

What to do about the eyesore next door

It is sad but true that no matter how great your home looks on show day, it is not likely to attract any offers to purchase if the home next door or across the road is a run-down wreck with a yard like a panel-beater's workshop.

In fact, if they spot it first, most prospective buyers will just keep driving - and who can blame them? Old car bodies, eye-high grass and weeds and an overflowing bin of "empties" really don't create the impression of a safe and friendly neighbourhood where people take care of their homes and property values are likely to keep rising.

"The problem is that if that property has been in that state for some time, things are unlikely to change unless you intervene. And that's probably what you will have to do if you want to get your home sold," says Shaun Rademeyer of BetterLife Home Loans.

"The first thing to try is a friendly chat with the owner of the property - assuming, of course, that you are not already at loggerheads with this neighbour. It's difficult, of course, to tell someone that their home is an eyesore, but you could try a less direct approach and ask for their help in creating the best possible impression of your area because you need to sell your house - while also pointing out that the higher the price you get for yours, the more their property will be worth. If you are not really on chatting terms, a friendly note along the same lines might do the trick."

Secondly, he says, you should be prepared to help, especially if the owners of the dilapidated property are elderly. If it's a question of peeling paint, a sagging fence or an overgrown garden, it may just be that they have not been able to manage the upkeep and will be delighted if their nice neighbour (you) offers to help them get their property back in shape. They may even be prepared to pay for materials and rubble removal.

"If you live in an estate, a third option is to ask your home owners' association (HOA) to tackle the owner of the unkempt property. One of the main jobs of an HOA is to ensure the harmonious appearance of the estate in order to protect home values.

"Alternatively, if you live in a traditional suburb and your neighbours simply refuse to clean up their mess or to let you help, you can report them to your local authority. Most municipalities have by-laws regarding the health, crime and fire hazards that are posed by derelict properties, and can order the owners to either clear the property themselves or pay to have it cleared by a council crew. You should be prepared, however, for this process to take a few months."

Similarly, says Rademeyer, if the property is unoccupied because it has been repossessed by a bank, you are entitled to insist that the bank clean it up and maintain it so that it does not pull down local property values - but once again should be prepared for quite a wait.

"And finally, it really might be worth putting up a wall and/ or planting a hedge to block your view of the problem property, because even if it does get sorted out in time for your show day, who's to say the owners will keep it that way? Besides, the additional privacy and security could even become an extra selling point for your home."

BetterLife Home Loans Press Release