makes it illegal to discriminate against tenants because they have children or receive benefits. That includes refusing viewings, withholding information about availability, or making someone less likely to get the tenancy on that basis. For some landlords, this may mean revisiting old advert wording, old assumptions and old screening habits. What may once have been treated as standard filtering now carries a much clearer legal risk.

Pet Requests Need Proper Consideration

Pets are another area where the position has changed.

Under the new regime, landlords are required to consider tenant requests to keep a pet. They have an initial 28 days to deal with the request and must give a valid reason if they refuse it. That does not mean every request

has to be accepted. But it does mean a blanket refusal is much harder to justify. Landlords will need to look at the request properly and be able to explain their decision.

There Is A May Paperwork Deadline Too

One point landlords should not miss is the separate information requirement for some existing tenancies.

Government guidance says landlords and agents must give the official Information Sheet to tenants where the tenancy is an assured or assured shorthold tenancy created before 1 May 2026 and there is a wholly or partly written record of terms. That must be done by 31 May 2026, and the guidance says landlords could be fined up to £7,000 if they fail to do it^[2].

That means May is not just about understanding the new legal framework. There is also a practical admin job to deal with for landlords who fall within that requirement.

What Landlords Should Be Focusing On Now

For most landlords, the immediate task is not theoretical. It is operational. Tenancy documents, possession processes, rent review procedures and property adverts all need to reflect the new rules now in force. The broader reform programme is not over, with the private rented sector database and landlord ombudsman still due later, but the first and most immediate shift has already happened.

For landlords with existing properties and ongoing tenancies, the priority now is making sure they are working properly within the new system rather than relying on habits built around the old one.

If you are unsure how the new rules apply to your properties, it may be worth taking advice before small admin mistakes turn into bigger problems.

Source Data

[1] GOV.UK - Implementing the Renters' Rights Act 2025: Our roadmap for reforming the Private Rented Sector

[2] GOV.UK - The Renters' Rights Act Information Sheet 2026



Cheap House Or Cheaper Commute?

The Real Trade-Off Behind “Affordable” Areas

“Affordable” can look very attractive on a property search.

A town with lower asking prices, a more manageable mortgage and bigger homes for the money will naturally catch the eye, especially for buyers trying to stretch a deposit or move up to a family home. But cheaper property does not always mean cheaper living.

That is the part of the affordability conversation that can get missed. A place may look far more affordable on paper because the homes cost less. But if the trade-off is a longer, pricier commute, higher fuel spend, extra rail costs or more time spent getting to work, the savings can start to look less dramatic in day-to-day life.

That does not mean moving further out is a bad idea. In many cases it makes perfect sense. But it does mean buyers are often choosing between two different kinds of cost: the cost of the house, and the cost of reaching everything else.

Why “Affordable” Areas Are Getting So Much Attention

This is a timely issue because value for money has become a bigger part of how people are searching.

Zoopla’s March 2026 analysis of family-friendly

towns found major differences across the country. In Shildon, the most affordable town in its ranking, the average value of a three-bed home was £82,500, with an estimated monthly mortgage repayment of £325 at 80% loan-to-value. In the South East, Dover was the most affordable town in its regional list, but the average value was £280,300 and the estimated monthly repayment was £1,103. Zoopla said the most affordable towns in the south are often coastal, meaning better housing affordability may come with more expensive travel and weaker proximity to major employment centres^[1].

That is the real point. A move to a cheaper area can reduce one monthly outgoing while quietly increasing another.

The Commute Cost Buyers Often Underestimate

Commuting is not just about train fares. It can mean petrol, parking, bus fares, season tickets, bridge tolls, childcare complications, or simply needing a second car where one used to be enough. It can also mean time, and time has a cost even if it does not show up as a direct debit. Department for Transport figures published in December 2025 showed the average commute in Great Britain took 28 minutes in 2024. But that average hides some sharp differences: 26 minutes by car, 40 minutes by bus or coach, and 64 minutes by National Rail^[2]. So two areas may look fairly similar on a map, but the day-to-day

experience can be very different depending on how the journey actually works.

That matters even more for buyers considering cheaper coastal or edge-of-region locations. A place can look affordable because it sits further from the main employment hubs, not in spite of it.

Why This Matters More For Some Buyers Than Others

For some households, the trade-off is still well worth making. If one or both buyers work from home most of the week, a longer commute once or twice a week may be a price worth paying for a noticeably cheaper property or more space. The same may be true for families prioritising schools, outdoor space or a bigger home over daily convenience.

But for buyers commuting five days a week, the sums can change quickly.

An area that saves a couple of hundred pounds a month on the mortgage may not feel quite so affordable once season tickets, fuel or parking are added in. And even where the monthly cost still works, the lifestyle side matters too. An extra hour or two of travel a day can affect childcare, flexibility, energy levels and how sustainable the move feels after the novelty wears off.

That is why affordability should be looked at as a household budget question, not just a house-price question.

What Buyers Should Compare Before Calling An Area “Affordable”

The better test is not simply, “Is the house cheaper?” It is, “What will life cost here each month compared with where we are now?”

That means looking at the likely mortgage payment alongside the practical costs of living there. Travel is one part of that, but not the only one. Buyers should also think about fuel use, parking, public transport reliability, whether two

cars become necessary, and whether the move changes other regular spending. MoneyHelper’s budgeting tools and mortgage calculators are useful for this sort of reality check because they help turn a broad idea of affordability into actual monthly figures^[3].

This is where some buyers catch themselves in time. A place that seemed like a clear win on purchase price may still be the right move, but only once the full monthly picture has been laid out properly.

A Better Way To Think About Value

The most affordable area is not always the one with the cheapest home.

For one buyer, it may be the town with the lowest house prices. For another, it may be the place where the mortgage is a little higher but the commute is simpler, cheaper and easier to live with. A move only really works if it still feels manageable once the first rush of completion is over and normal life begins.

That is why the “cheap house or cheaper commute” question matters. It gets closer to what affordability really means.

For aspiring movers, the answer is rarely just about buying the lowest-priced home they can find. It is about finding the best balance between the home they want and the life that comes with it.

Source Data

[1] Zoopla – Revealed: The most affordable towns for families – where you can get on the housing ladder for under £350 a month

[2] GOV.UK – Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2024 Domestic Travel

[3] MoneyHelper – Tools and calculators

The Six-Month Window:

Why More Borrowers Are Securing Their Next Deal Early

For many homeowners, mortgage admin is the sort of job that gets pushed down the list until it becomes urgent. The fixed rate is ticking along, the payments are familiar, and it is easy to assume there is time yet. But more borrowers are now taking a look at their next deal well before their current one ends. Not because they want to make life complicated, but because waiting until the last few weeks can leave them with less room to move.

That change in behaviour has been helped by the Mortgage Charter. Under the Charter, participating lenders allow borrowers approaching the end of a fixed deal to secure a new rate up to six months in advance. If a better like-for-like deal becomes available with the same lender before the new term starts, they can also ask to switch to that instead.

That has made the six-month point feel far more useful than it once did. It is no longer just a reminder that your mortgage review is coming up. It is a stage at which something practical can actually be done.

Why People Are Looking Earlier

FCA figures published in March 2026 showed that around 232,000 mortgages were locked into a new deal up to six months ahead of maturity during November and December 2025^[1]. That is a sizeable number, and it suggests this is becoming part of normal mortgage behaviour rather than something only the most financially organised households do.

The reason is straightforward

enough. The mortgage market has remained sensitive to wider events, and homeowners have seen how quickly pricing can change. Even where the best deals are still available, the direction of travel can alter fast enough to make last-minute decisions feel risky.

At the start of April, Mortgage Solutions reported Moneyfacts data showing average two-year fixed rates had risen from 4.83% at the start of March to 5.84% by 1 April. Average five-year fixed rates moved from 4.95% to 5.75% over the same period^[2]. That sort of move does not mean every borrower should rush into a decision, but it does show why many would rather start earlier and keep their options open.

What Locking In Early Actually Means

Securing a deal six months early does not usually mean leaving your current mortgage before your fixed term ends. It means putting your next rate in place ahead of time, ready for when your existing deal finishes.

That matters because it creates space. Space to compare what your current lender is offering against what is available elsewhere. Space to decide whether a product transfer is enough or whether a full remortgage is worth it. Space to deal with the paperwork if your circumstances have changed since you last arranged a mortgage.

It also reduces the chance of falling onto your lender's standard variable rate simply because time ran away with you. When a fixed term ends,

borrowers are usually moved onto the lender's SVR if they have not arranged a new deal. Those rates are typically higher, and they can change at the lender's discretion.

That gap is still meaningful. The same Moneyfacts figures reported at the start of April put the average SVR at 7.13%, compared with 5.84% for the average two-year fixed and 5.75% for the average five-year fixed^[2]. Exact rates will vary, of course, but the underlying point is easy to grasp: doing nothing can be expensive.

Early Does Not Mean Rushed

Some borrowers will look at the market and decide that certainty matters most to them. Others may feel rates could settle later in the year and prefer not to commit too soon. That uncertainty is part of the picture in 2026. Consumer guidance from Which? in recent weeks has reflected that there is no single settled path for rates from here, particularly after the volatility seen this spring^[3].

That is exactly why the six-month window is useful. It gives borrowers a chance to act without having to bet the house on one forecast.

If rates worsen, a deal may already be in place. If rates improve and the lender allows a better like-for-like switch before the new term starts, there may be scope to benefit from that too under the Charter framework. Either way, starting the conversation early gives the borrower more control than leaving everything to the final month.



Why This Matters Beyond The Interest Rate

A homeowner may be thinking about borrowing more, changing the mortgage term, removing or adding someone to the loan, or simply checking whether a move to another lender still makes sense. Some may find their current lender offers a perfectly competitive switch. Others may realise a remortgage opens up more suitable options. And some people just need time. Time to gather documents, think clearly, and make a decision without the pressure that tends to build when a deadline is suddenly two weeks away.

That is really what makes this such a useful thing for homeowners. Looking six months out is not about trying to second-guess every market move. It is about avoiding the weaker position that comes with leaving it late.

A Sensible Review Point For Homeowners

For borrowers whose fixed rate ends later this year, the six-month mark is a sensible point to review what comes next.

It does not commit you to a frantic decision. It does not mean changing lenders for the sake of it. It simply gives you a better chance of weighing up

the options while there is still time to do something useful.

And in a market where pricing can shift quickly, that is often the difference between choosing well and scrambling at the end.

If your current mortgage deal is due to finish this year, it may be worth reviewing your options sooner rather than later and taking advice on what suits your circumstances. Get in touch with our team for support!

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

Source Data

[1] FCA - Mortgage Charter uptake data - March 2026

[2] Mortgage Solutions - Mortgage rates soar by around 1% in market disruption

[3] Which? - Standard variable rate mortgages

A photograph of a dining table with a white tablecloth and several grey woven placemats. In the center, a clear glass vase holds a bouquet of bright yellow daffodils. The vase sits on a placemat. In the background, a window looks out onto a green garden. A wooden chair is partially visible on the right. A semi-transparent purple rectangle is overlaid on the center of the image, containing white text.

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